

SKILLS OF AN EFFECTIVE CONSULTANT

ATTITUDES

1. Unconditional regard – willingness to respect and accept consultee as a human being who is worthwhile, has dignity, and can be liked or cared for by the consultant, in spite of consultee's imperfections
2. Empathy – consultant's ability to understand; to accurately perceive consultee's experience without losing objectivity
3. Genuineness – demonstrated when consultant feels free to be her or himself in consultation
4. Other important attitudes – positive outlook about oneself and others, willingness to take risks, commitment to creativity, desire to be trustworthy

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

I. Listening

- * need to be a good listener to be effective
- * need to let consultee dominate conversation at some points (e.g., at the beginning)
- * listening is very important for establishing rapport
- * you also need to make sure consultee perceives you as listening

II. Minimal encourages

- * don't be totally silent
- * use mm hm, yeah, uh huh, nods

e.g., parroting

- * repeat last few words they said
- * this communicates you are listening

III. Feelings/affect

- * need to listen to and help consultee deal with feelings about the problem
- * this has not been researched, but clinical experience suggests that people who are emotional are not good problem solvers
- * have to show you care about consultee
- * can't build a relationship when the consultee gets feeling that his/her feelings aren't important
- * still don't treat this as psychotherapy - you just want to get the person to the point that they're ready to problem solve
- * you have to get comfortable with addressing the person's feelings and know the fine line between this and psychotherapy
- * when people start to express their feelings, you have to be non-judgmental
- * the one feeling you don't want to empathize with (the one you want to work against) is hopelessness or resignation

IV. Paraphrasing/summarization/active listening/perception checking, etc.

- * these are all feedback loops
- * they all have to do with if you're hearing your client correctly (both content and affect)
- * have to check fairly often whether you understand your consultee

- * these are all ways of pulling together and summarizing what they say and feeding it back to them (explicit part) and ask if you are correct (implicit part)
- * don't use same terminology repeatedly
- * use paraphrasing often to see whether you're on target
- * if consultee says something significant, one way you can highlight it is through paraphrasing
- * paraphrasing is also a way to say enough to let consultee know you're listening, but make them do most of the talking
- * also good for process transition, rather than jumping ahead, go back and close out by paraphrasing what was just accomplished

A. summarization - pulling together information from a longer period of time than paraphrasing

B. paraphrasing - when a paraphrase is done correctly

1. you know you understand consultee
2. consultee knows consultant understands
3. you know that consultee knows you understand

- * if your paraphrase is incorrect, at least you know your consultee will get a chance to correct you before you get any farther
- * also, your misperception can sometimes bring up a point the consultee may not have thought about

V. Questions

- * typically overused by people new at consultation
- * continuum from closed to open questions - this is not really a dichotomy
- * if you want a specific piece of information, a closed question will get you that information
- * at the beginning, closed questions will get you focused prematurely
- * also, closed questions keep the ball in consultant's court too much, too much work for consultant
- * closed questions tend to shut consultee up
- * closed questions are okay at the end
- * other questions that aren't helpful: either/or questions and stringing multiple questions together (consultee will usually answer the last)

VII. Silence

- * sometimes consultee silence can mean resistance, but usually it doesn't
- * it may be that they're thinking - let them think
- * may be that they're confused - ask if they're confused, paraphrase, clarify, summarize
- * may be uncomfortable with something - be low key, but give them invitation to talk about it if they want
- * sometimes the best response to consultee silence is consultant silence
- * if you don't allow silence after consultee talks, you may miss something they want to say - they may not be finished

VIII. Nonverbals

- * eye contact = self-confidence and listening
- * physical space = be aware of differences between your and their needs for personal space
- * body position = don't be rigid, or too excited in their face
- * touch = don't touch someone unless you know what you're doing and you're sure you won't offend them

IX. Challenge messages

A. Confrontation – occurs any time consultant causes or directs consultee to reflect on, question, reconsider, or modify some aspect of behavior, attitude or feeling

- how confrontation affects relationship depends on relationship, motivation of confronter, and manner of confrontation
- use only after a positive relationship has been established; be sure motives are clearly positive and meet consultee's needs rather than consultant's
- manner of confrontation can vary – e.g., can use questions
- be sure to evaluate confrontation efforts – if it elicits defensiveness, counterattacking, ignoring the confrontation or distorting or devaluing the message, it was not successful – if you see these signs, don't persist with confrontation

