



Bridges A monthly eZine from Meridian Consulting, Inc.

Building Bridges to Success – April/2004

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University of the Pacific – June & July 2004

Thought for the Month:

*I consider my ability to arouse enthusiasm among my people,
as the greatest asset I possess, and the way to develop
the best that is in a person is by appreciation and encouragement."*

**Charles Schwab, the first President of
U.S. Steel Company, 1921**

Coaches Corner: *Overcoming Your Own Stereotypes*

Pattern recognition is a highly developed skill in human beings. It is one of the characteristics that facilitates our development and helps us make sense of the world around us. However, like all strengths it can also have a *downside*. When people are 'judged' based upon patterns or assumptions, it becomes a 'stereotype.' Stereotypes are a belief in a fixed or general pattern that is applied to a general class of people delineated by a common characteristic.

Using patterns can help us navigate in a complex world more easily. However, when we stereotype the people around us, that belief can reduce people to cardboard cutouts, and limit the potential for collaboration and innovation. Stereotypes limit the level of trust that is necessary to effectively work with and influence others in any meaningful way.

In much the same way we stereotype others, each of us has a long history of forming opinions, beliefs and attitudes about ourselves, which have been shaped and reinforced over a lifetime. However, applying these stereotypes to ourselves doesn't allow for reflection or examination of what we think or routinely do. Thus,

we continue to act in accordance with the stereotypical beliefs that can be self-censoring and a self-limiting. The author of the "Little Prince" Antoine de Saint-Exupery, said, "*It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.*"

Making our essential 'self' visible, first to ourselves, and then to others, requires challenging our own internal stereotypes. It takes courage and insight to see ourselves as we are, at home, work or in the community, and even greater courage to accept and be at ease with what you find. The Taoist have a philosophy called the *Uncarved Block*; it holds that each of us is perfectly suited to be who we are. And by eliminating the unnecessary bits, you will uncover the strength and beauty of your core being.

We live and work in interdependent communities. Our ability to be successful depends on our ability to eliminate the noise, and to develop a keen sense of awareness of 'self' and to manage our 'self' and our relationships in ways that are situationally appropriate.

- **Develop an Awareness of Your "Self"** – Observe how your stereotypical assumptions influence your actions and the impact they have on those around you. In developing this awareness, you create the opportunity for new ways of seeing and behaving. Remember, "*Beliefs are not facts.*"
- **Take Action** – The most valuable thing you can do is to find a way to say the things that you haven't said, first to yourself, then to others. We exist only in the context of our relationships with others, we only have a "self" to express when someone is there to reflect it or receive it. Take the opportunity to change your beliefs and patterns of behavior, and in doing so, you will profoundly influence your relationship with *yourself* and *others*.

It is a given that *challenging* and *changing* your attitudes and behaviors is the most difficult of thing of all, but as Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "*I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving.*"

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### **Executive Coaching Services**

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

- Do what's important, instead of what's urgent
- Gain clarity and purpose
- Get focused and stay on-track
- Manage yourself for the best results
- Increase flexibility in working with others and new situations
- Build and sustain life balance

If you are interested in making positive changes, please call us for a complimentary coaching session. Our 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.

Tel: (925) 258-0304

Email: info@meridianconsultinginc.com

Visit us on the web at: www.meridianconsultinginc.com

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**Spotlight on Conflict:** *Sexual Harassment in the Workplace*

Constructive work relationships are based upon a foundation of *trust* and *agreement*. When discrimination, in any form, surfaces in the workplace and it's not addressed effectively, the 'employer/employee' relationship can become strained to the point of breaking, and many will feel that litigation becomes the only source for remedy.

In the late 1990's, sexual discrimination began to be a form of discrimination that was addressed with increasing frequency in the courts. A 2001 study by the Rand Corporation found that there were approximately 15,500 sexual harassment complaints filed annually. This amounts to about 20% of all complaints filed annually with the EEOC, and the average jury award is currently \$670,000 plus attorney's fees.

There are two types of sexual harassment that can be the basis for a lawsuit.

- **Quid Pro Quo** – This occurs when an employer conditions continued employment, promotions or other employment related actions upon obtaining sexual favors. The courts have extended the definition of "employer" under the act, to include supervisors, who are viewed as having the "authority" of the employer delegated to them.
- **Hostile Environment** – These cases focus on harassing conduct, whether by supervisors or other employees, that include innuendoes, offensive touching, rude gestures or the posting of obscene pictures, any of which can be viewed as conduct which creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. Some courts have extended liability to include the acts of third-party vendors whose conduct contributes to or creates a hostile environment. The courts have placed the responsibility on the employer to prevent and/or remedy a hostile work environment, regardless of the source.

