



Bridges A monthly eZine from Meridian Consulting, Inc.,
published January through November

Building Bridges to Success – May 2004

In this issue:

- Coaches Corner: *Executive Derailment*
- Spotlight on Conflict: *You're Fired*
- Upcoming Training: *AMA – May, June, and July 2004*
University of the Pacific – June & July 2004

Thought for the Month:

"Whether you are running an organization or participating in a committed relationship, you will find yourself continually thwarted in your best efforts to accomplish the goals unless "reality" is regularly and thoroughly examined.
Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations*

Coaches Corner: *Executive Derailment—How Do You Stay on Track?*

Derailment occurs when an individual loses focus on where they are going and what's important. Derailment can happen to anyone in management, but the higher you go, the easier it is to get derailed. The news is full of examples of corporate "star performers" like Enron's Kenneth Lay, Tyco's Dennis Kozlowski and WorldCom's Bernard Ebbers, that fell hard and fast due to lapses in professional judgment.

What doesn't make the news, is that the overall turnover rate at this level is approximately 20%. This is higher than the Department of Labor statistics for turnover in all positions, which is less than 14%.

Certainly there is a great deal of pressure on executives to perform and achieve results at this level, but the pressure alone does not account for the higher turnover. In many cases it is simply a matter of making poor choices.

Roderick Kramer, Professor of Organizational Behavior at Stanford University's Graduate School calls it the "genius-to-folly syndrome." He said that there is something about power, whether consciously pursued or bestowed, that "often changes people in profound ways."

Despite the assumptions of "ability and privilege" associated with *power*, more dangerous is the *isolation* and *insulation* that that comes with the executive's

position. The higher an individual goes in an organization, the more difficult it becomes to get honest feedback and objective input, so a balanced perspective can be maintained. Ironically, as the scope of responsibility increases, so does the executive's reliance on the honesty and objectivity of others.

However, not all executives lose their footing. The research shows that effective leaders share common traits, they:

- Retain a keen sense of proportion.
- Display a high degree of self-awareness.
- Feel a sense of satisfaction with what they achieved; they don't need external verification.

While these executives may have very different personalities and management styles, these traits are a result of their skill at "self-management." Here are some tips to improve your self-management:

- **Reflect at least as much as you Act:** While the demands of the workplace may drive you towards action 24/7, the most successful leaders need a balance between reflection and action. The self-awareness and perspective that is gained by reflection, helps to reduce the risks associated with exposure to power.
- **Find someone to tell you the truth about your behavior:** Go outside your organization to find it. You cannot expect employees to give you accurate or necessary feedback since you hold their career and their paycheck in your hand. They cannot afford to tell you the truth, even if you asked for it.
- **Admit to your challenges:** Everyone has them, but avoid the natural tendency to deny or cover them up. Instead, shine a light on your challenges in order to understand and manage them. This will serve two purposes, it models the behavior you want to see in others, and can prevent others from taking advantage of your weaknesses.
- **Keep your life simple:** The trappings of power are seductive, so it helps to remain awfully ordinary. Nurture humility and remind yourself of what really matters in life; it helps you to view your accomplishments and challenges, with detachment.

Getting to the top and staying there, requires enormous commitment and focus. In order to realize the happiness and satisfaction that goes along with the view, make an equal commitment to self-management. In so doing, "derailment" will only be a theoretical concept.

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.

- 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
- Build influence without authority

If you or your organization is looking to *improve performance* and *build capability* of your management team, please call us for a complimentary coaching session. 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.

Tel: (925) 258-0304

Email: info@meridiancoaches.com

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

Spotlight on Conflict: *"You're Fired!"*

Taking off on the popular Donald Trump ad-line for the show *The Apprentice*, Cynthia Shapiro, a Human Resource Consultant, went to great lengths in a recent newspaper story, to talk about the "fiction" of firing people. She says that firing rarely happens, because the "fear of lawsuits has made firing mostly obsolete."

Ms. Shapiro then shares the techniques she has employed over the years to force people to resign, "It's an art form," she boasts proudly. She promotes this as a viable and desirable management option. Ms. Shapiro asserts that this practice gets "rid of the problem" by virtue of being indirect, while providing some measure of legal protection for the employer.

In one case she describes how she helped push an employee, who was "hardworking" and "liked by fellow employees" but disliked by his supervisor, into complaining about unacceptable assignments. The employee was then fired for insubordination. Other cases involved repeatedly "handing out the worst assignments" or the "most difficult clients" to the people the employers wanted to get rid of.

While this article is appalling in both content and implication, this practice is more widespread than any of us would care to acknowledge. The problems and long-term negative impact created by this artifice are immeasurable:

- The dishonesty of the maneuver is transparent to anyone who is paying attention.
- The amount of ill will and resentment created by the subterfuge is enormous because those who are paying attention are sure to spread the word to those who weren't.

- Trust has been eliminated and agreement on goals and priorities has just been replaced by self-protectionism.

It is obvious that by being indirect or deceitful, there is no opportunity to turn a bad situation around. Like the Aladdin Principle asserts, *“You will never get what you want, if you don’t ask for it.”* A better solution is:

- Give specific and direct feedback to the person with whom you are having an issue.
- Reach agreement on what can and must be done to turn the situation around.
- Check-in with each other regularly.

This approach will not only build trust, but will model the behavior you desire in others. Remember, giving feedback is an opportunity to turn things around, and think of all the positive implications associated with that approach. If that doesn’t happen, it won’t be because you didn’t try. Honesty is always the best policy.

~~~~~

### **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.*

Tel: (925) 258-0304

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

Visit us on the web at: [www.meridianconsultinginc.com](http://www.meridianconsultinginc.com)

~~~~~

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.

Tel: (925) 258-0304

Email: info@meridianconsultinginc.com

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

~~~~~

## Upcoming Training:

- 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 the Training Programs available from Meridian Consulting, Inc.*

Tel: (925) 258-0304

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

Visit us on the web at: [www.meridianconsultinginc.com](http://www.meridianconsultinginc.com)

-----

## **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](#).

-----

***The Small Print:*** Copyright © Meridian Consulting, Inc., 2004. All Rights reserved. Please feel free to print this eZine, we only ask that you give Meridian credit for the content when you share it.

*If at any time, you would like your name removed from our monthly eZine, simply send an e-mail to [info@meridianconsultinginc.com](mailto:info@meridianconsultinginc.com) with the word "unsubscribe" in the message box. Your address will never be sold, bartered, traded, or in any other way shared with any other person.*