1. didactic – any time consultant gives consultee information or corrective feedback

- needs to provide information that is new to consultee and which consultee views as important (e.g., “you are late” is more likely to be perceived as pointing out a failure)
- should be presented in a descriptive form rather than using commanding, judgmental, or evaluative language
- be alert to potential impact on consultee

2. experiential – can be used when a discrepancy is perceived in the messages sent by consultee

- in addition to being empathic and descriptive, need to present discrepancy in a tentative manner

B. Interpretation – presentation of an alternative frame of reference or point of view from which to consider consultee's expressed or implied feelings, attitudes or behaviors

- goes beyond simple feedback and reflection of the explicit message to a level of connecting, concluding, and hypothesizing about the underlying nature of the message
- “I think what you are saying is”
- also may take form of identifying recurrent themes
- consultant must be empathic – consultee must be open to an alternative perspective

C. Direction – (depending on model) challenging consultee in “call to action”

- needs to be:
 1. concise – not given in complicated terms
 2. stated in ways that are understandable to consultee, using descriptive terms rather than jargon
 3. approp to consultee's reality
 4. presented in tentative manner
 5. delivered in congruent manner in which consultant's nonverbal behavior is consistent with verbal directions given
- be sure tee understands and accepts directions given

XI. Opening minutes

- * get time frame (how long will this take?)
- * if it's not the first meeting, it's good to review your previous meeting (both content and process)

XII. Closing

- * toward the end, don't bring up huge new topics
- * summarize and pull together what was accomplished
- * set the stage for next meeting - tell them where you're going with the process
- * may help to give small homework assignments - you can both get assignments

PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

1. Setting the stage – defining consultation as a problem-solving activity
2. Defining the problem – being able to hone in on what is to be fixed
3. Examining conditions surrounding the problem – analyzing forces impinging on the problem (e.g., antecedent and consequent conditions)
4. Gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data pertinent to the problem
5. Identifying any facilitating and restraining forces
6. Designing interventions for a particular situation
7. Evaluating problem-solving attempts
8. Determining who will do what, how, and when during the problem-solving process
9. Predicting ramifications and implications of solving the problem (i.e., what effects will solving the problem have on the system?)

WORKING WITH ORGANIZATIONS

1. Becoming accepted by members of the organization (e.g., entry skills)
2. Using organizational analysis (e.g., determining the rules operating within the organization)
3. Providing feedback to consultee about the organization
4. Gathering information (e.g., using surveys)
5. Using a repertoire of system-wide interventions (e.g., providing a stress management program)
6. Determining the climate of the organization (working atmosphere)
7. Determining the organization's culture (norms, standards, and values)
8. Using program planning (assisting consultees in the execution of the program)
9. Determining how to utilize human resources within the organization (e.g., assisting consultees in improving managerial styles)

GROUP SKILLS

1. Focusing and maintaining attention on task and work issues
2. Managing conflict within the group
3. Managing agendas of meetings
4. Providing feedback to group members
5. Facilitating concrete and specific communication among group members
6. Linking comments of one group member to those of another
7. Facilitating the development of the group process (e.g., knowing when to move from the getting acquainted stage to the working stage)
8. Using group management skills (e.g., knowing how to terminate a group session)
9. Sensing and using group dynamics to help groups meet their goals (e.g., calling attention to emotions running through the group)

SKILLS IN DEALING WITH CULTURAL DIVERSITY

1. Applying a knowledge and understanding of multicultural perspectives when performing consultation
2. Neither under- or overemphasizing cultural variables in consultation

3. Understanding how unique life experiences have influenced culturally diverse people
4. Integrating a knowledge of cultural diversity into effective practice
5. Not making value judgments about consultees (or client systems) who are culturally different
6. Challenging stereotypic beliefs about culturally diverse groups
7. Viewing cultural differences as issues to meet, not as impediments
8. Using methods consistent with the life experiences and values of different minority groups
9. Possessing specific knowledge about the group you are working with

Portions From: Dougherty, A. M. (1995). *Consultation: Practice and perspectives in school and community settings* (2nd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing.