

Consultation: Key Ideas

Are you thinking about working with a consultant but want to make sure you are getting good value for your investment? Here are some tips and guidelines for the role of a quality consultant:

- ✓ A consultant has no direct responsibility for the client's business
- ✓ Responsibility for implementing changes developed through the course of consultation remains with the client
- ✓ The client / consultant power relationship is one of peers
- ✓ Consultant has expert power in the relationship
- ✓ Client is under NO obligation to accept consultant's ideas or suggestions
- ✓ Consultant has NO administrative or professional responsibility for client's work
- ✓ Consultant is not ego-involved in the solution

What a consultant is NOT:

- ✓ a supervisor -- not responsible for staff's job performance
- ✓ an administrator -- rather, effect the program but not make the policy and procedures. Give the client ownership
- ✓ a psychotherapist or counselor
- ✓ a teacher
- ✓ a peddler of packaged programs
- ✓ an advocate
- ✓ a collaborator -- it fosters dependency

Qualities of a good consultant:

- ✓ a catalyst while maintaining some equilibrium
- ✓ friendly, egalitarian, and open
- ✓ good with groups
- ✓ nonthreatening
- ✓ expertise
- ✓ awareness of and sympathy toward situation of client
- ✓ supportive
- ✓ flexible
- ✓ efficient
- ✓ good follow-up and follow-through skills
- ✓ positive

Key competencies

- ✓ facilitate information processing (teach communication skills, direct suggestions at first, refocus attention, encourage expression of feelings and attitude, problem-solving, help client take over)
- ✓ develop a trusting alliance (pace self to system, take time to develop a relationship, work, help group reach independence)
- ✓ bring in new input
- ✓ ensure equilibrium enough to get/stay balanced
- ✓ good communication skills, especially at group level
- ✓ NOT to evaluate/judge

Checklist of Consultant Skills

Does the Consultant:

- ✓ Show respect for the client
- ✓ Set a comfortable climate
- ✓ Use appropriate terms and language
- ✓ Ask questions that do not intrude upon the client's personal life
- ✓ Act in a nonjudgmental and nonevaluative way
- ✓ Keep personal problems out of the consultant-client relationship
- ✓ Demonstrate sensitivity to the client's work problem, perhaps by sharing own experiences
- ✓ Show interest and enthusiasm for the case
- ✓ Assure client that s/he has the right to accept or reject what the consultant suggests
- ✓ Assure the client that all information is confidential
- ✓ Ask client-centered questions
- ✓ Demonstrate flexibility dependent upon needs of the client
- ✓ Ask questions that will give the consultant more information about the organizational system
- ✓ Demonstrate a coordinate relationship
- ✓ Ask for feedback from client
- ✓ Set a time for the next appointment