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Focus

A Newsletter published for clients and friends of Wagner Consulting Group

AUG 2002

VOL. III, NO. 1

How to Give Advice

People often give advice to help someone, including friends, children, parents, and business associates. An honorable "advisor" wants their recommendations to be thoughtfully considered. Giving advice is more art than science, however, and being "right" is no guarantee of a successful outcome. Remember that Advice = Help, and the Right Answer is worthless unless acted on.

Successfully offering advice depends on four factors:

- A focus on being helpful
- Earning the right to give advice
- Considering the recipient's perspective
- The method of giving advice

Can you help?

Be honest with yourself, submerge your ego, and engage your brain before your tongue. Save your breath if your advice will not make a positive difference. Remember who has the power (not you!) An advisor depends on persuasion, not control. If you had control (power), you would not be limited to advising.

Do you have the right to be heard?

Most people ignore advice from a stranger. It takes two to tango in the advice process. Without a personal relationship between the parties, or meaningful advisor credentials recognized by the recipient, suggestions will fall upon deaf ears. A successful advisor must be trusted and understand the other person's situation. You have no right to even comment until you have carefully listened to the other person.

How do they feel?

Consider the other person's perspective, particularly their feelings and emotional situation. A good "rational" answer may be ignored until underlying emotional issues are dealt with. A good advisor seeks to relieve worries, not add to someone's problems.

Customize your approach

Most of us would use a different style helping a friend deal with the recent death of a parent than when advising a neighbor on lawn mowers. But similar fundamentals apply:

- Show respect and concern

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- Explain your ideas so the other person can understand them
- Diffuse defensiveness - avoid being critical and using "you" too much
- Use the right words, and "soft" phrasing
- Keep the conversation alive

Would you rather hear?: "Boy, you really botched that job. You will have to start over. You need to use a dooverdig instead of a widget."

Or this?: "Tell me what happened." "Gee, that would have upset me, too." "Do you think starting over is best, or could we fix what we have now?" "A dooverdig works best in this situation, and costs less than a widget. Would it be better to start over with one of those?"

In the second example, notice how phrasing a recommendation as a question gives the recipient a choice. Also, the advisor listened first and then expressed empathy.

People seeking advice usually want:

1. Options for dealing with the situation
2. The pros and cons of each option
3. A recommendation
4. The freedom to make the final decision

Using this approach avoids conversation-killers - an either/or choice that can end a discussion. If you really want to help, keeping the dialog alive until the best solution emerges is important.

Tom Wagner

We help clarify options so our clients
identify the Right Questions
and solve the Right Problems.

Call us at 800 422-1374 to learn more.

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