Reap the Rewards of Good Communication

By Paul J. Meyer

Effective communicators reach their business and personal goals because they understand people and interact meaningfully with them. They go above and beyond ordinary means and methods of sending messages; they express a unique human touch in their communication.

Human behavior experts have long said the most universal need is to understand and to be understood. Insightful and effective communicators meet these most basic human needs when they interact with others. When you understand and communicate effectively with people you:

- Earn loyalty and respect.
- Help them sort out problems and find solutions.
- Strengthen self-image and boost self-confidence.
- Guide them when they are lost or confused.
- Coach them when they are in error.
- Encourage them when they are discouraged.
- Equip them to become happier, better, and more successful.
- Influence the course of their life.

Investment of time and energy to skillfully communicate with others always pays incredible benefits! These rewards are far-reaching and mutually beneficial. New, exciting business goals are reached as communication prevents crisis situations, saves time and effort, enriches relationships, and increases productivity.

Communication Skills Can Be Learned

A common misconception is that some people are "born communicators." These born communicators supposedly communicate well because they have inborn traits and skills beyond the reach of others. Unfortunately, this erroneous idea discourages many people from attempting to become better communicators, when in reality, everyone can learn to communicate effectively.

When considering great communicators, it would be easy to conclude that they were "born communicators." Yet, each of them had to work hard at perfecting their communication skills. Many famous communicators from the pages of history overcame severe obstacles to convey their messages to the world. Helen Keller, for example, overcame the crushing dual handicap of blindness and deafness to deliver a far-reaching message of courage and hope. From a wheelchair, Franklin D. Roosevelt inspired strength and valor in a whole nation. Winston Churchill suffered from a severe childhood speech impediment that required extensive speech therapy into early adulthood – yet he became one of the most powerful individuals of his time.

The point is that anyone can become a successful communicator. And one who is already a good communicator

can become better. Choice, not chance, determines human destiny. Improving communication skills requires conscious choice. Failure to make that choice may result in significant consequences, including loss of income, lack of constructive change, broken relationships, or even the loss of dreams.

In contrast, for the individual who chooses to become a better communicator, newfound abilities, a wellspring of enthusiasm, and positive relationships are just around the corner. Improved communication and success, of course, never come looking for you. You must work at becoming a better communicator. Identify the specific communication skills you must develop to help you reach important goals. Effective communication enhances productivity in every area of business – planning, goal setting, motivating, negotiating, selling, and most importantly – leading.

Planning the Total Message

Because communication is such a vital element of your personal and organizational success, take time to plan how you will deliver important messages to the members of your team. Effective planning considers the total message: content, method for delivery, and accommodation of the message to the unique personality of the receiver.

Be sure your thoughts are clearly presented, your reasoning is logical, and your message complete. Check for unsupported assumptions or skipped steps in the reasoning process. If your own thinking is unclear, the content of your message will be unclear or confusing to the receiver. If you cannot crystallize your message, you may need to ask for more information. Adapt each message to the personality of the receiver. Knowledge of team members and your past experiences with them provide clues to using the best structure for each particular message.

Consider personal feelings, attitudes, and what may be occupying a team member's attention when you attempt to communicate. All of these factors affect how the individual is likely to respond to you and will strongly influence the manner in which you present your message. Choose the words, rate of speaking, body movements, and the type of questions you ask to match the style of the person with whom you are communicating.

Be willing to adapt your own communication style to that of your listener. By doing so, you demonstrate basic concern for the needs of others and your desire to accomplish the goal at hand. The meanings and the emotional impact of words, phrases, and other references are perceived differently by people. Choose expressions that carry no emotional overtones that might cause ambiguous interpretations or semantic misunderstandings.

Choose the best method of communication for the specific messages you wish to send. Some communication is

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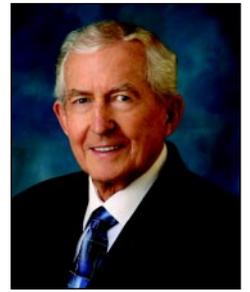
more effective delivered verbally, either face-to-face or by telephone, while communicating in writing is better for other messages.

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Communicating verbally offers the advantage of face-to-face interaction and immediate feedback. To facilitate two-way communication, learn to ask the right questions and to listen to the responses carefully. Asking effective questions allows you to: • receive information and reports • identify problems • learn about feelings, attitudes, and needs of others, and • solicit suggestions or solutions.

