

DECEMBER LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE REVEALS

"SHORTCUTS TO EXCELLENCE"

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Seeking to provide a catalyst for member interaction, growth, and indeed to develop and sharpen individual performance, 2002's Fall Executive Forum included an amended agenda - which came at "change" from a different perspective for both Actives and Alumni. The most interesting portion was the selection of Michael Brown, Ed.S. as the keynote speaker, and his presentation.

A licensed professional counselor and organizational consultant from Richmond, Va., Michael teaches people in transition how to take "...a creative path through change." The distinguishing feature of his work "...is the way (he) helps people creatively handle the dynamics of change. Change is an important and necessary part of the human experience, for it is only through change that we can grow." Getting there is not great fun! However, "...if we lack the ability to handle change successfully, a host of difficulties...can result..."

Michael develops for his corporate clients a customized program to help them deal creatively with their unique problems. The focus is to "...develop latent human resources, human capital." Most clients engage his services for several days or more. However, given the time restraints, the "ultra" customized EF program was effectively presented in under an hour. Michael designed a process to help the group explore three differing tracks at the same time depending on their particular area of interest or concern; effective networking, improving communications and how best to manage stress. He began with a clear explanation of the methods and objectives of the program that guided participants in a dynamic process to identify, focus on, and to illuminate their area of interest in order to establish a better way to address it.

Michael led the group in a brief experience of a 12 step process that he developed over a long period of time entitled: "Shortcuts to Excellence"- the EF theme for the day. The process is intended to help participants get focused and to get to "the core of the matter" to enable solutions as quickly as possible. Michael stressed several times that the process would be "an intensely personal trip."

Each of the 12 steps used a different technique to bring online a specific human resource in order to explore the issue at hand. In sequence, the overall technique provided a powerful experience. The precept was that "...there is a whole universe on the other side of stop." The attempt was to "wake up the brain and channel awareness, to tap the resources of the "inner world" and awaken one's inner genius.

The first step was to relax, deeply. The off repeated mantra was "Whenever I feel stressed or upset I will take three deep breaths." The immediate effect was a sense of solitude, a separation from normal thoughts and functions. The second step included a brief time for reflective writing to capture one's thoughts about the topic at hand- more of a "data dump." One of the more intriguing steps was to winnow down to one word the previously identified subconscious thoughts. This one word served as a guide to the next step- the visualization or mental imagery. An image was evoked to represent or express that one word and acted like "...a magnifying glass to focus attention." Then the image was drawn - with an assist from colored pencils- in a circle called mandala art.

Word, image, drawing, analysis! With closed eyes participants interpreted their images by asking, "What have you come to teach me?" The whole visionary adventure- which Michael called an experience of "psychosynthesis"- created a new direction or paradigm that readily led to a specific homework assignment or action plan. In the breakout groups the immediate feedback from the participants was positive as each focused in a new way on their specific issue of concern.

A more thorough examination of Michael's technique plus two case studies were distributed as handouts at the conclusion of the session. "Shortcuts to Excellence: Techniques to Increase Personal Productivity, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Effectiveness" was one article which documented the power of the process as it was applied to an unlikely source- The Water Revenue Department of the District of Columbia. This case study-which extends the experience and is noteworthy reading - is further testament to the effectiveness of Michael's unusual and unique approach to organizational transformation.