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Three years ago, our company significantly upgraded our technology infrastructure. One side benefit of the new design was that it provided virtually unlimited and secure remote access. Initially, with the goal in mind of providing this remote access to our growing sales and management teams, pending winter storms caused us to consider rolling out remote devices and access to all employees. We began a project called "Operation Snowstorm", where we would no longer require our office employees to travel to our headquarters when major storms were predicted. The increase in employee safety and productivity during these events was a significant gain for our business.

This newfound flexibility continued to produce creative thoughts as to how we could blur the line between traditional "office bound" personnel and "field personnel". Management was aware of 5 major problems with the inside/outside divide: 1) Inside personnel were getting drained by the increasing workload and the continuous pace of simply performing their primary functions, 2) Incremental personnel were forced to "learn on the fly" with less than the training and management oversight than ideal, 3) Innovative business plan macro components were getting bottlenecked from comprehensive definition and/or completion, 4) internal jealousy over the envisioned more flexible and slower paced schedules of the field personnel was continuing to build, and 5) Frustration was mounting at all levels by the lack of success in realizing qualitative plans.

As a major initiative toward refreshing universal involvement in the company's new growth, management introduced the concept of "Flex Fridays" during the warmer weather months for internal personnel. The procedure was somewhat radical: Rather than having typically office personnel conduct their regular job duties from their homes during Operation Snowstorm", Flex Fridays forbid them from working on regular duties. The workforce was placed on a rotating schedule of Fridays, with each functional area ensuring a base load of coverage for its team members to take their Vacation or Flex Friday days. Flex Friday participants received 3 questions to work on during their day, each assigned by top management on the Thursday afternoon preceding their respective Friday. The process entailed:

- a) The individual to go early in the morning to an enjoyable location where they feel they can relax and think clearly
- b) Contemplate the 3 questions directed to them. The questions can relate to their personal work experiences and goals, specifically to current aspects of their current job, or have nothing to do with their job specifically – rather to observations about things in the company for which they are not personally responsible.
- c) Send in a brief summary report to top management only at 2PM, covering the 3 questions as objectively as possible, doing their best to keep personalities aside, and not use it as a complaint or congratulatory document.
- d) Turn off all work devices immediately at 2PM, and get an early start on the weekend.

The first summer, summer 2015, produced many insights into business improvements which were needed. Most specifically was the need for further definition of individual roles and responsibilities. The rapid growth of both business levels and added personnel to handle the growth caused most office-based personnel to adjust their jobs and spend time simultaneously training new hires. The Flex Friday program highlighted this problem, and generated a priority management program to address these deficiencies. The enlarged program produced 2 significant findings: 1) management asked better questions, due to experience with the program as well as asking more challenging topics to be addressed, and 2) employees fully trusted that information shared was for company betterment and not to target individual employees. The result has been the most significant collection of ideas and proposed improvements ever achieved in the company's long history.

In summary, Flex Friday has added to company identity, teamwork, individual acknowledgement of management caring and inclusion, as well as general morale. It is extremely consistent with our ESOP structure, our Responsible Distribution commitment toward continuous improvement, and our NHBSR Sustainability initiative. Sustainability is fueled by fresh ideas and approaches, and the questions, answers, proposals, and resulting plans created during Flex Fridays improve and enhance the ideas we create as a company every day. Businesses survive by making money, but businesses thrive by making their employees feel listened to, valued, and by allowing them to take charge of the growth and prosperity of their business. The Flex Friday initiative puts social responsibility into the hands of the people who care about their business the most; the employee-owners themselves, and, in doing so, shapes the focus of the business to better serve the needs of the customer.