

# Satisfying Values—Yours *and* Theirs: A Talk with Manny Elkind

by Richard L. Reece, MD

**Q.** OVER THE LAST 12 years you've been teaching physician executives for the American College of Physician Executives. What do you do in these sessions?

**Manny:** The speed of change has accelerated so much that people are realizing that what's worked for them in the past doesn't work as well anymore, and they're trying to figure out how to think differently about their business, work, or life. I help people develop their flexible thinking skills so they can purposely change perspectives in any situation and not get stuck in one point of view. These skills enable people to make a positive difference in organizations, families, and society. Most of the learning comes from small group activities that are thought-provoking and fun and challenge many long-held beliefs about leadership, relationships, and communications.

**Q.** After a distinguished career at Polaroid, you founded Mindtech in 1988. Why did you choose that name?

## KEY CONCEPTS

- Satisfying Values
- Changing Beliefs
- Beliefs versus Values
- Flexible Thinking
- Valuing Mental Diversity

*Richard Reece, MD, interviewed Mansfield (Manny) Elkind on September 22, 1999 to talk about satisfying values and flexible thinking as keys to influencing physicians. Manny discusses why it's difficult for people to create lasting change in the workplace without recreating themselves. The effort to influence others often focuses on getting disciplined about changing behaviors, with the hope that feelings and attitudes will also change. This approach rarely works because behavior is changed only when values or beliefs change. People will get passionate and committed to achieving the organization's goals when they believe that their values will be satisfied as well. The leader's responsibility is to find ways of satisfying people's values, in addition to convincing them to use the organization's values as guides for behavior. A process is explored that helps people discover each other's values and preferences and transforms resistance to commitment.*

**Manny:** I've always been interested in technology. I managed high-tech manufacturing and development groups at Polaroid. I've also been fascinated about how our minds and bodies work. That's why I've done so much personal exploration and was involved with experiments in how to optimize productivity, creativity, and work satisfaction. I began to realize how developing our mind-body to think more flexibly facilitated the creation and effective use of technology, which in turn facilitated the faster and more effective development of our mind-body. Mindtech represents the synthesis of mind-body with technology—a powerful and emotional vision for me.

**Q.** People say they have radically and quickly changed the way they think, and even made life changing and career shifting patterns, after going through your session. How does that happen?

**Manny:** Imagine a list that has values written at the top, then beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and finally behaviors. We are most aware of our behaviors, which are at the bottom of the list, because we can see and hear them. We are less aware of our

## ABOUT MANNY ELKIND

feelings. Did you ever have someone say, "Gee, why are you so angry?" and you reply, "WHO'S ANGRY?" only to realize, of course, you're angry. We are even less aware of our attitudes. We tend to be quite unaware of our beliefs and almost completely unaware of our most important values.



Values and beliefs drive our attitudes, feelings, and behaviors. And because we're generally unconscious of our beliefs and values, it's difficult to talk about those, except in a general and impersonal way. Therefore, most attention is placed on getting disciplined about changing behaviors, with the hope that our feelings and attitudes about doing certain things will change.

This approach rarely works. When there's a crisis, people revert back to old behaviors because their values and beliefs support them. The degree to which leaders and professionals pay attention to challenging and creating shifts in people's long-held beliefs is the extent to which behavior changes will last. Behavior will start to change, sometimes completely, as soon as a person's beliefs change.

Let's consider the belief that the Internet is difficult and stressful to navigate. Think how that affects people's behavior. If I wanted to train people to use the Internet, I would first give them easy to succeed activities that were also fun in order to shatter and change any limiting beliefs.

A participant in one of my flexible thinking programs had an extreme preference for imagination, intuition, and conceptualizing. I put her on a small team and assigned a task that they had to complete as if they only had the capability to pay attention to organizing, perfection, and details. They had to behave and report their results in that style. She was initially uncomfortable and then I noticed she was fully involved with the group.

**M**anny consults and teaches clients who want to rethink their vision and make a difference in their organizations and society. As a senior manager, he led manufacturing and development teams during his 30 year career at Polaroid. While in this role, he experimented with organizations to find ways to blend productivity, creativity, and work satisfaction. He concluded that creating change within ourselves and developing our human talent is a prerequisite for business success and life satisfaction. This led him to explore ways of accelerating human development to improve leadership, creativity, and relationships. He founded Mindtech in 1988 to continue this work and teaches senior executives at the Columbia Graduate Business School. He lives in Sharon, Massachusetts and can be reached by calling 781/784-2315 or via email at [MElkind@ziplink.net](mailto:MElkind@ziplink.net).

