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**Bridges** A monthly eZine from Meridian Consulting, Inc.,  
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***Building Bridges to Success – January 2004***  
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**Thought for the Month:**

*"The four poisons of the mind are fear, confusion, hesitation, and surprise."*

Deep Survival by Laurence Gonzales

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**Coaches Corner:** *Your Attitude is the Control Center of Your Life*

We have hundreds of books in our business library that cover topics on leadership, coaching, empowerment, conflict, organizational design, and strategy. In each and every one of them you will find a thread dealing with the concept of "Attitude", and how powerful it is. A statement that synthesizes the collective message is this, "Your attitude is the control center of your life," and it is critical to nurture the power of a positive attitude as both a proactive and reactive response.

In a proactive sense, it's how you envision the possibilities about your life and world around and you. Study after study demonstrates that people who have positive attitudes are the ones who accomplish what they desire. In his book Deep Survival, Laurence Gonzales tries to understand why some people are able to rescue themselves from life threatening situations while others perish. One of the constant themes deals with the attitude of the individual. Those who act with confidence and have a deep belief that they will survive, do survive.

In his book Think and Grow Rich, (the well known protégé of Dale Carnegie) Napoleon Hill, notes that one of the common characteristics of people who are successful, is "faith," the unshakable belief that they will accomplish whatever they set their mind to.

A recent study conducted by the University of California, at Davis, has concluded that people who focus on the *positive*, as opposed to the *negative*, enjoy better health.

Professor Robert Emmons noted, "...feeling gratitude reduces unpleasant feelings like envy, resentment, and regret."

In looking at attitude as a reactive response, your attitude affects how you respond to adversity. Author, Spenser Johnson said, *"It's not what happens to you in your life, but how you handle it when it does!"* Perhaps Victor Frankl, a survivor of the WWII Nazi concentration camps said it best.

*"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing—the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."*

His is a powerful statement. Fortunately, most of us will never have to go through the experiences that he and millions of others did. However, the stress in our lives can tip us in a negative direction. Even with a positive attitude, there will be certain times or circumstances of adversity that overwhelm anyone. During these times the power of your relationships with others, can be an important stabilizing force. However, just like your "attitude," your relationships must be nurtured and tended to. In other words, dig your well, before you need the water.

A positive attitude is something that needs to be nurtured and practiced, in good times and bad. The true test of a positive attitude is how you react to adverse circumstances. It's worth remembering the following things:

- Recognize that you lean towards what you think about.
- Attitude shapes your ability to envision possibilities about yourself and your situation, and helps you create solutions and invent new tomorrows.
- A positive attitude can be developed by consciously thinking about your life with gratitude and appreciation, and acting with the self-confidence that will come as a natural consequence.

In today's fast-paced, high-stress, multitasking environment, it is reassuring to note that the ability to enjoy your life and get the best from whatever you do, lies within you. You are the architect of your attitude.

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**Business Coaching Services:** *Success Strategies for Working With Others*  
Meridian works collaboratively with business people to develop coaching programs that focus on targeted action and tangible results. Corporate executives and business owners alike can benefit from coaching:

- Gain clarity and purpose
- Get focused and stay on-track
- Build influence without authority
- Deal effectively with difficult people and situations
- Give effective feedback

- Create and maintain boundaries
- Build confidence and restore credibility
- Get work done effectively through others
- Establish and sustain constructive work relationships
- Increase flexibility in working with others and new situations
- Build and sustain life balance
- Manage yourself for the best results
- Do what's important, instead of what's urgent

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:** *Great Expectations*

Business relationships are defined through a series of both formal and informal requests and promises. Formal requests and the resulting promises are based upon things like *offer letters, employee handbooks, and job descriptions*. Informal requests and promises are created through your daily interaction and conversations with others.

When a request is made and a promise given, expectations are established. These expectations are influenced by previous experiences, personal preferences, and individual needs. Let's look at the following scenario of a co-worker in your office.