When you understand team members, you become adept at phrasing questions to fit the communication style of each individual. You might ask a relationship-oriented person, "How do you feel about this situation?" But you might ask a thought-oriented member of the team, "What do you think caused this problem?" Become expert in asking questions that cause people to tap into their own creative resources.

"Actions speak louder than words." This saying is so often repeated we tend to forget it is literally true. Actions are frequently called "body language" and include the nonverbal communication of facial expressions, body posture, gestures, as well as voice qualities like tone and loudness. The meaning associated with specific forms of nonverbal communication may vary from person to person and definitely varies from culture to culture.

Because the international borders of the business world are shrinking, people frequently interact with individuals from different cultures. The most successful business people are aware of personal and cultural differences in nonverbal communication and take them into consideration when interacting with others. Communication, to a large extent, relies upon the wise selection of words, but actions and attitudes – as well as what is not said or done – also provide powerful elements of the total message. In fact, some studies conclude that as little as 5 to 10 percent of the total message depends on actual words while the rest of the message depends upon nonverbal communication.

Communication – A Vital Connection

With the continuous acceleration of technology and international competition, success depends on the ability to communicate more than ever before.

Communication is intricately woven throughout our interpersonal relationships. Relationships are the basis of success in the business world as well as in the home and with friends. Communication is the essential human connection – understanding others and being understood – that bonds together interpersonal relationships. Skillful communication enables you to achieve professional and personal goals. It is the conduit for mutual understanding and change. Without communication, you accomplish only what you can do alone, which inevitably is only a fraction of what you can do in joint effort with others. Communication – the human connection – is the key to effective motivational leadership.

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Coaching Growth

David Byrd
President, LMI

I have found over the years that effective leaders are usually very good coaches, and there is uniqueness to their coaching… **their abilities in developing people!**

Developing people usually requires growth and growth usually requires change. And if you have read my new book "The Tripping Point in Leadership" you understand that change is contrary to our human natures. What is it about effective leaders that make them adept at coaching growth?

I have observed three significant qualities or characteristics that help effective leaders overcome natural human instincts and become experts in coaching growth.

1. **Effective leaders believe in people.** They believe that everyone under their charge is capable of achievement, and they demonstrate that positive belief by expecting them to grow. That positive expectation builds a self-fulfilling prophecy that attracts the very circumstances required for a growth culture and climate. Effective leaders reject the negative beliefs about people that seem to be so prevalent today; such as, "people are basically lazy and must be made to work and do not have the potential to grow unless forced." Positive beliefs about people build positive growth cultures and climates.

2. **Effective leaders use real motivators.** They always begin with where the person is, never with where the leader wants them to be. Focusing on what a person can do rather than causing a person to feel bad by focusing on what they cannot do is critical in establishing a growth pattern that fosters change. External motivators like fear and incentives are temporary forms of motivation. The only form of permanent motivation is personal motivation. People instinctively act from their own internal drives. Effective leaders know how to tap into this resource to stimulate growth.

3. **Effective leaders know how to build the confidence levels of those under their charge.** They understand that confidence comes from the experience of successful attempts. Coaching growth requires that the leader give enough exposure to attempts to begin to experience success. Keeping people isolated from the risks of failure stifles growth.

Coaching growth is the key to developing people. LMI has been coaching growth for more than 40 years. If you would like to know more about developing people, give us a call.

Until Next Time,

David Byrd
President, Leadership Management Institute™

Training for a Skill Development

The specific method or process for instructing team members varies with the procedure to be taught, the learning capabilities of the people involved, and their experience. The following approach can be used as a general outline for instruction on any type of procedure:

- *Explain what is to be done and why.* Tell team members what the job involves and why you want them to do it. Answer any questions they may have in a friendly, positive manner. If people can expect to receive a higher job position, increased pay, or become more valuable to the business in some tangible way, tell them so. Point out how their efforts are important in meeting the goals of the business. Remind them that their personal goals for increased responsibility and greater compensation can be met by receiving further training and accepting new responsibilities.

- *Explain the major steps in the new task or procedure.* Break the job down into small, written steps that are easy to understand. A written procedure saves you time later, serving as a reference to answer questions that a trainee would otherwise interrupt you to answer. A written procedure also provides people with an opportunity to assume more responsibility for learning the job and reflects your confidence in the abilities of your team members to learn independently.