During the debriefing, she said: "I learned that I use this way of thinking to heal myself. I know that I have strong preferences for imagination, intuition, and conceptualizing. I like to have a lot of balls in the air. I go from project to project without finishing any of them and I get overwhelmed and very stressed. I just realized that I get unstressed by taking a small chunk of work and planning how to complete it in detail. Then I follow the steps, and that unlocks the logjam. I never realized I did this. I've always been critical of people who wanted things done perfectly and paid attention to details. I believed they missed the big important things, but they were a necessary evil. Now I can understand how thinking in black and white and paying attention to detail can really be a relief and enjoyable. I've changed my feeling about people like that."

Here's another example. I was working with chief executive officers and board chairs of credit unions. We were debriefing and the CEO of a large credit union said, "You know what I just realized? I absolutely kill people who don't think logically and analytically like me. I just don't tolerate it. And I understand now why I turn my staff off and make them very fearful of me." He had a belief change by realizing that what he was doing, which he believed was the right thing, was actually causing problems. That belief change causes changes in behavior.

I give people experiences that challenge their long-held beliefs about what works, what doesn't, what's normal and natural, and what's not. These experiences dissolve some beliefs and new ones take their place—this is what causes changes in people's lives.

**Q.** You are certified as a Master Practitioner of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). What is NLP and how can it help people change their thinking patterns?

**Manny:** A way of thinking about some aspects of the nervous system is that we have five senses—visual (picture), auditory (sound), kinesthetic (touch, body feeling, and position), gustatory (taste), and olfactory (smell). Our feelings (emotional states) are conscious or unconscious responses to experiencing our senses. A physician may see his patient leave the hospital and feel "pride." A mother may hear her child scream and feel "anxiety" or "fear." When we think, we are processing these sensory representations.

If I ask people to spell the word "automobile" to themselves (readers might want to try this) and describe their experience:

- Most people make a picture of the word automobile and say each letter in sequence as they see them (visual).

- Almost everyone hears themselves saying the letters (auditory).
- Some people make a picture of an automobile (visual).
- Some people are aware of their bodies as at ease or tight (kinesthetic) and feel “confident” that they created the right word picture.

Our experiences involve our senses—and we represent them with sensory language. We even have preferences. Some people pay more attention to what they see, others are more tuned in to what they hear, and others are more aware of their body states. When you present a great idea to a person with visual preferences, the response might be, “I **see** what you mean.” “I get the **picture**.” “That **looks** great.” A person with auditory preferences might say, “That **rings a bell** for me.” “That **sounds** terrific.” Or a person who has kinesthetic preferences might say, “What an **impact** this will have,” or “That **feels** right.”

We have patterns that are, in effect, the integration of our neurological experiences with language. Leaders and professionals are learning how to understand behavior by the way people use language. Then they can communicate and develop rapport more effectively and create change in themselves or help others to do so.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is using the language of the mind to understand and be more in control of our neurology (our senses and behavior) to achieve desired outcomes. When people understand their behavioral and language patterns, as well as those of others, they can more easily alter and develop flexibility with their mental processes. They can also develop more effective internal strategies concerning relationships, leadership, and corporate strategy.

**Q.** You emphasize unleashing the power of flexible thinking. Are you also

teaching people to put themselves in the minds of others and to think like they think?

**Manny:** The opportunity is for people to experience with their mind and body



what others are experiencing to understand their perspective. That’s different than being a mind reader. The emphasis is on how to develop empathy. Imagine that you’re listening to music and you’re enjoying it so much that you start moving in time to the melody and humming. You may lose track of where you are—it seems like there’s no distance between where the music is being played and you. You might say you have developed empathy or you’re “at one” with the music.