*Taylor was recently hired and given an Employee Handbook that sets out work hours of 8 AM until 5 PM and a job description that clearly described the duties of that position. Taylor had been in the job, when assigned to join a newly formed team to accomplish a specific objective, and the meetings to take place every Monday at 8 AM.*

*You are on the same project and have noticed that Taylor doesn't like working on teams, and when Monday rolls around Taylor dashes into "team meeting" at about 8:15, explaining the kids needed to be dropped off and he ran into an unexpected delay. You have observed that Taylor comes late to the majority of the team meetings.*

*Taylor believes he has "basically" complied with the request made of him because he is attending the meetings and working on the project. He feels*

*he is doing more than his share, since the team project work isn't in his job description, nor was it discussed during interviews.*

*Your boss on the other hand believes the meetings are important and actually holds the expectation that all team members will come in early on Mondays so they can be in the conference room and ready to go at 8 o'clock.*

The perception of the boss, co-workers and team members is that Taylor failed to meet expectations, and he may be labeled as unreliable, a poor team player, a slacker, etc. This situation may seem trivial to Taylor, but the perceptions of those around him are reality, and when Taylor's perception differs from that of others, an undercurrent of conflict has been established. For the boss, this occurs because he has not behaved in accordance with the implied agreement that you do the job assigned to you, even if it's not in your job description. For the team members, it occurs because they are irritated and frustrated with Taylor's lack of commitment, and consequently he is treated with little respect and does not have the trust of his co-workers.

In a more serious case, the Pittsburgh California School District was the recipient of a sexual harassment lawsuit. Five women filed a suit against the school district alleging that a male employee, a school janitor, had been consistently sexually harassing them and that the school and the school board failed to take action.

When the women accepted employment at the school, they had an expectation that the work environment would be safe and that they would be free from unwanted attention.

*When the women first complained about the behavior, the school investigated and found that harassment had taken place and the man was reprimanded by the School Board and suspended without pay for 3 months. However, after that period of time the suspended employee returned to work as usual. The women, feeling that nothing had changed, filed suit.*

After the lawsuit was filed, one member of the School Board was quoted as saying, "What else do they want us to do? I guess they are just looking for a payoff." In other words, this board member still doesn't have a clear understanding of the women's expectations. By failing to clarify the expectations of the women, the school board created a solution that failed to meet expectations and ended up escalating the conflict, as well. By failing to clarify the interests (expectations) of all the parties (the women, the accused, the school, the school board) the solution was just a shot in the dark.

The lesson is that when building processes to manage workplace conflict, there must be a step that encourages discovery of the "expectations" of the involved parties. A successful intervention tool is *mediation*, as it provides this type of discovery, as well as resolving the workplace dispute, and in a manner that creates a high level of satisfaction among the involved parties.

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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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**Consulting:** *The War On Waste*

The Bureau of Labor Standards recently announced that productivity has increased in the United States by 9 percent. The level of productivity is based upon a complex formula involving purchasing, pricing, cost of labor, and employment levels.

However, this does not mean that your particular business is experiencing a 9% raise in profitability. In fact, regardless of the national level of productivity, McClelland's Theory holds that any given business will find that an average of 60% of their costs are incurred for non-value added activity. Non-value added activity is defined as work that does not create or add value to the products or services delivered to a client.

In any business, non-value added activity is essential; however, it can also grow to a point that you are unable to realize a gain in profitability, even with gains in productivity. On-going process improvement projects and/or business process re-design, are activities that can help you improve both productivity and profitability.

**Are your work processes meeting organizational expectations?**

With the best intentions, businesses can still find it hard to work efficiently, improve their execution, and create value on behalf of their customers.

Answer the following questions to determine where your improvement opportunities lie:

- Do your work processes adapt to rapidly changing circumstances?
- Do your work activities focus on creating value for your customers?
- Does it take too much time to get things done?
- Does the execution fall short of the vision?
- Do emergent issues prevent people from creating long-term solutions?
- Are people accountable for the work they do?
- Does faulty analysis and planning result in reactive decisions?

Businesses with seamless workflow process integration have the ability to maintain their focus on long-term goals, while effectively accomplishing today's tasks.

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**Consulting Services:** *Value is created when your work activity delivers a product or service that meets the needs of your customers, at a price point where value meets or exceeds the investment. The central ingredients to make this formula successful are the work processes.*

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 and Speaking Engagements**

- The Role of the Supervisor, University of the Pacific, January 22, 2004

- Coaching: Improving Business Performance, University of the Pacific, February 5, 2004
- Workplace Conflict, The Cost, The Cause and The Cure, Contra Costa Chapter of the Northern California Human Resource Association, February 12, 2004
- Problem Solving & Decision Making, University of the Pacific, April 8, 2004
- Business Ethics, University of the Pacific, May 6, 2004
- Workplace Conflict, The Cost, The Cause and The Cure, East Bay Chapter of the Northern California Human Resource Association, May 5, 2004
- The Role of the Supervisor, University of the Pacific, June 3, 2004
- Partnering With Your Boss, University of the Pacific, June 14, 2004
- Business Ethics, University of the Pacific, July 8, 2004
- Problem Solving & Decision Making, University of the Pacific, July 22, 2004

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**Training Programs:** 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.

*Contact us today for a free consultation to discuss  
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