- *Demonstrate the procedure; allow trainees to perform it.* Remember that people learn in different ways; some learn quickly by watching, but most learn better by doing the job themselves. While trainees watch and listen, demonstrate what to do one step at a time and explain as you work. Then allow them to do the job as you offer support and encouragement.

- *Evaluate progress.* Praise satisfactory performance and point out ways to improve still more. Emphasize what team members do correctly. Show what could be done better, and ask questions that lead team members to expand their understanding and to develop the knowledge necessary to perform correctly. Focus on mastering one area or step at a time and then proceeding to the next. Give generous attention and positive reinforcement to the performance you want to see repeated.

- *Provide a tracking system.* A method of tracking and monitoring performance is necessary for skill development. Always inspect what you expect; people respect you more – and perform better. As quickly as possible, allow team members to perform independently with only intermittent checking. This way, you let them know you have confidence in their ability. Use your system of feedback faithfully to measure success so
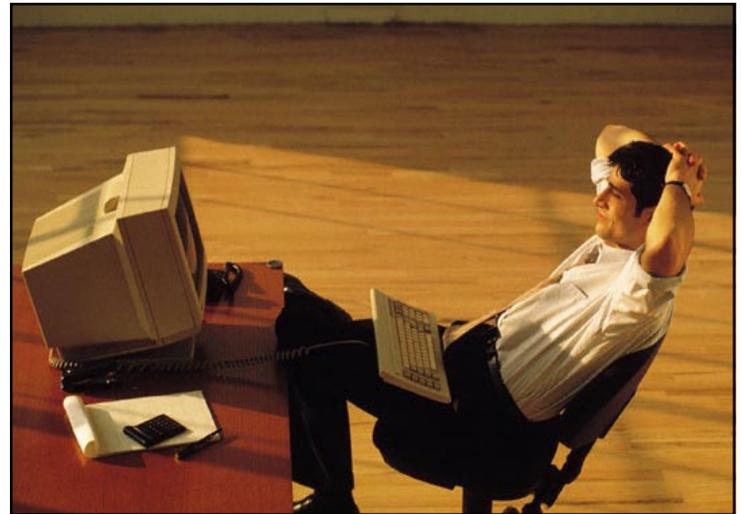
people can continuously improve.

Choosing a Tracking System

A good tracking system is one of the most useful tools for helping individuals grow. Progress can be demonstrated only by comparing the past to the present. Tracking is the only method of evaluating both the quantity and the quality of performance for individuals, for a department or work group, or for the overall organization.

Every goal – organizational or personal – needs a deadline or target date. Deadlines provide a motivational "push." Once team members discover what they can do, that new level of productivity becomes a constant challenge for achievement and productivity. Choose a tracking system that meets these criteria:

- *Appropriate measurement.* Make sure the tracking tool measures each important aspect of the activity. If your goal is to reduce the number of days between the receipt and shipping of orders, you won't be happy to discover that the time interval was cut from three days to one if you also learn that the error rate rose from 1 percent to 8 percent. In this case, a tracking plan should include both speed and accuracy.

- *Easy to use.* The measurement tool should not add significantly to the workload. If team members must spend an hour a day just filling in the report, they lose a good deal of valuable time that could have been used in more productive efforts.

- *Easy to interpret.* Tracking tools should present the facts visibly in a form that quickly reveals the pertinent results. Charts, graphs, and summary reports with side-by-side comparisons to the last reporting period are easy to read and interpret. What team members learn from the reports helps them decide what to do next. Make sure tracking information is used to advance the goals program.

Becoming a Motivational Leader

Leaders fill many different positions and perform widely diverse functions. But one primary goal of leadership is the same for all: to help people become self-motivated to use their skills and efforts to achieve the goals of the organization. The operative word in that sentence is self-motivated.

The attention given to motivation is not new. Since the first recorded history, leaders have attempted to discover new ways to attract the willing cooperation of others. Records of their attempts along with accounts of their successes and failures have filled countless volumes; but all of the different methods discovered can be sorted into three basic categories: fear motivation, incentive motivation, and attitude motivation.