**Q.** How do you assess people’s thinking styles?

**Manny:** I use the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI). It takes about 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire and provides a graphic four-color picture and numerical scores of a person’s thinking preferences. These patterns of thinking (what we tend to pay more attention to) reflect what we find most satisfying at this point in our

lives. They can be different than skills. Over time, preferences will often change, reflecting how significant emotional experiences and life transitions affect people. This can also be used for teams and organizations to assess their culture or anticipate problems and opportunities—imagine what such an assessment would reveal if IBM and Apple were involved in merger discussions.

Figure 1 contrasts the average thinking preferences for male surgeons and female nurses. The closer a point on the profile falls to the outside border, the stronger the preferences in that area. It indicates that surgeons generally pay more attention to logic, analysis, technology, and numbers. Nurses pay more attention to feelings, relationships, touching, and conversation. These differences suggest the source of some of the classic conflicts that take place between them and why they can be such an effective team when they appreciate, understand, and complement

each other.

**Q.** There seem to be two components to what you’re doing. One is flexible thinking, how you and others think and how to shift lanes. The second is values, your values and those of others. Do most of us know what our values truly are?

**Manny:** There’s hardly a person that is aware of their most important values. Values often cited in the workplace are integrity, honesty, and teamwork. And then there are others rarely mentioned, such as happiness, inner peace, and joy. Most people are surprised to discover that these last three are more important to them. Unfortunately, it’s not unusual to hear leaders say “Look, we’re not here to make people happy, we’re here to get things done.”

The real opportunity is to find ways to get things done and also to make people happy. People will get passion-



Imagine one person who believes that doctors don't care about their patients anymore, only money. The other believes that doctors joined what they thought was a noble profession and are fighting to keep it that way.

Think about how differently they might behave with doctors.

Now consider a person who believes they are great at developing new relationships and another who doesn't. If someone believes they're terrible at developing new relationships and one of their core values is relationships, then they have a limiting belief that is getting in the way of them satisfying one of their values. We all have limiting beliefs to one degree or another. People often make negative judgments about behaviors that are driven by beliefs and then they mistakenly accuse others of having bad values. For example:

1. A young couple was having difficulty. When one of them was sick, they would accuse the other of not loving them. When the wife was asked what her husband needed to do for her to believe that he loved her, she said he should bring her food, take care of the house responsibilities, and keep her company. When the husband was asked, he said she should bring him food, take care of the house responsibilities, and leave him quietly by himself. When she was sick he was lovingly staying away and when he was ill she was often in the room talking to him. They carry different sets of criteria that determine when love is present. This is very common and happens with other values like integrity and respect.
2. During a values workshop, an executive said, "I get it. I understand why we're having such difficulty in the team. We don't have mutual trust." A few others disagreed. I asked each person to go to the flip charts and write three or four criteria for mutual trust, what they must see or hear to believe that it is present—pieces of evidence, like "I can count on a per-

son to tell me the good and bad news." They came up with 25 or so examples. I asked each person to put an "X" by the criteria that were not important for mutual trust—80 percent of the criteria had at least

one "X." To some degree, we carry around different criteria for our values and to some extent the same criteria. This leaves plenty of opportunity to innocently violate each other's

values when we were intending to support them. As a result, good people are often saying and doing nasty things to other good people.

3. Each individual has a hierarchy of values starting with the most important. This is not necessarily linear and may look like an organizational chart, where certain values are in the service of higher-ranking values and most have multiple reporting relationships. The values and the hierarchy may vary depending on the situation. Imagine a person whose *top value is honesty* and the fifth most important is relationships. Another person's top value is **relationships** and the fifth most important is **honesty**. Their second, third, and fourth values are the same. Who is more likely to lie to help a friend? The person with **relationships** at the top. The person with **honesty** at the top may not trust this person, might accuse him or her of a terrible deed. The one who lied might be incredulous and insist that it was the right thing to do—and they'd do it again.

Q. The pundits have been saying that we have to change the way physicians behave. Yet, there's a chasm between the belief and value systems of the adminisphere, the select few who run the organization, and the people on the ground, the doctors and nurses. How can we close the gap?

**Manny:** The behavior of physicians and administrators isn't significantly different than the behavior of other professionals in other fields. I've heard it said that too often the workplace is where loving,

caring, compassionate people come together for the purpose of abusing each other. There's no question that some people abuse and some lie and think that it's okay because business is business. But much more of the problem comes from misunderstandings about values and beliefs.

