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**Bridges** A monthly eZine from Meridian Consulting, Inc.,  
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***Building Bridges to Success – June 2004***  
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**In this issue:**

- Coaches Corner: *Strategies for Doing the Right Thing*
- Spotlight on Conflict: *Cornerstones of Collaboration*
- Performance Consulting: *Staying Ahead of the Curve*
- Upcoming Training: *AMA – June, July & Aug 2004*  
*University of the Pacific – June & July 2004*

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**Thought for the Month:**

*"We do not perceive things as they are; we perceive things as we are."*  
Talmud

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**Coaches Corner:** *Strategies for Doing the Right Thing*

In today's work environment, collaboration is not an option—it is essential. In building collaborative workplaces you must celebrate the differences and honor the interdependence of those who toil beside you. The essential ingredient of full participation is dialogue, and you can initiate meaningful dialogue when you provide others with honest feedback. People need to hear it all—the good and the bad.

Collaboration between people depends on honesty and meeting the needs of both individuals. Providing constructive and positive feedback is invaluable for people to continue the good work they are doing, and to improve where necessary. Every employee deserves your feedback.

Feedback is not about telling, but rather, a way to initiate a meaningful dialogue with others. As a leader, it is always your job to establish clarity in whatever needs to be done. When there is clarity, you establish agreement, and where there is agreement you have increased your ability to accomplish your business objectives.

Regardless of whether feedback is positive or constructive, it should never be withheld. People can't change if you don't share the relevant information with them. If they don't get it from you directly, they will infer it from your actions and other circumstances. Inferences are based upon assumptions, which leads to confusion and conflict.

If you are uncomfortable giving feedback, practice giving positive feedback, so that when you do have to give constructive feedback it's not an alien concept. Sharing pertinent and positive feedback will go a long ways towards establishing the practice of dialogue, which is the basis for sound business relationships.

You owe it to yourself and those with whom you work, to create an environment of openness and honesty. When you provide feedback, you not only open the door for an honest exchange, but you are modeling the behavior you desire in others. You are establishing a workplace protocol that creates an environment of accountability and honesty.

Follow these simple guidelines and feedback will become a tool for improving your ability to effectively collaborate with others.

- **Be Direct:** State concisely the nature of the discrepancy or the issue you want to discuss.
- **Be Specific:** State specific details of what you expected or what was agreed upon and then state what you observed.
- **Be Non-Punishing:** State the facts as you know them (don't add value judgments).

When you give feedback, you give people the opportunity to be successful. Your feedback is the foundation for creating a work environment that is open, proactive and accountable.

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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.

- Do what's important, instead of what's urgent
- Gain clarity and objectivity in dealing with issues and problems
- 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 for *objective, confidential, and knowledgeable* support, please call us for a complimentary coaching session.

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

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### **Spotlight on Conflict:** *Cornerstones of Collaboration*

Nearly all the articles on *conflict* are written from the viewpoint that a conflict currently exists and the focus is on resolving it. However, before conflict arises, you can take action to reduce the amount of conflict you encounter and minimize the negative affects of any future conflict situations.

Regardless of whether you started it or were swept into the conflict situation, the only thing over which you have any realistic degree of control—is yourself. Taking the initiative and being responsible for your own actions before and during conflict, is exemplified in the four *Cornerstones of Collaboration*:

- **Character** – Act in accordance with your values. Employ and live by your own set of ethical standards.
- **Competence** – Build and sustain constructive relationship with those around you. It is predicated on two things: building trust and creating clear agreements in your transactions with others.
- **Compassion** – Live and work in interdependence with a wide variety of people. This requires empathy for others, and valuing and allowing the differences of those who toil beside you.
- **Confidence** – Having confidence is not an attitude of superiority, but an attitude of *self-acceptance*. It is the ability to clearly recognize both your strengths and your challenges and to be comfortable with that knowledge.

By internalizing the *Cornerstones of Collaboration*, you are better suited to minimize the negative emotions associated with interpersonal conflict. You will move more easily to identify the underlying causes of conflict and you will be able to develop more mutually satisfying solutions. Integrating these characteristics into your own personal make-up, will improve your relationships with others, and will reduce the amount of stress and conflict in your life.

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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:** *Staying Ahead of the Curve*

All businesses are subject to market forces, such as new technologies, increasing competition and rising customer expectations, which dictate changes in your business. Whatever the driver, change is a constant in today's marketplace. As a result, businesses are faced with a common challenge, "*Act or be acted upon.*" This requires businesses to constantly *improve, expand, and innovate.*

However, businesses are a complex web of interdependent relationships between people, work processes and the numerous systems that support them. These relationships provide the products and services to the customers who sustain the business. Successfully engaging and aligning these components to manage change, means improving your chances of *staying ahead of the curve.* This requires a proactive, rather than a reactive response for necessary change initiatives.

Even when necessary, many businesses are reluctant to instigate change initiatives for a wide variety of reasons:

- Perceived difficulty.
- Reluctant to make investment.
- Previously failed initiatives.
- Too distracting.
- The band-aids still work.
- Stretched too thin.
- Too busy putting out the day-to-day fires to take the time to build the necessary fire-fighting equipment.

The critical question is, "*What will it cost you to do nothing*"? Regardless of the scope of your own initiatives, if you need to move forward, here are five key strategies for managing successful change initiatives:

1. **Create the Vision:** Every project needs a target. Not only does this give the project the needed direction, but it provides those involved with criteria to aid their decision-making and problem-solving efforts along the way. In addition, a compelling vision of how things will be once the project is completed, provides the motivation necessary for sustaining the initiative through the rough spots.

2. **Just Do It:** There seem to be more reasons for delaying a project than there are for starting one. When kicking off a project, too many delays at the front-end will kill the initiative before it ever gets started. If the project meets a critical need or is supported by your cost/benefit analysis, don't hesitate to take action.
3. **Multilateral Involvement:** Change projects benefit from engaging as many different interests as are practical. Involvement of others serves two critical purposes (1) The more points of view that are considered, the higher the probability of creating a successful solution, (2) Involving people in the change helps create "buy-in" and overcome resistance. A good project team is integrated both vertically and horizontally from through-out the organization.
4. **Ensure Objectivity:** In any initiative, people will need to be able to objectively assess the current situation and create solutions regardless of personal interests. As Peter Senge says in *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, "It is important that at least one participant has the willingness and skill to promote inquiry, the presence of mind to recognize subtle mental models at play (including his own) and an eminent enough position that everyone else in the room will listen to him. In many cases, this requires an outside facilitator." It may mean bringing in temporary resources from the outside to provide the necessary expertise and objectivity.
5. **Commitment:** In any change initiative, there are people whose personal interests will not be served and they will feel threatened. Commitment from the highest levels of the organization can help overcome those who have an interest in undermining the effort. This commitment needs to be visible, outspoken, and constant.

Change is inevitable, and *planning* is a critical component of proactively managing change. These five strategies will help improve the long-term chances of success for any project, large or small.

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### **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

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### **Upcoming Training:**

- 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
- Problem Solving & Decision Making, sponsored by University of the Pacific, July 22, 2004
- From Manager to Strategic Thinker, sponsored by the American Management Association, San Francisco, California, July 28-30, 2004
- Organizational Politics, sponsored by the American Management Association, San Francisco, California, August 9-11, 2004

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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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