▲ **Motivation through fear.** The oldest method of motivation is fear. In primitive society, the strongest person usually became the ruler. Physical strength was originally the source of power. Weaker members of the group followed orders because they feared the physical punishment that was sure to result from refusal to conform. As society became more organized, other forms of power came into play: social, economic, and political pressures forced obedience. Even today, the attempt persists to use fear to motivate people to behave in desired ways. Families and schools try to control children with the threat of punishment – either actual physical punishment or withholding privileges. The threat of punishment is the basis of our criminal justice system. Fear is even used in the business world. Rules and policies threaten various sanctions for undesirable behavior all the way from a memo of reprimand to denial of increased pay to outright dismissal.

▲ **Motivation through incentive.** Although fear is often a powerful motivator, many would-be leaders who lack the physical or personal power to demand obedience look for other methods of producing the cooperation they want. They realize that every behavior is the result of a desire to gain a benefit or to avoid a loss. Since they lack the power to enforce a threatened loss, they offer an incentive – the promise of some gain or benefit to those who comply. Incentive motivation is generally regarded as a less primitive strategy than fear. Families and schools use the promise of rewards to coax children to perform.

Organizations offer people awards, prizes, and privileges for certain achievements.

▲ **Motivation through attitude.** The master method of motivation is attitude. When people are willing to perform because they believe that a particular course of action is right and beneficial, they become self-motivated. It is then unnecessary for anyone else to "motivate" or manipulate them.

All three of these basic approaches to motivation have been used since the early beginnings of organized society. Both fear and incentive motivation have consistently proven to be temporary because they are external in nature – both depend on a source outside the person.

Fear ceases to exist if the power to inflict punishment is gone. But it also ceases to motivate action if people find out they can live with the punishment, or that the threat of punishment is not likely to be carried out. For example, a team member who is careless about following established procedures learns that the only punishment is an angry reprimand and thus decides it's easier to tune out the lecture than to follow the rules. Fear is successful as a motivator only if the pressure is constant and the power to punish is exercised.

Incentive motivation certainly has distinct advantages over fear motivation, but it too has its drawbacks. Incentive motivation loses its power when the promised rewards are perceived either as unattainable or as unappealing. When employees consistently earn a promised reward over a period of time, that reward becomes expected. In fact, it is soon looked upon as a right instead of a special reward. Incentives must become progressively more impressive and costly to continue to motivate desired behavior.

Both fear and incentive motivation often fall short because they are externally controlled and only temporary. They don't last beyond the threat or the reward. By far, the most effective type of motivation is attitude motivation because it grows out of the individual's dreams and desires. It is a function of the need to belong, to achieve, and to use the innate talents with which the individual is endowed. A person's attitudes are the basis for self-motivation. Consequently, attitudes are the key to understanding this internal or lasting form of motivation.

The Psychology of Dealing with Change

The key to the future for both individuals and organizations will be learning how to better deal with change. To do this, it is imperative to understand the psychology of change. Whenever we encounter and go through change we actually work through a series of identifiable steps or phases.

Phase I: Shock and Denial

Our first reaction to most change is shock followed by denial. This can take many forms. We deny the change is happening. We deny that the change means anything. We deny that the change applies to us. We deny that the change will last. In other words, we come up with many rationalizations on why we don't need to deal with this particular change.

The key to dealing with denial is awareness. We must become aware of the need for a particular change. In other words, we must understand why the change is occurring, why it needs to occur, and what effect it will have. This is one of the reasons why so many organizations have difficulty changing. The top executives decide on a change, but they never let other people in the organization know the reason why the change was necessary. They simply tell people that they are going to change and that they want them to change, too, but they don't explain the reasons for the change.

Phase II: Resistance and Anger

Once there is an awareness of the need for change and the reasons for it, the next phase to overcome is resistance. This is where we fight against the change. Again, this can take many forms. We can refuse to go along with the change. We fight against the change. We look for someone or something to blame because of it. We sometimes even sabotage the change. We can withdraw and not show up. The response might be: "They can't change us if we aren't there!" Or, we can just pretend to change. Outright and open resistance is often easier to deal with than passive resistance. At least with open resistance, you know what you are dealing with and you can confront it head on. With passive resistance, it is difficult to challenge since there isn't any obvious resistance on the part of the individual.

The solution to overcoming resistance to change is to focus on how it affects each person. The primary reason people resist change is that they don't know how the change is going to affect them personally. They may understand and accept the overall need for change, but they don't understand how it will affect their lives. This is a major reason why organizations fail to follow through with change. They explain how the change will affect the organization, but never explain how it will directly affect each person.