Everyone (in reasonable mental health) has values that others would describe as noble or wonderful. Every behavior, no matter how unreasonable, crazy, or "Mickey Mouse" it seems, is in the service of a person's values. When we discover what those values are, we realize that the person is rational and certainly not crazy, and that change in perception opens the doors to understanding and collaboration.

Q. There are about 600 large integrated delivery systems in the United States. They have three components—a hospital, health plan or HMO, and the physicians. While they're integrating organizationally, many are disintegrating culturally, because of internecine warfare between these factions. How do you get them to work together as a team?

**Manny:** People's values are diverse, but deep down they're more aligned than they seem. There's a lot of commonality in the evidence that cuts across values and that's what has the potential to bring people together. For example, what must you see or hear in order for you to believe that respect is present? A typical response is "people listen and let me finish what I want to say" or "they ask me questions to check their understanding of what I said." For other people that could be evidence for **car-ing** or **relationships** or **appreciation**.

If I take a team of ten people and elicit their five most important values, there are potentially 50 different values (there will usually be about 35 or so). You might say, "How can we run an organization like that? We don't have common values." However, if each person identifies the three most important pieces of evidence for each of those values (150 pieces of evidence), there will be significant common ground. In fact, the 150 pieces of evidence for those 50 values will fall into about a half-dozen clusters.

**As soon as your beliefs  
about something change,  
your behavior  
will start to change.**

If you ask people to name the clusters, they come up with things like acknowledgement and recognition or relationships and trust. Those clusters and the underlying evidence become the description of the culture that the team believes will provide the best opportunity to get their values satisfied. That description can become part of the vision and can be used for guiding change and behavior—it becomes more than a piece of paper in someone's drawer. When the team sees those words in print, the feeling is more like, "That's my life up there."

For example, a financial services company was involved in strategic planning and rethinking the environment they wanted for themselves and their customers. A group of 23 participated in the flexible thinking training and attended a values workshop. I interviewed each person to help them discover their five most important values in the context of work. The purpose was to start the process of empowering people to develop a new understanding and appreciation of themselves and each other before dealing with strategy, function, and finances.

Each person ranked their values in importance from one (most important) to five:

- 57 values were identified.
- Only five people had the same number one value: "happiness."
- Five other values were each ranked highest by two people: "feeling good," "peace," "inner peace," "peacefulness," and "peace of mind." The values related to peace had different meanings to each of the participants.
- 12 other values were ranked number one.

Each person was asked to identify their three most important pieces of evidence for their top values. That came to 345 pieces of evidence. The group then found evidence that had common characteristics and put them in a cluster. For example "helping others, coaching, and sharing information" were put in the same cluster. Six clusters evolved and the group named them:

- Communications and Teamwork
- Commitment to Accomplishment
- Service to Customers
- Respect for Individuals
- Concern for Employee Morale and Welfare
- Integrity

A statement was developed for each cluster. For example, "Concern For Employee Morale and Welfare" was represented with "Our obligation to our employees is to provide them with an enthusiastic, rewarding, and satisfying environment in which to work and grow." These clusters and correlating statements became the common ground that described the environment they wanted to create so they would have the best chance of getting their values satisfied.

This mental diversity can be a source of conflict, but when synthesized, can be a source of creative insight. We have different values that mirror our unique brain structures, genetics, and life experiences. It's as if we code our human experience and deepest desires in different ways and call it values. But when you look at what's underneath, the evidence for those values, there's common ground that binds us together as human beings. When people in an organization find out what that common ground is, they can agree, "This is what we want the environment to be. This is how we want to operate with each other, because if we do that, we have the greatest opportunity of getting our own most important values satisfied."

Q. There are 7,000 U.S. hospitals and over the last five years half of them have acquired physician practices. Both the hospitals and physicians know they need each other. And yet, now there's a massive divestiture of physician practices. The hospitals have lost a lot of

money and the physicians aren't productive. Could this fiasco have been avoided?

**Manny:** As physicians come together with hospitals and health organizations, they're starting with too little trust and a lot of suspicion and hostility. They need help to develop flexibility in their perceptions of themselves and each other. Self-awareness is a prerequisite to talking about function and finances and it's a way of getting through a lot of issues that tear these groups apart. That's rarely done.

