



FlexBulletin #43: Is Your Kitchen Ready for Company?

February 9, 2011

[In our first **Bulletin** of the year – **FlexBulletin #41: Notable Flex 2010, Opportunities 2011** – we observed that **“the phenomenon of revisiting and updating existing tools continued through the year and will likely expand in 2011.”** This trend will be driven by many things:

- Continuing recovery from the recession will likely increase demand for flexibility
- A growing emphasis on flexibility as a transformative/productivity tool demands innovation
- The declining shelf-life of last-decade flex systems is encouraging a “new kitchen.”

Dialing for Data The rest of this **Bulletin** will suggest key areas for attention to those seeking transformation of their flexibility capacity. We believe these trends are strong and growing. But to understand their strength, rate and reach, we would like to call upon our loyal readers to help us with some telephone feedback. Stacey Gibson and I will be calling many of you over the next few weeks for brief calls to understand if and where you are in the remodeling adventure. We can discretely share the results with all of you in a future issue. (And on the same call we will seek, and happily accept, your suggestions for other issues that the **Bulletin** might take up.) We look forward to your cooperation.]

A HALF-DOZEN CHANGES go a long way in significant remodeling projects

For yesterday’s approach to meet tomorrow’s productivity needs, some changes in target, tone, technology and teamwork are in order. A sample of these changes includes:

- Highly focused, and fully informed leadership message(s) that target discrete goals
- Guidance and communication that speak with one reinforcing voice
- Innovative technology that brings crystalline clarity to process and persuasion to case studies
- Online implementation guides that mobilize success to deepen future accomplishment
- Creative live training that serves to achieve unity of assumption, understanding and action
- Systematic achievement, assessment and capture of data that reflects productivity gains

HIGHLY FOCUSED, and fully informed leadership message(s) that target discrete goals

Much flexibility in our organizations is promoted as a menu of solutions, neither prioritized nor focused. A common list includes:

- Retention in general or of high value employees
- Attraction of highly desirable recruits
- Increased employee satisfaction
- Improved effectiveness
- Greater productivity
- Reduced carbon footprint
- Space reduction & cost-savings

These are longstanding and desirable outcomes of flexibility initiatives. But each one, or any combination of them, requires different direction, support and reinforcement. And any clarity and prioritization of goals needs a strong focus from the top. Typical leadership messages we have seen reflect a menu listing rather than a menu choice. To turn toward an emphasis on productivity does not require abandoning many targets; it does require unwavering prioritization of that goal

above all. Since successful organizations are built on prioritization, flexibility requires a similar approach. And it is the message, the tone from the top that enables this to happen.

GUIDANCE AND COMMUNICATION that speak with one reinforcing voice

Whether diffuse leadership messages are tacked on to a somewhat contradictory set of guidelines and communication vehicles, or those contradictions lead to vagueness from the top, the fact is that knowledgeable and forceful direction from the top needs reinforcing and consistent messaging throughout a sophisticated, ongoing initiative. Such coordination and synergy is too rare an event in many rollouts. In considering a productivity emphasis, elements might include:

- A clear CEO message emphasizing productivity +, with complementary messages from key operational leaders
- Guidelines that include possible gains, but strongly emphasize productivity throughout
- Communication plans that avoid undifferentiated goals, and are grounded in stories, language and focus that properly orient the broader population
- Achieving culture change benefits from creative and widespread messaging: live messaging, video campaigns, reports of gains, etc.

INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY that brings crystalline clarity to process, persuasion to cases

As technology – and especially video technology – evolves and becomes cheaper and more ubiquitous, guidance for how to propose, monitor and identify results from productivity-oriented flexibility becomes easier to define. What's possible with a common feature of flexibility: the success story or case study?

- What are now almost universal one-dimensional stories can be videos instead
- This enables more animated, richer interview-style discussions with a person on an arrangement, his or her manager and clients or coworkers.
- Such videos can be widely used in other communication and education settings

ONLINE IMPLEMENTATION GUIDES that mobilize success to deepen future accomplishment

A great deal of focus in any flexibility initiative is on the upfront challenges:

- Defining the purpose and nature of the initiative
- Seeking levels of organizational support
- Creating guidelines and communication strategies
- Designing and delivering training

This is good and necessary. But in the end, the object of all this effort – the flexible employee – can end up working remotely or part-time, left alone to struggle in an unsupported environment. Online, just-in-time training for manager and employee participants built on local and other successes, is essential to address this issue. (This question of what constitutes an adequate online training suite is something we will address fully in a **Bulletin** in the near future.)

CREATIVE LIVE TRAINING that serves to achieve unity of understanding and action

We know, perhaps better than most, that widespread live training has long since left the flexibility field. This fact will pose a significant challenge for companies that truly seek transformation. Live training simply enables more interaction and faster and deeper shifts in thinking. Managers and employees seriously seeking enhanced, productive flexibility will need to shift their thinking on a number of levels:

- The presumption that flex satisfies employees only will need to change
- Employees will have to take serious initiative and work harder in developing proposals
- Managers will need to truly adopt and implement business standards for proposals

SYSTEMATIC ACHIEVEMENT, assessment and data capture that reflects productivity gains

Companies vary in the inventiveness and discipline of their metrics and measurement process. One advantage of a more focused approach is the ability to better target the gains sought and

achieved by a new approach. (Like the online training item, this bears fuller discussion in a later issue.) The obvious value of capturing and sharing positive business data for an enhanced initiative cannot be over-stated. Developing state-of-the art processes and tools early rather than late in the project is a vital step.

[Remodeling an approach to flexibility is both demanding and valuable. We look forward to talking with you in the weeks ahead to hear the status of, plans for, and progress on transforming your company's approach to flexibility in the period ahead. And we will follow this issue all year as it unfolds.]

Best regards,
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