

Maintaining Professionalism

As a professional consultant (external or internal), it is imperative that you adopt principles to ensure ethical consulting, recognize the boundaries within which you should work in an organization, understand the legal liabilities and risks inherent in organizational consulting and attend to regular and ongoing professional development activities. Guidelines in this section will help you ensure that you operate truly as a professional in your consulting work. The guidelines are relevant to all phases of collaborative consulting.

Principles for Effective Consulting

Consultants have different perspectives on effective consulting. The following guidelines might be useful as you reflect on your own principles for effective consulting.

- 1. The “answer” to complex problems lies between you and your client.**
The “answer” emerges during the project as you and your client work collaboratively to clarify current issues and address them, while learning at the same time.
- 2. Encourage and recognize diverse values and perspectives.**
An experienced organizational consultant remembers there are many perspectives on an issue in the organization. Those perspectives should be encouraged and explored because they often lead to more successful problem solving.
- 3. When working with your client, start from where they are now.**
Understand your client’s perspective on their issues, including what they have tried, what has worked, what has not worked and what they think should be done now. It is better to go slower *with* your client than faster without them.
- 4. There is no blame in consulting situations.**
It is rare that anyone sets out to hurt someone else or an organization. An atmosphere of blame only serves to inhibit people in your client’s organization from the trust, collaboration and commitment necessary for successful change.
- 5. Come to the project with a basic consultation framework in mind.**
Early in a project, the major purpose of the framework can be used as a common frame of reference when talking about the project goals, methods, evaluation and learning. Be willing to modify that framework as you and your client work together.
- 6. Your value is in the flow of the process, not in the details of the project.**
Your client will value you if both of you continue to work together in a process that is collaborative, well understood, communicated to all and focused on results.
- 7. Success comes from who you are as from your expertise.**
This is true, especially if your client perceives you to be authentic and respectful, and consulting with focus on results and learning. Similarly, one of the most powerful influences that can have with your clients is to model the behaviors that you want from them.

8. **Do what you say you are going to do.**
In the midst of your client’s confusion, you can help a great deal by remaining grounded and centered, clear and consistent. Your consistency builds trust and commitment with clients, as well.
9. **Know yourself.**
You are an “instrument” of change with your client, so you should be willing to suspend your overall biases, assumptions and beliefs when working with people. Be honest about them when they arise during a project.
10. **Do not tell your clients to do something just because you said so.**
Always first explain the reasons for your advice and the benefits that might come to your client as a result. Then provide time for your client to respond to your advice. This is usually true even if you are a leader acting as an internal change agent.
11. **It is up to your client to use your advice or not.**
This is sometimes one of the hardest principles for new consultants to accept. It helps if you remember that people learn only what they are ready to learn.
12. **Do not take it personally.**
Often your client struggles with an issue, in part, because of their role in the issue. They may not want to change themselves and might resist your attempts to help them. In those instances, remember that those responses are their choices, not yours.