



Bridges A monthly eZine from Meridian Consulting,
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Building Bridges to Success – October 2004

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Thought for the Month:

"None of us is as smart as all of us."
Steven Isaacs, President, SMP/SHG Inc.

Coaches Corner: *Ethics is Everyone's Business*

Senior leadership plays a vital role in creating and sustaining an ethical business environment. Yet the central focus in many of today's ethics programs is focused on the employee.

In order to build a strong ethical foundation, it has to start at the top of the organization. It is not enough for leaders to be ethical, they must openly and actively communicate their values and strive to build an ethical culture. Ethical leaders conduct their decision-making openly, so that they are perceived as ethical, even from a distance.

In a recent study conducted by Walker Information, only 49% of all employees surveyed, considered their leaders to be people of high ethical standards. There are three typical profiles relative to ethics and leadership:

- **Ethical Leaders:** Those who are personally ethical in both word and deed, and conduct their decision-making openly. They frequently engage the organization in discussions about values and they put their ethical standards into practice by establishing a *Code of Ethical Business Practices*.
- **Ethically Neutral:** Those who are personally ethical in both word and deed, but do not openly discuss ethics or make it a part of their decision-making process.
- **Unethical Leadership:** Those who deliberately choose to act unethically. Examples of which can be found in daily newspapers.

One of the worst things that can happen in any business, is that someone is obviously doing something that others believe to be wrong, and nothing happens.

- A 2002 study conducted by Ernst & Young concluded that employers are losing 20% of every dollar to workplace fraud.
- 21% of the employees surveyed (at all levels of the organization) say they are personally aware of fraud at work. These unethical practices included:
 - o Theft of office items--37%
 - o Claiming hours not worked--16%
 - o Inflating expense accounts--7%
 - o Taking kickbacks from suppliers--6%

Ethical leaders can establish a culture of trust and agreement by following these ethical guidelines.

- **Ethical Communication:**
 - o Ethical leaders set the standard for every employee. They actively encourage a full range of participation. They are open to influence and prepared to change.
 - o Ethical leaders lead by example. Their words are consistent with their actions.
- **Ethical Collaboration:**
 - o Ethical leaders keep their "circle of advisors" open and fluid.
 - o They care about their relationships with others and want to resolve differences.
- **Ethical Succession Planning:**
 - o Ethical leaders are able to set aside their "need for control" and allow other leaders to emerge.
 - o They encourage people to take leadership roles at every level of the organization.
- **Balance:**
 - o Ethical leaders recognize that their self-worth is not tied to their position. They recognize the values inherent in creating a balanced life and are able to channel their ego needs away from themselves and their job.
 - o The success of the organization is more important than personal success.

Ethical practice is not just a good idea, it is also good business. It is not enough to say that values are important, your actions must be consistent with your words. You must seek to constantly engage the organization in discussions about "what is important" to you and to them.

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If you have an interest in learning more, you can contact us for a **FREE** guide to developing a ***Code of Ethical Business Practices***.  
**Executive Coaching Services**  
*Building Success Strategies for Working With Others*

Meridian works collaboratively with business people to develop coaching programs that focus on targeted action and tangible results:

- Gain clarity, and examine purpose and legacy
- Deal effectively with difficult people and situations
- Get work done effectively through others

If you or your organization is looking to *improve individual performance and build capability*, our executive coaches can provide you with *objective, confidential, and knowledgeable* support.

*Contact us today for a free consultation to discuss  
how Meridian Coaching Services can benefit you.*

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**Spotlight on Conflict:** *Employment Law for Business Professionals*

There are many potholes in the management highway. One of these is not knowing what is and what's not legal in the workplace. In view of the increasing amount of litigation on workplace issues, this could be a failure of critical dimensions. The American Arbitration Association found that employment related lawsuits grew by 2,200% between 1972 and 1992.

In an effort to stem the tide of increased liability, companies have adopted policies and procedures that must be executed by management at all levels. However, increasingly complex problems continue to emerge when selecting, managing and terminating employees, making it a rocky road for management. The best way to ensure a win/win for the employee and company, is for you to understand the basics of employment law in order to protect your company, while treating your employees fairly.

In his book Fair, Square & Legal, author Donald H. Weiss provides abundant references to legislation, court cases, and other developments to help guide you through the maze of the do's and don'ts for dealing with both the everyday and extraordinary situations that confront all managers. The latest version was updated in 2004 and contains the latest in reference materials. This is a "must have" desk reference for everyone who manages people today.

Weiss writes in a straightforward, jargon-free style that is easy to understand. It is packed with definitions, stories that illustrate problems and solutions, practical guidelines of what to say and do, and case studies. And last, this book can help you ensure a culture of ethics, trust, and fairness for your workplace.

