



Bridges A monthly eZine from Meridian Consulting, Inc.,
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Building Bridges to Success – August 2004

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Thought for the Month:

"Nothing is more terrible than activity without insight."

~ Thomas Carlyle ~

Coaches Corner: *Taming the E-mail Monster*

There is no denying the impact of technology in the workplace. It has increased the speed at which information can be generated and shared. Nowhere is that more visible than with the spread of e-mail as a communication tool. However, e-mail has been both boon and burden. Yes it has improved the ease of communicating and sharing information, but the message often gets lost in the translation.

When you communicate via e-mail, you lose all the *vocalization, facial expression, hand & body gestures, and physical proximity*, which serve to put your words in context. This leaves you with only words, punctuation and grammar to ensure the message that was received, was the message you intended to convey. While e-mail can be a challenge, there are a few simple things you can do to increase the quality of your outgoing messages.

1. **Decide if you could talk in person or by phone.** Business is conducted between people and for people, and talking person-to-person provides the best opportunity for dialogue and clarification.

2. E-mail should immediately convey an idea or thought.

- Be clear and concise. Pretend every word costs a dollar. *Don't you wish other people did too?*
- Make the subject line self-explanatory--capture the point of the message in the subject line.
- Ensure your e-mail is structured so people know immediately the purpose of your message, any action you want taken, and the appropriate background information (no more than a paragraph).

3. Observe the Rules of Writing and Format Guidelines: E-mail may be informal and all the laws of writing may be suspended, *but only in your imagination*. While technology has changed, grammar has not. When people see the "improper" use of the English language, they tend to focus on what other "errors" you might have made—instead of the message you intended.

- Use correct punctuation, grammar, and spelling.
- avoid using all lower case letters. this can be very distracting to read.
- DO NOT USE ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. IT IS HARD TO READ AND PEOPLE RECOGNIZE WORDS BY THEIR SHAPES AS WELL AS BY LETTERS. Using all capital letters may be construed as lazy, rude or YELLING.

4. E-mail is not appropriate in every situation, avoid using E-mail:

- When sending bad news.
- When you are angry, upset, or frustrated.
- When your message is longer than half a page of paper.
- When reprimanding or criticizing someone.
- When your message takes more than a half hour to compose. If it's important to spend that much time on an e-mail, you should try and talk to that person by phone or in person.
- When delegating a task. An important assignment should never be sent through an informal medium. Just because you sent the e-mail, does NOT mean someone understood or agreed to do anything.

Remember, E-mail is NOT private! *Lawsuit after lawsuit has proved that.*

5. Extending a few common courtesies can improve the receptiveness of your messages.

- Erase long address lists or long messages when forwarding.
- Copy all the people you mention in your e-mail message (if appropriate).
- Avoid "crying wolf" by sending all e-mails *URGENT*.
- Create a signature block that includes your contact information so people can easily respond to you.

- Use frequent paragraphing—lots of white space makes the message easier to read.

E-mail can be a valuable business and communication tool. And while you may not be able to control the volume or the relevance of the e-mails you receive, you can manage the quality and usefulness of the messages you send.

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 objectivity in dealing with 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
- Explore purpose and legacy
- 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 your leadership development needs

Tel: (925) 258-0304

Email: info@meridiancoaches.com

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

Spotlight on Conflict: *Workplace Violence Survey*

The American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) has just completed their 2004 national survey concerning *Violence in the Workplace*. In preparing to conduct the survey the ASSE noted that the Bureau of Labor Standards had reported that they were documenting an increase in the number of "violent" incidents in the workplace. In fact, the National Safe Workplace Institute estimates the cost to employers, in missed days at work and legal fees, exceeds \$4 billion annually. According to the ASSE survey results:

- There are 30,000 assaults committed each week in the workplace (assault being defined as both physical and verbal assault).
- An unarmed offender commits 75% of all workplace violence.
- Harassment is the leading form of workplace violence (16 million workers are harassed each year).

- Other acts of violence include stalking, threats, inappropriate communication, and both telephone and e-mail harassment.

Some of the common mistakes that employers make today actually escalate the conflict, which can erupt into violence if it's not resolved satisfactorily:

- A rigid adherence to established policies regardless of the circumstances.
- Developing policies and procedures designed to minimize damages, rather than promote solutions.
- Conflict management programs that are reactive, rather than proactive.
- A business architecture that promotes a rigid hierarchy, where conflict is moved up channel for resolution, without the opportunity resolve it between the involved parties.
- There is a general failure of accountability throughout the organization and people do not take or accept responsibility for their actions.

The current data suggests that employers should be doing more to mitigate and reduce conflict in the workplace. The American Arbitration Association found that 40% of the Fortune 1,000 companies have now instituted some form of "conflict management" that is providing managers and employees with alternatives to the traditional "progressive discipline" programs. Some companies have also instituted conflict resolution programs focused on their customers that have reduced costs and improved customer satisfaction.

Businesses can do much to minimize the negative impact of unresolved conflict in the workplace. They can begin by treating conflict as a serious business issue that affects the bottom line, and create effective business solutions of timely *Intervention* and appropriate *Prevention*.

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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.*

Everyday, at every level of the organization, unresolved conflict increases the cost of doing business, reduces productivity, and places enormous stress on important business relationships. In fact, experts estimate that at least 33% of a typical managers time is spent coping with conflict situations.

Meridian's conflict resolution approach delivers results by building internal capability and by minimizing the harmful effects of on-going or potential conflict situations.

- Minimize stress, anger, and frustration in the workplace.
- Reduce the cost of lost work time, turnover, and burnout, while increasing productivity and motivation.
- Prevent litigation and its associated costs.