This is mostly about good leadership, which is different than management. Leadership is a psychological process—your mind is working to convince my mind to do what your mind wants me to do. Leaders usually do not pay enough attention to understanding their own minds and those

around them. It's often considered too touchy-feely even though effective leadership is nothing but touchy-feely.

Q. The world is moving so fast and being driven at warp speed by information technology. Is that phenomenon forcing us to confront differences?

**Manny:** Information technology is driving change much faster and on a more global basis. In addition, we're living in a cultural mixmaster, where people who look and behave differently work and live with each other. These changes multiply the problems and enlarge the effects. The relationship and collaboration issues are often exceeding the capabilities of people to handle them. The problems in the health field are a microcosm of those existing elsewhere. We're definitely not alone and that still doesn't feel cozy.

We need to do whatever it takes to develop our relationship skills to more fully understand and appreciate ourselves and each other. If we can't be at peace with ourselves and each other, we won't have a model in our minds

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and bodies for how to achieve peace in our organizations. Our own health and productivity is at stake. Effective health care is at stake. And maybe, just maybe, peace in the world is at stake. ●



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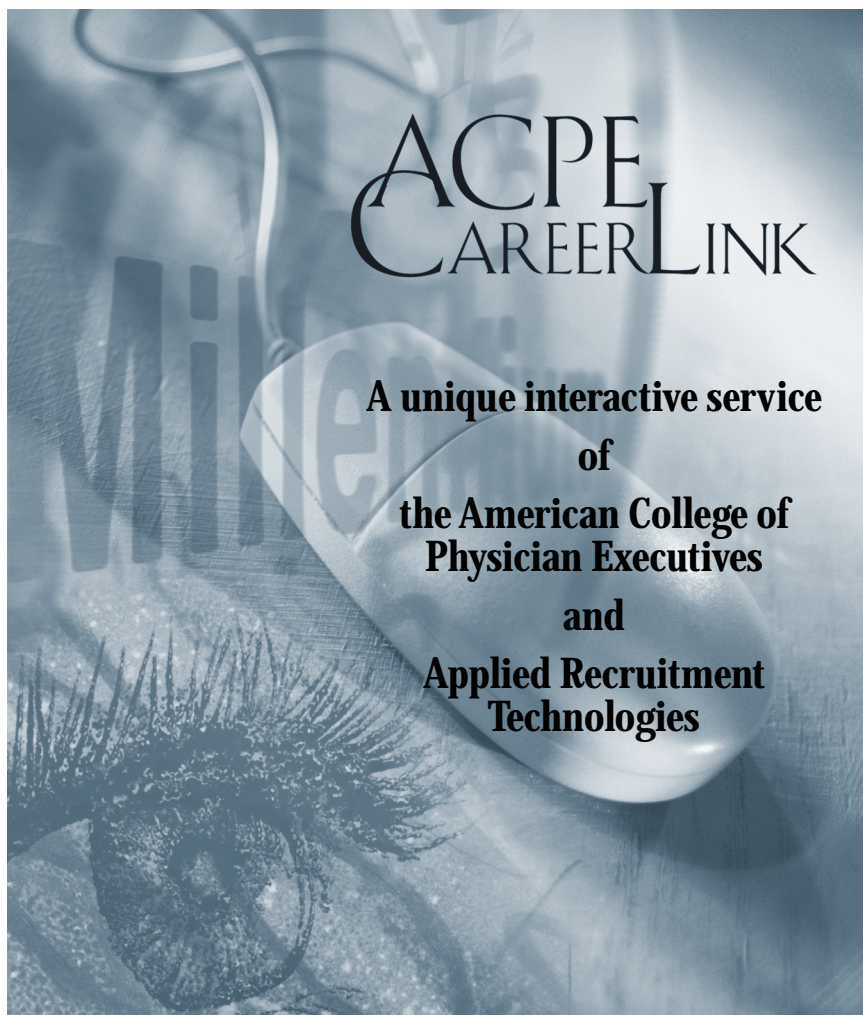
### Author's book pick

*Liberating the Corporate Soul* by Richard Barrett (Woburn, Massachusetts: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998). I found this unusually interesting because it describes how values can be indicative of the degree to which individuals and organizations have evolved.



Physician Executive Network

*If you are interested in further talking with Manny, please email him at [melkind@ziplink.net](mailto:melkind@ziplink.net).*



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