### Conflict Services

*Unresolved conflict in the workplace is costly. When issues and differences are not appropriately addressed, they will escalate, and so will the associated costs.*

Meridian can help your business improve its ability to reduce workplace conflict and limit its negative impact through proactive programs of *Intervention* and *Prevention*.

- **Intervention:** Meridian works to reduce and resolve internal conflict situations between individuals, teams and business units, and works with external parties to ensure disputes in important business relationships are resolved in a positive manner through *Mediation* and *Integrated Conflict Management Programs*.
- **Prevention:** Meridian works with clients to develop ongoing, proactive programs that help build awareness of underlying issues that contribute to conflict, and build skill sets to help people effectively deal with conflict situations through *Training* and *Business Coaching*.

Meridian consultants provide targeted solutions and best practices, from multiple industries, to increase your organization's ability apply appropriate *intervention*, and develop *prevention* programs that are tailored to your business needs.

*Contact us today for a free consultation to discuss how Meridian Conflict Intervention and Prevention Services can benefit you.*

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Consulting: *Averting Common Business Failures*

In our experience, there are three primary reasons for failure in the marketplace:

1. **The inability to execute.** When organizations and the people in them, fail to identify the root cause of the problems they encounter, they spend precious resources "fixing" symptoms, which results in "patch solutions." In this type of organization, problem solving at best, returns the organization back to neutral. At worse, the problem still exists and will reappear or emerge in a different manner, and can cause new and unanticipated problems. When problems are clearly identified and resolved the organization continues to move forward, they are not distracted with fixing the same problems with new names, over and over again. *This gives the organizations the ability to set goals and achieve them.*
2. **Get a poor return for their application of resources.** Organizations have a natural tendency to add policies and procedures that do not add value on behalf of the customer. McClelland's theory holds that as much as 60% of all organizational costs can be attributed to non-value added

activity. Therefore, it is important for organizations to set a high priority on identifying hidden costs and eliminating non-value added activity through continuous improvement. *Successful organizations use their resources efficiently.*

3. **Become inflexible.** This is particularly true for organizations who see themselves as being “successful.” Change is something to be avoided and the status quo is defended against all challenges. *A really “successful” organization has the ability to react rapidly to changing circumstances.*

Every organization and the people in them, can prevent failure and avert disaster with a very straight-forward three-step program.

- **Recognition:** Investigate and anticipate. Constantly scan the environment for emerging threats or shifts in your business landscape. Make change and evolution a priority. Invite the dissenting voice and encourage the critical eye.
- **Prioritize:** Keep your eyes and ears focused on where the organization is going. Hold strategic conversations throughout the organization about where you are going, how to get there and what is important along the way.
- **Mobilize:** Encourage the full and voluntary participation of everyone. The success of the organization depends upon the competency and willingness of every employee. As an organization, you are only as capable as your weakest link. Building collaborative capability is a critical business issue.

Your stakeholders, employees, customers and communities are depending upon your ability to succeed. Failure is not an option.

Consulting Services

Competition ensures that only the best will survive for the long-term. The failure to continuously improve your goods and services, your channel of delivery, and the work processes themselves, will inevitably lead to declining quality of goods and services, lost revenue, and reduced customer satisfaction. Improving workflow saves time, reduces costs, and improves the quality of goods and services. We offer three workflow services:

- Cross-functional Process Redesign
- Business Process Redesign
- Process Improvement

Contact us today for a free consultation to discuss how Meridian Consulting Services can benefit you.

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Upcoming Training:

- Getting Results Without Authority, sponsored by the American Management Association, Newport Beach, California, Nov. 10-12, 2004.
- Business Ethics, sponsored by University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, Nov. 11, 2004.
- Role of the Supervisor, sponsored by University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, Nov. 13, 2004.
- Managing Technical Professionals, sponsored by the American Management Association, San Francisco, California, Nov. 17-19, 2004.
- Management Skills for New Supervisors, sponsored by the American Management Association, San Francisco, California, Dec. 13-15, 2004.
- Getting Results Without Authority, sponsored by the American Management Association, Newport Beach, California, Feb. 7-9, 2005.

Training as an Investment:

A study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania found that:

- A 10% investment in physical assets resulted in a 3.8% rise in employee productivity.
- However, a 10% investment in employee training created an 8.5% increase in productivity at businesses engaged in manufacturing and an 11% increase in productivity in the service sector.

The study was conducted by Robert Zemsky and Susan Sharman, and was reported on by Dr. Nathaniel Branden in his book Self-Esteem at Work.

*Contact us today for a free consultation to discuss
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