



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

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Thought for the Month:

*"What lies behind us and what lies before us
are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."*

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) ~

Coaches Corner: *Succession Planning—Is Yours Meeting Expectations?*

Is your organization successfully preparing the next generation of leaders? A recent study by Towers Perrin found that one of the most significant differentiators between struggling and successful corporations was their approach to *Talent Management*. Those who were found to be the most successful had deliberate strategies aimed at attracting, retaining and developing "leadership capability."

There are many *Talent Management* strategies, but *Succession Planning* is one of the more successful because:

- Future leaders are developed from inside the organization, resulting in the retention of intellectual capital and operational expertise, and sustaining important business relationships that are vital to your organization's success.
- It's highly targeted approach to identify the required competencies for specific positions and developing individual capabilities to match those competencies.

Succession Planning is more than training and more than a personnel evaluation system. It is an ongoing strategy designed to supply well-trained, broadly experienced, and highly motivated people who are ready and able to step into key positions.

In addition, current data indicates that *Succession Planning* will be more important than ever before: Baby Boomers currently represent 47% of today's workforce and all of them will retire between 2011 and 2029, taking with them an accumulation of skills and experience.

Effective *Succession Planning* assures a continuing flow of qualified people to move up and take over when the current generation of managers and key people retire or leave your organization. Evaluate your readiness for sustained success by asking yourself these questions:

- Can you quickly fill key positions with well-trained and experienced people from within your organization if the need arises or are you forced to conduct extensive external searches?
- Have you defined the business competencies for key positions?
- Have you identified well-defined career paths for key positions?
- Have succession strategies been integrated into the corporate strategic plan?
- Is there is an alignment of future needs and available resources within your organization?

Even those organizations that have a well-defined *Succession Plans* can fail for one of several reasons:

- Waiting too long to implement the plan – The ideal succession plan is on-going, future-focused, and has a well-developed “exit strategy” for key positions.
- Assuming employees will be around to step in as necessary – There are two problems associated with this assumption, 1) employees may want to be promoted to top positions, but lack the leadership skills and abilities, 2) not all qualified people want to be promoted, even if it's expected.
- Waiting too long to give successors real authority – Many leaders don't give their successors genuine authority and responsibility, only learning until its too late, that the successor is not up to the job. Or they give some responsibility, but frequently meddle or second-guess the successor.
- Being secretive about succession plans – Executive leadership is frequently concerned about publicizing their Succession Plans due to the appearance of favoritism or stirring up potential conflict when someone isn't chosen. However, the “in-fighting, positioning, and the uncertainty of not knowing” does more damage when the line of succession is unclear.
- Planning in a vacuum – Succession planning is complex. It affects many operational and strategic activities within the company, and creating a plan in a vacuum can create more problems than it solves. Succession Planning will always benefit from the input of diverse points of view and needs from throughout the organization. Sometimes the use of an external and objective facilitator can improve the process and the results.

In preparing your organization for the next generation of leaders, *Succession Planning* is an excellent tool for efficiently and effectively applying resources to

build organizational capability and sustain success over the long-term. Even if the planned successions do not occur, you are still better off because those organizations who have more leaders at more levels, will always have a distinct competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Succession Planning Services

If your *Succession Planning* is not meeting expectations or you need to get started, Meridian has an excellent process for helping organizations get on-track for success. We can help you create a *Succession Plan* that meets the unique needs of your business, industry, and strategic objectives to develop tomorrow's potential, today.

Contact us today for a free consultation to discuss your leadership development needs

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Spotlight on Conflict: *Managing Stress and Anger*

Stress is a common physical reaction to the multiple frustrations and pressures of daily life. Anger is often the emotional expression of that stress. How your body reacts to physical and emotional stress is very similar to aging, according to Deepak Chopra in his classic book, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*.

Like your ancestors, your reaction to stressful situations is to help you survive in a sometimes hostile environment, by creating a heightened mental awareness and flooding your muscles with energy-producing chemicals. However, if stress is activated too often or for prolonged periods of time, the stress response can cause damage to your immune system and your body and its vital organs.

- **Immune System:** Stress weakens your immune system by reducing your body's ability to resist disease, viruses and bacterial infections. In addition, your capability to recover from sickness or injuries is prolonged or compromised by constant stress.
- **Circulatory System:** Elevated blood pressure and heart rate will damage the elasticity of blood vessels, and ultimately—your heart.
- **Intestines:** Continual decreases in blood flow can leave the mucous lining vulnerable to ulcers and gastrointestinal problems.
- **Brain:** Excessive cortisol is toxic to brain cells and may damage the cognitive ability. The most common reaction is anger, fatigue, and depression.

When you are faced with stress on a daily basis, the result is increased emotions of anger. One of the universal triggers of "anger" as described in *Emotions Revealed*

by Dr. Paul Ekman, is called “interference.” Which means that you are “restrained or inhibited” in some way:

- Stuck in a traffic jam.
- Diagnosed with an illness.
- Not being able to say what’s on your mind.
- Rising taxes and healthcare.
- Feeling the tug-of-war between work and home responsibilities.
- Experiencing computer crashes, cell phone failures, etc.

The increased emotions of anger and the fallout are becoming an increasingly common part of the business landscape. A 1998 survey by Inc. Magazine, posed a question to 10,000 American workers: “What is your most common emotional reaction at work?” Seventy-eight percent (78%) said, “Anger.”