An employer has two defenses to allegations of *Sexual Harassment*.

- The employer has exercised reasonable care to prevent and promptly correct any sexually harassing behavior. This defense is known as the "prompt response" defense.
- An employer may have an affirmative defense if the complaining employee unreasonably failed to take advantage of preventive or corrective opportunities. This is known as the "employee delay" defense.

Sexual Harassment is a seriously disruptive source of conflict in the workplace. Its impact goes beyond complaints and jury awards. It is conduct that will divide staff, increase sick leave, promote turnover, advance tension and stress, and disrupt the focus of an otherwise productive workforce. To offset the potential for harm, it's critical for employers to focus on programs of both *Prevention* and *Intervention*:

- **Prevention**
  - Training on a recurring basis.
  - Establishing and communicating clear policies and procedures.
  - Open forums (supported and promoted by the employer) designed to allow employees to discuss and promote values that are important to them.
- **Intervention** – Design programs to resolve employee differences, no matter what the basis. This can take the form of *Mediation* or other programs.
  - Immediately air and resolve employee complaints.
  - The ability to investigate and document information relevant to such complaints.

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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:** Meridian works with clients 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, 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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Email: [info@meridianconsultinginc.com](mailto:info@meridianconsultinginc.com)

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## **Consulting:** *Change Initiatives*

In today's workplace, change is constant. Competition has expanded, the marketplace is more global, technology is more prevalent, and customer expectations are rising. As Yogi Berra once said, "*The future ain't what it used to be.*"

Not only is change constant, it is critical if you wish to remain competitive. However, change is also disruptive and success is determined in part by, your ability to rapidly adapt to change.

Organizations are a complex web of people, processes and systems. High performance organizations are those that successfully manage and integrate these critical components. For organizations to adapt to changing circumstances, it is not enough to have a brilliant technological solution, or to be process-focused if the critical change elements in your organization are not aligned to support your organization's initiatives.

- Without **Vision** there is confusion.
- When **People** lack the skills, ability or motivation to change there is anxiety.
- When **Processes** do not evolve and improve, there is only incremental change.
- When **Systems** fail to be aligned with the change effort, there is frustration.
- When **Action Plans** are not developed or followed, there are many demotivating false starts, causing apathy and cynicism.

In other words, organizational change must be well conceived and well executed. Over the course of the next two months, we will discuss the two components of a successful change initiative, *Planning* and *Implementation*, in more detail.

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## **Consulting Services**

*Working to the Triple Bottom Line*

Building value through ethical practice is a sound business strategy. Meridian works with businesses who want to focus to the triple bottom line:

- Profits
- People (internal & external customers)
- Social Responsibility

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

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**Upcoming Speaking Engagements:** May 20, 2004, Speaker—Richard Cronen

Topic: *Workplace Conflict: The Cost, The Cause, The Cure*

Date: May 20, 2004

Time: 7:30-9:00 A.M.

Sponsor: East Bay Chapter of the Northern California Human Resource Association (NCHRA)

Location: Waterfront Hotel, Jack London Square, Oakland, CA.

Breakfast Registration: [www.nchra.org](http://www.nchra.org)

If you are interested in hearing Richard speak on this topic for your organization, please contact us at:

Tel: (925) 258-0304

Email: [info@meridianconsultinginc.com](mailto:info@meridianconsultinginc.com)

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**Upcoming Training:**

- Managing Technical Professionals, sponsored by the American Management Association, Washington, D.C., May 0-5-07, 2004
- The President's & CEO's Course, sponsored by the American Management Association, Hilton Head, South Carolina, May 24-28, 2004
- The Role of the Supervisor, sponsored by University of the Pacific, June 3, 2004
- Partnering With Your Boss, sponsored by University of the Pacific, June 14, 2004
- From Manager to Strategic Thinker, sponsored by the American Management Association, Chicago, Illinois, June 21-23, 2004
- From Manager to Strategic Thinker, sponsored by the American Management Association, San Francisco, California, June 28-30, 2004
- Business Ethics, sponsored by University of the Pacific, July 8, 2004
- From Manager to Strategic Thinker, sponsored by the American Management Association, San Francisco, California, July 28-30, 2004
- Problem Solving & Decision Making, sponsored by University of the Pacific, July 22, 2004

*Contact us today for a free consultation to discuss  
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*and how they can benefit you.*

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