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**Bridges** A monthly eZine from Meridian Consulting,  
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***Building Bridges to Success – Nov 2004***  
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### **Thought for the Month:**

*"If you work in a culture that dictates that everyone "go along to get along", it can require a great deal of courage to express your opinions openly, especially if they differ significantly with those of the group or your boss."*

Larry Johnson & Bob Phillips, Absolute Honesty

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### **Coaches Corner:** *Requests & Promises*

You do not usually have the ability to choose your workmates. Even when you do have some input, choices are made based upon limited information and in an environment where both parties are putting their best foot forward. Where we really get to know one another is through the course of daily interactions when things may or may not go smoothly.

In today's organizations, we depend a great deal upon one another. In this interdependent environment, *Trust* is a critical element in building healthy relationships. To be trustworthy, means being reliable, dependable, and accountable. In other words, the trust people have in you is defined by the consistency of your actions and your words.

Over the course of a normal working relationship, there are a series of formal and informal "*Requests and Promises.*" You as an employer request that your employees turn in an honest effort and be committed to achieving organizational goals and objectives. As an employee, you request that your employer treat you fairly and provide you with the tools and resources necessary to do your job. In return, you promise to do your best to make your employer successful. As co-workers, there are numerous informal *requests* and *promises*, the results of which determine the nature of individual relationships.

When your *requests* are not specific or are indirect, you create room for misunderstanding. When there is a failure to honor *promises*, trust is eroded. Often times this failure is one of perception, i.e., "I may believe that I gave my best effort, but it is not what you expected." In order to re-build the trust, these perceptions and expectations must be discussed openly, directly, and honestly.

The bottom line is that it requires both time and commitment by all parties to sustain important business relationships. Like any other business tool if you want your relationships to work you must invest the time and perform the necessary maintenance. The alternative is not pleasant. In order to build trust and sustain constructive interdependent relationships follow these guidelines:

- Make sure your requests are clear and unambiguous.
- When you make a promise, deliver.
- Clarify expectations.
- Resolve differences.

To be successful, organizations must have the collaboration of a wide spectrum of individuals with very different points of view, skills, and talents. By exploring what went wrong, you will create not only an opportunity to improve a potentially bad situation, but you will also end up building important business skills and expand your ability to be more successful.

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### **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:

- Get focused and stay on-track
- Build influence
- Deal effectively with difficult people and situations
- Build confidence and restore credibility
- Explore purpose and legacy

If you or your organization is looking to *improve performance* and *build capability* of your management team, then we would like to talk with you. 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:** *Avoid Stressful Working Conditions*

*"Health care expenditures are nearly 50% greater for workers who report high levels of stress."*

**Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine**

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reports that Stress is fast becoming a threat to worker health, which in turn is becoming a threat to the health of your business. In their booklet Stress, NIOSH identifies some of the conditions that they have identified as leading to increased stress at work.

- **The Design of Tasks:** Heavy workload, infrequent rest breaks, long work hours and shift-work. Hectic and routine tasks that have little inherent meaning and do not utilize workers skills and provide little sense of control.
- **Management Style:** Lack of participation by workers in decision-making, poor communication in the organization and lack of family friendly policies.
- **Interpersonal Relationships:** Poor social environment and lack of support or help from co-workers or supervisors.
- **Work Roles:** Conflicting or uncertain job expectations, too much responsibility and too many "hats" to wear.
- **Career Concerns:** Job insecurity and lack of opportunity for growth, advancement, or promotion and rapid changes for which workers are unprepared.
- **Environmental Conditions:** Unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions such as crowding, noise, pollution or ergonomic issues.

Studies show that stressful working conditions are associated with absenteeism, tardiness, and intentions to quit, all of which have a negative effect on the bottom line. NIOSH research concludes that low stress companies are both more healthy and more productive. Some of the actions you can take to reduce stress include:

- Eliminating non-value added activities
- Take actions that are consistent with organizational values
- Recognize individual as well as team efforts

Actions to reduce stress through organizational change or design should be a high priority for companies focused on long-term stability and success. The best approach is a combination of intervention and prevention strategies that should be part of every company's business plans.

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**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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### **Performance Consulting:** *Strategies for Improving Your Management Team*

Companies and Boards of Directors often struggle to identify what went wrong when a newly placed senior executive, who was subjected to a rigorous screening and hiring process, does not work out. *"It is very difficult to gauge how an individual will act once he or she is at the very top of an organization,"* said Henry Wendt, retired Chairman of Smith Kline Beecham.

Extremely high expectations are placed on newly placed senior executives. This is especially true for those who come from outside the organization. As Robert Eckert noted when he took over as the CEO of Mattel, *"Jumping into a new job is hard enough, but it is harder still when you don't know the customers, the competition, or the team."* Many executives experience this pressure and want to hit the ground running, but they do not all seem to be running in the direction of success.

According to a study reported in HR Magazine May 2001, 40 of the top 200 corporations in America replaced their CEO's in 2000. That is a 20% turnover rate among CEOs, and is above the 14.4% average turnover rate for all workers as determined by the Bureau of National Affairs.

The reasons for this revolving door at the executive level are due in part to two things:

- The difficulty of predicting with any accuracy, how past accomplishments will affect future performance.
- The extremely high expectations that attach to senior executive positions.

The selection of the individual is just the first step in a process that is designed to ensure a successful hiring. Equally critical is the ability to develop effective "*Talent Management Strategies*." If you fail to plan for this critical element of your business, the high hopes and warm enthusiasm of the so-called "honeymoon phase" will not last long. The best approach is to develop a well articulated "*Succession Plan*" for internal development and an "*Onboarding Plan*" for externally recruited talent.

The good news for companies and their employees is that there is compelling data to indicate that performance is improved when a deliberate process is used to prepare and integrate new executives.

*Onboarding* is a structured and intentional process focused upon the executive's successful integration into the organization that leads to the development of sound transition strategies that promote targeted action and desired results. This dictates a period of learning, which leads the executive to proactive, rather than reactive activity. The onboarding process can minimize derailment, while accelerating the integration, and improve the performance curves of newly placed senior executives.

*Succession Planning*, on the other hand, does not focus upon integrating new hires into an existing culture, but rather is the strategic development of internal resources. It is accomplished through a process of determining corporate strategy and matching those needs with the leadership capabilities that are needed to get you there.

Despite the obvious need for managing your leadership resources, a survey by the National Association of Corporate Directors, reported that 45% of companies with sales of more than \$500 million have no meaningful process for grooming potential CEO's or senior executives. However, a recent study by Towers Perrin found that one of the elements common to leading organizations, regardless of size, was a sound and clearly defined *talent management strategy*. This is a wise investment in both the company and its human capital.

Where does your organization stand? As with all other strategic issues you have a choice, you can choose to act or be acted upon.

*Contact Meridian today for our free guide to "Succession Planning"  
or our guide to "Executive Onboarding"*

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### **Performance Consulting Services**

Competition ensures that only the best will survive for the long-term. *Improving, Expanding, and Innovating* your business saves time, reduces costs, and increases the quality of goods and services.

Meridian can assist your organization in analyzing how work is currently *performed, coordinated, supported, and executed* to increase your organization's competitiveness and customer satisfaction.

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### **Upcoming Training:**

- 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.
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### **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.

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