## Phase III: Adaptation and Acceptance

The next phase is where people begin to accept or adapt to the change. This is where you actually begin to experiment with the change. Focusing on the present, instead of the past is critical when moving from resistance to acceptance. As long as you are focused on the past, and "the way things were always done," you are still in the resistance phase. You have progressed to the acceptance phase as soon as you start to focus on the future and the way things can be done.

Moving through the adaptation/acceptance phase involves a series of small wins and requires ongoing support. As you adapt to the change and try new things, you will invariably make mistakes. If there isn't support and positive reinforcement as you are learning new ways of doing things, you will tend to revert back to old habits. Consequently, ongoing and visible support during adaptation is critical.

Phase IV: Commitment and Results

The final phase of change is where a person becomes committed to the change. At this point, the person has tried the change and has actually begun to master new and better approaches. It is not until a person has his or her own personal, practical experience with the new methods that he or she will arrive at commitment. Commitment is not earned through simple mental understanding; it is only attained through actual, physical experience.

It is important for everyone who is affected by the change to actually be involved in the new process. Total commitment to the change is not attained with just the understanding that it will happen. It is only through belief – gained by experience – that a person is truly committed to the change. When a person has committed to the change, you must still continue to provide leadership and direction.
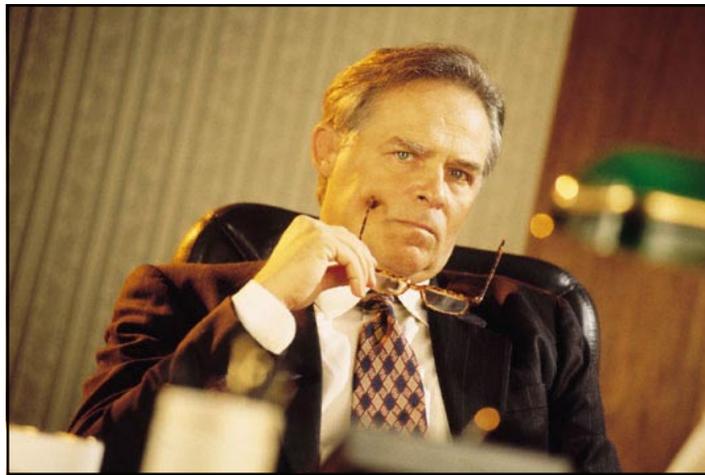
Leading with Innovation for the Future

We are now in the "People Age." The talent that organizations are able to recruit and develop will ultimately determine their fate. Leadership is the key lever to making this happen. Just as the Chicago Bulls needed a great coach in Phil Jackson to bring out the full potential of Michael Jordan, organizations will need the best leaders to recruit, train, motivate, develop, and retain the most talented team members. If you want to build a great team, first develop a great coach. If you want to build a successful, enduring organization, first develop great leaders.

Attracting good people and keeping them is one of the greatest – and most energizing – challenges facing leaders. People join an organization that promises to meet their basic needs; they stay with the organization when it delivers on that promise. A dynamic organizational climate that stimulates creativity and productivity makes the work experience rewarding and exciting, attracts team members you want to recruit, and helps keep the ones you want to retain.

Organizational climate depends largely upon the attitudes, examples, and plans of leadership. Effective leaders carefully design and implement an atmosphere of trust, cooperation, and positive attitudes that encourage and nurture productivity and make it socially acceptable to be creative and successful. The key to being a good leader lies in the willingness to be innovative and forward thinking.

Implement Innovation

Highly effective leadership is critical to successful innovation. Innovation will only occur if leaders actively pursue, support, encourage, and expect innovation from team members. To foster innovation in your organization, implement the following procedures:

◆ *Set challenging goals.* Most organizations set incremental improvement goals – to do a little better. These goals can usually be accomplished by doing more of the same thing or doing it only slightly better. To inspire innovation, set stretch goals that can only be achieved by doing things differently.

◆ *Create a sense of urgency.* Urgency and need are the parents of invention. It's only when you urgently need to create something new that you start to look for different solutions. Set goals with target dates to build a sense of urgency.

◆ *Tear down barriers to communication.* Innovation does not happen in isolation. Creative ideas are born and developed through interaction with others. Many of the best innovations are simply new ways to combine existing ideas. Create opportunities for people to interact with each other, especially across departments, divisions, and teams – even if it means interacting with each other at a distance!

