



Bridges

A monthly eZine from Meridian Consulting, Inc.

Building Bridges to Success – March/2004

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-

Thought for the Month:

*Lift up your eyes upon this day breaking for you
Give birth again to the dream
The horizon leans forward
Offering you space to place
New steps of change*

Maya Angelou

Coaches Corner: *Achieving Balance in a Busy World*

Work is one of the central themes in our lives. It may provide an outlet for your creativity, your social needs, or an avenue for your need to contribute, as well as playing an important role in meeting your financial needs. However, no matter how large of a part it may be in your life, you have found that work is only one part of it.

For most of us, work represents a huge investment of time and energy. While you may be making more money than your parents at the same age, studies show that you also work significantly more than your counterparts of just a few decades ago.

You may have more money, but at what cost? Do you have enough quality time with your family, or have the opportunity to engage in other pursuits that bring happiness and fulfillment?

At times, you may feel like you are forced to choose between a life with *things* or a life with *time*.

- A life with *things* represents the material and creature comforts you can acquire with your money, and oftentimes, this represents your badge of success in an otherwise anonymous world. The acquisition of *things* can be a never-ending endeavor, because there are always more *things*, better things, and newer *things*. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "...*sometimes money just costs too much.*" This is a life focused on *doing*.
- A life with *time* on the other hand, is focused on existence as opposed to subsistence. It is the ability to stop long enough to have a conversation with your children, read a much loved book, appreciate a loved one, reflect, share time with friends, or admire a sunset. This is a life focused on *being*.

You do not need to sacrifice one for the other. Instead, the goal is to create balance by making choices that reflect your deeply held values. When you focus on the elements in your life that hold value, you will begin making choices that lead to deeper personal satisfaction. As Hemingway said, "What's right is what feels good after."

To get to the essential elements, answer this question, "*If you were on your deathbed, what do you wish you had spent more time doing?*" Then follow-up with these questions:

- How have you invested your time?
- What is your level of satisfaction with the choices you have made?
- What do you want to be remembered for?

Balance does not just happen, it is created. Balance is personal and can only be defined by you.

1. ***Begin by Beginning:*** Reflect on your deeply held values, on what is important and what brings satisfaction to your life. Explore and follow the choices that lead to creating balance in your life.
2. ***Remain Open to Outcomes:*** You possess an ability to attract into your life, the people and situations which are in harmony with your choices. It is not about having all of the answers yourself, but about being open to possibilities and new ways for achieving what you want and need.
3. ***Take Control:*** You are responsible for our own life, even though you may be tempted to list the obstacles that prevent you from achieving your dreams or the things that prevent you from dreaming at all. Focus on what you control, not what you don't! *To change your attitude is to change your life.*
4. ***Take Action:*** In order to achieve your desired results, you must take action on the choices you make. *Every journey begins with one step—just one step.*

Achieving balance can be attained by making choices that reflect your deeply held values. By taking action, your life expands to encompass all that is necessary and good.

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.

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

Spotlight on Conflict: *Breakthrough Alternatives for Resolving Workplace Conflict*

Workplace conflict is a major business issue. If not addressed in a proactive, positive, and systemic way, conflict can increase the cost of doing business and decrease productive capability.

According to a 2003 survey conducted by the American Arbitration Association, 40% of the Fortune 1000 companies have instituted some form of Alternative Dispute Resolution System (ADR), to manage workplace conflict. What is prompting some companies to act while others have not? There have been two drivers for change:

1. The first comes from a company's direct experience either through *violence* or *litigation*.
 - Violence – We are all familiar with the phrase “going postal.” In response to series of highly publicized acts of violence in the U.S. Postal system, the Post Office instituted an internal conflict resolution system that promotes a 24/7 readiness and immediate response by a panel of external mediators around the country. The moment any complaint or disagreement arises, that cannot be resolved by the parties, they call on a Mediator. They are promoting a climate of resolution.
 - Litigation -- Some companies have created ADR systems as an alternative to going to court. Toro is a company that manufactures products (lawnmowers, etc.) that have a high rate of user injuries, and was frequently sued by its customers. They found this time-consuming, expensive, and frequently had a negative impact on customer satisfaction. Toro responded by creating a panel of Mediators, and customer complaints are directed to this system, often with the support of plaintiff's attorneys. The results have

shortened the resolution time, decreased the dollar amount of damages, and the level of customer satisfaction has increased. They have created a win/win situation with their customer base.

2. The other impetus comes from Legal and Human Resource Departments, who must deal directly with the fallout from workplace conflict. These departments are starting to view themselves as profit centers within the business. They recognize the need to resolve problems early, before costly grievances, disciplinary procedures, or litigation becomes the only remedy.
 - At International Harvester, the company noted they were averaging 450 employee grievances a month. The company recognized that the grievances were indicative of an undercurrent of dissatisfaction that was having a negative impact on productivity, turnover, and job satisfaction.
 - In response, they developed a strategic initiative to resolve grievances on the same day they occurred by getting the parties to work through the problem and reach a verbal agreement that same day. The number of employee grievances has been reduced to an average of three per month.

Conflict in the workplace is an important business issue, and one that adversely affects the bottom line. Everyday, at every level of the organization, unresolved conflict increases the cost of doing business.

There are compelling reasons to develop ADR systems for resolving workplace conflict. Relationships are the currency of business. By taking a systematic approach to proactively manage workplace conflict, you will not only preserve these important business relationships, but will enhance them as well.

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 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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Consulting: *Corporate Social Responsibility*

There is a growing business trend and it goes by many names, *Ethical Practice*, *Corporate Social Responsibility*, or *Value Based Management*. Whatever name you apply, it is a concept based upon building your business by paying attention to two factors:

- What you do, and
- How you do it

A 2002 study by DePaul University showed that the overall financial performance of the 2001 Business Ethic's 'Best Citizen' Companies, those who were deemed to demonstrate *Corporate Social Responsibility*, was significantly better than the average of those in the S&P 500 Index. The 'Best Citizens' scored 10 percentage points higher than the mean ranking of the S&P 500 companies. The rankings were based upon criteria that included:

- Total return
- Sales growth
- Profit growth (over one and three year periods)
- Net profit margins
- Return on equity

Businesses have found that "*Corporate Social Responsibility*" can increase sales and build customer loyalty. A 2001 Hill & Knowlton/Harris Interactive poll conducted in 2001 found that 36% of Americans' surveyed, consider *Corporate Citizenship* an important factor when making purchase decisions. A 2002 Cone Corporate Citizenship survey found that, of consumer's who learn about a firm's negative *Corporate Citizenship* practices:

- 91% would consider switching to another company
- 85% would pass the information along to family and friends
- 83% would refuse to invest in the company
- 80% would refuse to work at that company

One of the ways these companies are building "value based" social responsibility programs, is by paying attention to the values, as well as the need of their stakeholders. In addition, their view of stakeholders often goes beyond the traditional boundaries of the company and takes into account the needs and values of the community in which they conduct business. This practice is often referred to as the *triple bottom line*.

Long-term business success is deeply affected by our interconnectedness with others. The strength or weakness of our business relationships has a profound

impact on that business. Building value through ethical practice is a sound business strategy.

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

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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

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

Tel: (925) 258-0304

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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, 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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