

## **Extending the Counseling Practice**

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Counseling is vital to developing talent in any organizational setting. It is also an essential capability for achieving behavior modification. For a long period of time, we have undertaken profound research, and a long, rich and transformational experience in the practice of helping people improve: 1) What they can expect from themselves by building SELF CONFIDENCE as a quality action predictor, and as reputation with themselves; 2) How they feel about themselves as their SELF-ESTEEM or healthy opinion of themselves, a thick emotional blanket that buffers them from feeling hurt by harmful criticism; 3) Who they think they are as the SELF-CONCEPT, that when properly nourished by adequate counseling can lead to high performance...

Self-confidence x Self-esteem x Self-concept = High performance.

During the last decade, counseling has become increasingly important within the world of organizations. Leaders and managers are realizing that they are called upon to do counseling or bring in a professional who can offer these services with the purpose of influencing behaviors. Guides, counselors and friends is what we all are whenever we deal intimately with people, which in the case of some of us may be a hundred times a day.

Counseling is an art, a science and a system of techniques which can be creatively stimulated and developed. People are the medium in which we all work. I have always stressed that counseling is mainly fine art, and that some professionals embrace it with techniques until the art really emerges. This kind of fine art, executed within the complex context of organizations, is a learning adventure in the profound understanding of people. I have been in hundreds of meetings where it is clearly obvious that there is a lack of understanding of the complexities of human behavior.

Counseling is an eyeball-to-eyeball face to face interaction. In my own research and extensive practice, I have found that the best leaders achieved sustained, superior results not by systems or means of control, but by counseling, mentoring, tutoring, coaching and confronting people in

soundable ways. Counseling includes a one-to-one conversation which in some way may be focused on behavior and/or performance.

Successful counseling results in a positive change in performance; in addition, a new or renewed commitment to self-sufficiency, to the organization's culture, goals and values, to continuous learning, and to sustained high performance will emerge. It results in an achievement of the maintenance of positive work relationships. Engaging in a profound counseling venture signifies mutual exchanges, communicating respect, and it is always problem focused, change-oriented and disciplined. It follows a clear and identifiable sequence or flow, and requires the use of specific knowledge and communication skills.

All counseling conversations are one-to-one, and they have to be mutual, that is reciprocal and balanced. It is a didactic process, where the two parties can learn and share knowledge at the same time. It is a process of mutual exploration and discovery, and participants dare to be vulnerable, to listen, to pay attention, and to give something of themselves that is worthy. The counselor brings formal wisdom, organizational savvy, behavioral

understanding, problem-solving abilities and facilitation capabilities. The subject brings his/her own personal needs, perceptions and expectations as well as useable information of his/her reality.

Counseling is a process designed to make the most of what the patient and the counselor know, and it is the counselor's task to ensure that both sets of information are used following high ethical standards.

Respect is what the subject experiences because of what the counselor says and does. This is a psychology of extreme consideration, encouraging the subject to give opinions, to provide confidential data, to discuss frankly what he/she does not understand, and to offer objections to whatever the counselor has said. A knowledgeable counselor never gets confused about respect for the subject, especially for a highly unstable subject. Respect is not something a person must earn, not a treatment that a human being deserves or does not deserve. It is a moral imperative and it is comprehensive and multi-dimension in nature.

In truth, communicating and maintaining respect for people and for a subject is a pre-requisite, an essential aspect of the counseling dialogue and of the

sharing of meaning that aims to improve performance and to develop commitment to something important.

An effective counselor must never lose sight of the fact that his job is to improve performance and ensure commitment to a higher standard. A counselor always raises the bar, thus it does not serve any purpose to stimulate resistance, to foster resentment, to block the development of information or to talk destructively about any other people. COUNSELING IS NOT A POLITICAL EXERCISE.

A word of advice: People do not feel respected when the other person does not listen, interrupts all the time, discount value to their ideas or avoid face to face interaction. They will experience a lack of respect when the counselor does not develop information with them in a confidential setting. A subject feels respected when the other person listens attentively and takes his/her input seriously. Counseling is about encouraging people to contribute their best of their ideas, behaviors and performances. The result should always be in one or more positive changes, creating the foundations on which commitment and engagement are built: clarity, competence, influence and appreciation.

A performance challenge may be an opportunity of some kind, or it may represent a step up to an even more difficult goal. A problem is not necessarily something negative, but only a difference between what it is and what is desired to be. The counselor and the subject can learn from the past, but they cannot alter it. The focus of a counseling exercise is on what can be changed or improved. In order to achieve formidable results, the counseling process should move through a series of interdependent stages (such as involving, developing and resolving). Undisciplined counseling does not follow specific stages.

The counselor performs many roles at the same time: Expert, reflective thinking partner, feedback provider, feedback interpreter, dialogue partner, practice partner, accountability enforcer, positive reinforcer, historian and role model.

Counseling is an interactive process. Indeed, it is a healthy and a wonderful experience by which two people rise on the force of hope, and put away the depths of difficulties and despair, replacing cowardice by courage for finding a better place inside the organization.