- Improve collaboration, cooperation and communication among individuals, teams, business units, vendors, and customers.

Meridian consultants have the skills, tools, and experience to help your business apply appropriate *intervention*, and develop *prevention* programs that are tailored to your specific needs.

*Contact us today for a free consultation to discuss your needs*

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Performance Consulting: *Smart Training Investment*

Training is a significant business tool that can improve productivity by building the competencies needed for your business. A study 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 for businesses engaged in manufacturing and an 11% increase in productivity in the service sector.

Training can take many forms such as technology based, web based, coaching, or traditional classroom instruction. No matter what form or forum you choose, a couple of general guidelines can help you get the most from your training dollar.

First, identify individual, business and organizational needs.

- **Individual** needs can be identified using the in-house performance review activities. Training goals and needs can be culled out of the data and organized in a manner that makes it useful to your training department or coordinator.
- **Business** needs usually come in one of two flavors, future-focused or past-focused. Problems that the business faced in the past do not make good indicators for identifying your training needs. Business opportunities identified in your strategic plan, however, provide a future focus and the training can be geared towards helping the organization accomplish significant objectives.
- **Organizational** needs also can be categorized in one of two ways. There are the core competencies needed to conduct business, and this type of training can be offered on a recurring basis as refreshers or for new employees. The second category goes beyond the core competencies and offers training designed to give the organization a competitive advantage. These programs can range from leadership development, to conflict management, to relationship building.

Second, in order to improve your training investment, *measure the results*. Good measurement systems go beyond the "smile sheets" usually collected at the end of

a given training program. You can measure the learning that took place in two ways:

- By testing before and after on the subject matter, or
- Measuring business results achieved either by an individual or business unit to determine if the training has helped improve performance.

Training is a valuable business tool. Unfortunately it is frequently the first place that cut backs occur when you try to tighten expenses. However, as the statistic above indicates, training is a sound business investment if you follow a few common guidelines.

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.

Contact us today for a free consultation to discuss your organizational needs

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Upcoming Training:

Call to find out how these workshops can brought to your business location.

- Role of the Supervisor, sponsored by University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, September 18, 2004.
- Coaching for Performance, sponsored by University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, September 23, 2004.
- Senior Executives Seminar, sponsored by the American Management Association, Hilton Head, S. Carolina, September 27-30, 2004.
- Presidents & CEOs Seminar, sponsored by the American Management Association, San Francisco, California, October 4-8, 2004.
- Managing Technical Professionals, sponsored by the American Management Association, Washington, D.C. Nov. 10-12, 2004.
- Business Ethics, sponsored by University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, November 11, 2004.

- [Role of the Supervisor](#), sponsored by University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, November 13, 2004.
- [Managing Technical Professionals](#), sponsored by the American Management Association, San Francisco, California, Nov. 17-19, 2004.

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Featured Training of the Month

The Art of Delegation: *Getting Work Done Through Others*

This workshop is designed to aid management at all levels to improve their competence in one of the single most crucial management skills: *getting work done through others*. You cannot succeed alone. Effective delegation means being able to accomplish objectives using the committed collaboration of a diverse group of individuals.

Your ability to effectively delegate expands your ability to achieve objectives that support the organization's goals. Being an effective delegator helps you get the most from available resources and is a means for developing the capabilities and increasing the performance of your staff.

This workshop provides you with the opportunity to practice the skills, tools and techniques to effectively delegate work, and to learn what can go wrong and how to correct it. It will also challenge you to examine how your own behavior impacts the operating environment in which your staff works. Through the use of lecture, dialogue, role-playing and team exercises, the instructors will work with you on the three phases of delegation:

Assess:

- Assess your assets, blind spots and hidden biases.
- Objectively assess staff skills, experience and motivation.
- Identify barriers that prevent individuals and teams from succeeding.

Assign:

- Clearly and concisely communicate the desired results and outcomes, and effectively track assignments.
- Set appropriate accountability and decision-making boundaries.
- Identify consequences for success and non-compliance.

Monitor:

- Monitor progress and results in a manner that builds individual accountability.
- Ask effective questions and learn to focus on the facts
- Deliver positive and constructive feedback

Learning the *Art of Delegation* provides you with the professional edge to achieve improved results and increase capability of the individuals around you.

Meridian Consulting, Inc. can help your company realize a gain in productivity and increase the effectiveness of management personnel through training programs that are tailored to your needs.

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Book Review

"How Full Is Your Bucket? Positive Strategies for Work and Life"

by Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton

How did you feel after your last interaction with another person? Did that person - your spouse, best friend, coworker, or even a stranger -- "fill your bucket" by making you feel more positive? Or did that person "dip from your bucket," leaving you more negative than before?

This book reveals how even the briefest interactions affect your relationships, productivity, health, and even longevity. Organized around a simple metaphor of a dipper and a bucket and grounded in 50 years of research, this book will show you how to greatly increase the positive moments in your work and your life -- while reducing the negative.

Praise for *HOW FULL IS YOUR BUCKET?*

"In this brief but significant book, the authors, a grandfather-grandson team, explore how using positive psychology in everyday interactions can dramatically change our lives."

-- PublishersWeekly

"This slender volume offers an abundance of insights and inspiration. I'd recommend it to anyone who wants to dramatically improve their work life and strengthen their relationships."

-- Deepak Chopra, author of the best selling "The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success and The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire"

"Wow! This little book is a treasure. It is chock full of wisdom, inspiration, and practical advice, rooted in solid research. It will change the way you look at your life, your work, and the world."

-- Martin Walsh, Executive Director, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Foundation

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