

# LifeMap<sup>SM</sup>



"LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success. Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more enjoyable and abundant life."

January 2012

## This Month's Message:

### Productive Conflict

#### Paths Forward

- Need Career Coaching?
- Tired of boring

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### Productive Conflict

For the past year or so LifeMap community members here in the United States have been treated to the spectacle of a government roiled by conflict and characterized by enmity which has accomplished little. If it were a business, it

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which has accomplished little. If it was a business you wouldn't want to be employed by it (which is why many incumbents are retiring) or invest in it for your future. If it was a business it would look like a sure loser on the path to eventual demise.

And though governments and businesses are inherently different (i.e. governments have a constant and legally enforceable cash flow via tax revenues) there is much one could learn from the other. The caveat here is that all elements of the government would have to be more interested in focusing on the people's business than in gaining short-term sectarian advantage. This is not "the impossible dream". Successful businesses deal in productive conflict every day of the week.

Productive conflict is not easy to achieve but it is an essential strategy that provides ways to work through historical differences, personal acrimony and achieve breakthroughs via innovation, adult communication, openness to new data, and a focus on the long-term success of the enterprise. In my career as a management psychologist I have helped many organizations achieve these ends; here are a few of the ways that we've done it.

### Paths Forward

#### - Agree on A Goal.

Every discussion or negotiation should have a goal agreed upon by both sides. If that goal is a consensus opinion or outcome then it is worthy of everyone's time. Anything else is a waste of time. If an opponent's singular goal (as stated by one Washington party leader) is to create deadlock then that person should be held to account via impeachment for failure to do his or her job. In any business a person whose prime focus is on making someone else lose versus having all make progress in some way would not be tolerated and would earn a negative reputation and a pink slip.

#### - Distinguish Between Opinions and Facts.

Any organization with motivated, competitive employees is going to be filled with conflicting opinions. Every one has a perfect right to his or her opinion. And all should feel free to express them without fear of being ignored or derided. Understanding where the other person is coming from is key to helping him or her see your point of view. But business decisions should be based not on opinions but on facts which, as John Adams said, "... are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our

passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence."

When one person says "you're trying to ruin the best health care system in the world" it would be more helpful to ask what facts support that opinion than to respond "No I'm not. You don't know what you're talking about". A genuine discussion is a sharing of facts not a selling of opinions.

Providing the facts that your opinion is based on might sound like this: "According to the World Health Organization more money per person is spent on health care in the USA than in any other nation in the world, a greater percentage of total income in the nation is spent on health care in the USA than in any United Nations member state except for East Timor. The US pays twice as much yet we have a higher infant mortality rate than most of the world's industrialized nations and in the United States life expectancy is 42nd in the world - lagging the other nations of the G5 (Japan, France, Germany, UK, USA) and just after Chile and Cuba. These are facts. You want us to be the best, so do I. Let's work together to change these facts."

Focusing on facts addresses the intelligence of your opponent, challenges his or her curiosity, is respectful and does not attack or insult him emotionally. You will find that there are few genuinely-motivated people who believe themselves so all-knowing that they have nothing left to learn. Yes, facts are stubborn things but they must be relied on for effective decision-making.

#### **- No Red Herrings Allowed.**

A red herring is a figure of speech in which a data point or irrelevant fact is entered into a discussion to mislead or distract from the original issue. Recently there has been much discussion about a proposed pipeline from Canada to Texas. There seem to be powerful concerns on both sides of the issue that remain to be clarified (health and environmental worries versus creation of construction jobs). However one of the leading proponents of the pipeline has stated that a major selling point of the pipeline is to lessen our dependence on "Middle East" oil. This is certainly a very admirable and necessary goal but the pipeline has nothing to do with it.

Why? It ignores the fact that the Canadian oil in that pipeline is destined to be sold overseas thus, having no effect on oil imported to the US. Fear mongering is apt to have less of an effect if facts are presented instead of polemics and grandstanding. Consider that 49% of US oil consumption is

produced domestically and that the U.S. imports more than twice as much petroleum from Canada and Mexico than it does from the Middle East (only 9.2% of our total).

Yes, lessening our dependence on the 9.2% of our oil that we do get from the "Middle East" is a worthy goal. But it has nothing to do with the issue under discussion. This is the very definition of a red herring - a distraction meant to mislead and it ignores the relevant and important issues yet to be resolved (the health and environmental worries versus creation of numerous jobs). Any corporate executive making this kind of argument would be laughed out of any boardroom in the land - and rightfully so

**\* A Few Last Things About Productive Conflict:**

- Divergent viewpoints should not be considered as problematic but as jumping off points for further fact finding, healthy debate and open discussion.
- History can be an obstacle. Most individuals become more positive and less resistant if the group is able to change focus from the past to the future. It becomes not about what should have happened; it becomes about what we can make happen differently.
- Team leaders must keep an eye peeled to distinguish between task conflict and personal conflict. Personal conflict can lead to harboring grudges, anger and stalemate. If it cannot be overcome by individual coaching or group team building then a personnel change may be in order. A round of golf alone cannot bridge negative personal agendas that unwilling or unmotivated members bring to the group.
- In some circles the term compromise has almost become a pejorative that means everybody is ultimately unhappy with the result of a resolved conflict. Untrue. In all but life and death situations there is usually some common ground or common interests to be found between conflicting parties. If all members are well-intentioned, each will be clear about what of their ground they can, in good conscience, cede and upon what common ground a solution can be built. This requires respectful, adult communication, letting go of historical baggage with a focus on the future, and a genuine interest in finding productive solutions. Successful, competitive organizations do this every day of the week. Those in the public sector would do well to take notice.

**LifeMap** is about helping you and your organization achieve

your goals in a manner that is both productive and humane.

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· Are you or someone you know job hunting or thinking about it?

The best, concise, all-round job changing guide available. Revised Edition [Winning Job Interviews](#) by Dr. Paul Powers.

In this easy-to-follow, step-by-step book, Dr. Paul Powers demystifies job interviewing, explains why the process actually favors the job hunter, and shows how you can dramatically improve your interview skills.

Packed with solid, practical information and laced with both humor and "kick in the pants" motivation, *Winning Job Interviews* is the book you wished you had before your last interview... and is mandatory preparation for your next one!

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**Sincerely,**

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