The important question to ask yourself is this: *If stress is physically and emotionally damaging and “anger” is the most common emotion expressed at work, what can I do to help manage my stress and anger?* You can invest in yourself by focusing on these seven *Self-care Fundamentals* of stress prevention:

- **Nutrition:** Eating properly is essential to good health. The appropriate diet for each of us will vary to some degree. Paying attention to sustaining a balanced diet will improve your immune system and increase your resistance to disease, viruses, and bacteria.
- **Water:** Our body needs to be flushed constantly to remove toxins and replenish energy. Trying to drink eight glasses of water per day will help keep your body properly hydrated and your organs functioning at peak efficiency.
- **Air:** Taking in deep breaths brings oxygen to your whole cellular structure. Deep, measured breathing helps to relax muscles, tendons and ligaments made rigid by stress chemicals, restoring blood circulation and oxygen to your vital organs for normal usage. Many forms of meditation focus on the “breath” and it has been shown to reduce physical, emotional and mental stress.
- **Sunshine/Light:** The value of adequate lighting and sunlight has been found by researchers to be fundamental to your psychological well-being. Sunshine can improve your attitude and your resilience. In addition, sunlight is the only way for your body to create Vitamin D naturally. It only requires 10 minutes in the sun per week without sun block to get your Vitamin D needs met.
- **Exercise:** A regular program of exercise helps sustain physical energy; reduce physical, mental and emotional stress; improve flexibility; and decrease bone and soft tissue injury. As life expectancy increases, regular exercise can make the difference in your quality of life as you age and become elderly.
- **Balance:** Keeping an appropriate balance of those things which are important in your life can renew your sense of well-being. Attitude is critical to emotional hardiness; your attitude is the control center of your life.

- **Focus:** It is essential to have personal goals. The ability to accomplish your objectives provides you with a sense of accomplishment and reinforces your attitude of well-being. Nothing creates a zest for life like having something to look forward to.

In addition, stress and anger in the workplace cost businesses millions of dollars in terms of loss productivity due to interpersonal disputes, absenteeism, illness, turnover, lawsuits, and more. So the question becomes more than “what can I do” to “what can we do.”

Businesses can do more than offer an Employee Assistance Program or Health Care Benefits. They can critically examine their role in creating more collaborative work environments and to recognize that the “satisfaction” of their workforce is their responsibility. The return on investment for the business is higher levels of job satisfaction, increased productivity, and a commitment to the goals and aspirations of their work community.

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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: *Implementing Strategic Initiatives—A Critical Stage*

There are two critical phases in any deliberate change strategy that is executed in your business. The first is the planning stage (see the June issue of "Bridges"). The second is the implementation of the strategy or initiative.

Many businesses get sidetracked on their way to implementing new initiatives. Even those businesses who remain focused and have resources dedicated to implementing change initiatives, find that implementation rarely goes as planned. Here are some tips for resolving the problems you will encounter in this crucial phase.

1. Ensure you have well-articulated transition strategy. Develop a "well thought-out plan" with details about who, will do what, by when. In Project Management language this is known as the "*Work Breakdown Structure*" (*WBS*), and there are many software programs designed to lay-out complex project management plans. Its basic purpose is to provide a detailed roadmap so you can gauge *progress*, anticipate *obstacles*, and plan for needed *resources*.
2. Keep the project visible. Change is natural and resistance to change is inevitable. To overcome the numerous obstacles that you will encounter, it helps to track your project and report on progress in a forum that is highly visible.
 - 2.1 Use "project champions" that have credibility, as these individuals create legitimacy, help manage unanticipated problems, and ensure accountability.
 - 2.2 Provide opportunities for making the people involved with the change initiative very visible; letting the organization know that this is desirable behavior and that these people will have other opportunities for advancement and/or special perks.
3. Establish project measures and milestones. Use objectives and milestones to monitor progress and gauge success. Measures and milestones should be objective and easily observed or collected.
4. Anticipate obstacles. Make sure you have the resources and necessary coordination commitments to make the project happen. To make sure you have the ability to manage obstacles make them part of your Work Breakdown Structure.
 - 4.1 Ensure the plans accurately reflect the true level of effort it will take to see the change through to its conclusion, as it always takes more time and effort than anticipated.
 - 4.2 The project plan should include the ramp-up time it takes to achieve 100% productivity after the Implementation Phase has been completed. If the change is too difficult to learn or adapt to, people will build workarounds so they don't have to comply. Plan to train and integrate critical resources.

5. Create a work environment where improvement is continuous. This helps to ensure an atmosphere where change is viewed as a healthy and an expected way of doing business. It will make "change" efforts less threatening and reduce the level of resistance that will always be encountered.

Planning and Execution is a critical component of the Implementation Phase. These five strategies can help improve the long-term chances of organizational success for any project, large or small.

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### **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. We offer three performance consulting services:

- Cross-functional Process Redesign
- Business Process Redesign
- Process Improvement

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.

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Upcoming Training:

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

- Business Ethics, sponsored by University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, July 8, 2004
- Problem Solving & Decision Making, sponsored by University of the Pacific, Stockton, California, 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
- 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

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Training as an Investment

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

- Our programs build leadership skills in the areas of *Influence Building, Networking, Decision Making and Problem Solving, Constructive Relationship Management, Delegation, Team Management, and Self Management*. We have conducted training for businesses large and small throughout the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.
- Our instructors build and deliver workshops that share their extensive business experience to help individuals improve their *Management of Self, Management of the Task, and Management of Relationships with Others*.
- Meridian workshops are designed to meet your specific needs or can be drawn from an extensive library of existing workshops.
- Our training seminars are highly interactive, just like the workplace, and each workshop leaves participants with new skills, tools, and techniques to increase their *performance, productivity, and their own personal sense of job satisfaction*.

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