◆ *Eliminate fear.* Fear is the number-one enemy of innovation. Fear keeps people from trying new things or even suggesting new ideas. Build a climate of trust and support. Encourage different opinions. Actively seek out problems as they often contain the seed of a new opportunity.

◆ *Make everyone responsible for innovation.* Ask team members how to improve or change the organization. Don't just ask once or twice, ask consistently. Eventually, team members will start to think creatively and look for potential innovations. Respond positively to all ideas, even if they aren't implemented. Give credit and recognition to team members for their creative thinking.

A New Way to Lead

When you communicate that you are willing to trust the judgment of team members and give them opportunities to exercise initiative, you motivate and empower them to seek innovative ideas and achieve higher and higher goals. Recognize team members for their successes and help them learn from their setbacks. Your job as a motivational leader is to create an environment where experimentation and trying new ways of doing things is supported, encouraged, and even expected. The future of your organization depends on the new ideas and creativity of team members!

Bridging the Gap Between Potential and Performance

Since 1966, Leadership Management Institute™ has been bridging the gap between potential and performance by helping organizations and individuals evaluate their strengths and opportunities through implementation of the unique and proven LMI Process™.
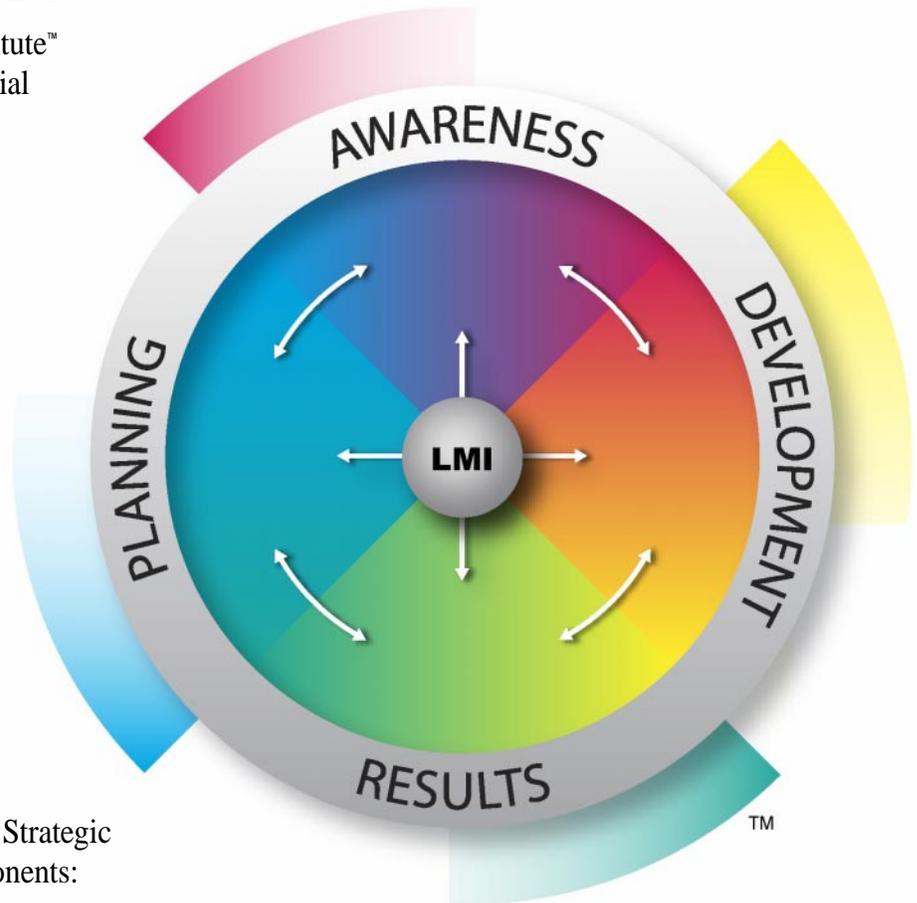
The LMI Process™...

- Develops leaders who, in turn, empower their people to use their untapped talents and abilities.

- Identifies key areas the organization should focus on in order to reach the next level of success.

- Gives direction to an effective solution and delivers measurable results.

- Practices a 93 percent effective leadership model.

The LMI Process™ is designed around a Strategic Development™ model with four vital components:

- Awareness
- Development
- Planning
- Results Management.

LMI® tools and processes have been making a difference in organizations and individuals for 40 years in more than 60 countries.