



**'Wisdom may be in the knowing,  
but the virtue is in the doing'**

By: Kelly Graves "The Corporate Therapist™"

Confucius said: "By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest." And so it is that we find ourselves looking back at 2007 and reflecting upon successes and challenges, comparing our work with research-based data, and learning from the experiences that have taught us real-life lessons (some of which were easy and others were bittersweet.)

With the end of 2007 approaching, we decided this would be a good time to ask our clients a few questions about their individual and organizational experiences from this past year. Out of these conversations we discovered that for some of our clients there were initial misunderstandings about exactly what an individual or organizational development consultant did. Further, we noticed that there appeared to be some new patterns emerging as to what initially motivated them to reach out to an OD consultant. These findings were helpful to us as we set our course for the coming year because being results-oriented consultants; our successes are based only on the successes of our clients. Here are some misunderstandings we discovered and clarified:

**Misunderstanding:** *Consultants should only be called in when there's a serious problem.*

**Truth:** Although many leaders do wait until the "pain" is unbearable to call in a consultant, this is not necessary. Many forward-thinking leaders dig their wells before they are thirsty.

Consultants may also be valuable as unbiased third parties, and a consultant may also be hired when distance precludes sending out an in-house person. A trusted consultant may stand in for a leader or manager in meetings, on location, or when a partnership enhances the results of the work.

**Misunderstanding:** *OD consultants work mainly with big corporations because only big organizations can afford to hire consultants.*

**Truth:** We have worked with small, medium and large companies this year; nonprofit and for-profit, public and private. The investments these organizations made in hiring our OD consultants were far less than had they kept the status quo, or hired another (veteran or novice) manager when their workload seemed to necessitate that. (Hiring a professional consultant who was knowledgeable, objective and experienced in developing successful communication, leadership and trust organization-wide allowed all involved to be demonstrably more efficient, more adaptive and better at developing their existing human capital.

**Misunderstanding:** *The consultant will cause more unrest by asking too many questions.*

**Truth:** Sometimes, at first, it might feel uncomfortable for leaders or others within an organization to hear the hard truths about how to turn things around within the organization, but it's the OD specialist's job to deliver the objective truths based on comprehensive observations, interviews, and assessments. The goal of a skilled professional consultant is always to support the success of the client organization and that requires the consultant who can gain trust, be truthful, tactful and on-target.

**Misunderstanding:** *The consultant will add to my work by delivering a one-size-fits-all program I don't have time to learn or implement.*

**Truth:** A skilled OD consultant will be able to offer expert advice in any number of areas, as well as roll up his or her sleeves and self-confidently implement strategies, solutions and steps along the way. Individual and organizational development consultants should be able to guide a leader or manager to find the skills and behaviors necessary to develop efficient and reliable work processes, adapt to environmental changes in timely and responsive manners, and develop his or her human capital so as to lighten the work load, not increase it. As specialists in this field we know that research indicates the following are common reasons why an individual or a leadership team within an organization may seek to work with a development consultant. ·

- Performance within the organization could be better but help is needed to develop specific skills or behaviors which would improve performance.
- Individuals do not have the specific knowledge and skills necessary to solve the problems that have been identified
- Individuals have the knowledge and skills but do not have the time or personnel to solve the problems.
- Past efforts have not produced the desired short- or long-term results.
- An independent or unbiased third-party opinion, either to confirm a decision or to provide alternatives, is needed.

Similar to the generalized statistical data shown in research, but more specific to the realities of the client organizations we have had the pleasure of working with, the following is a list of the initial reasons why the majority of our clients sought out the services of an individual/organizational development consultant in 2007:

- 32% of our clients identified that they sought out communication support to resolve interpersonal conflicts, turf wars or office politics.
- Our chief financial officer needed to do some serious relationship-building with her staff.
- There were misunderstandings and personality differences that were impeding her performance and causing all kinds of problems with her team.
- It was a can of worms and our CEO didn't have the time or patience to sort it all out.
- We needed trust between the staff and our site management.

The [workers in this department] were seen by others in the organization as dysfunctional, unprofessional, and at times arrogant. Many of these [workers] did not believe [top leaders] valued their input and they were angry about this. [The organization] was losing [market share]

to [a competitor.] We were spinning our wheels. 26% stated they requested expert help in specific content areas, workshops, leadership training and/or individual coaching.

Because I was promoted in my own department I found myself faced with supervising my former colleagues. This was a real challenge. I needed help establishing myself in this new role and redefining these old relationships to get the best out of my staff without burning bridges. Our HR manager recommended I call you. I was new to the company and in a new position [as a director]. I wanted leadership coaching from someone who was objective and experienced. I needed to find someone trustworthy who I could talk to about everything without fear of jeopardizing my new position. (It had to be someone who wasn't my immediate supervisor, too, because I had a trust issue with him.) I felt I needed someone from outside the organization. 21% wanted support to develop or build consensus for their strategic or tactical plans and/or use team building to strengthen communication and cohesiveness with their staff.

My department had been to lots of team-building events before, but we hadn't ever made the real connection with how to use those experiences to make our everyday work world better. Your approach was different because we spent a lot of time debriefing what we learned in the games and talking about how we'd implement these things on-the-job. Those conversations and the follow-up meetings really made this team-building different from the others. It was actually a valuable investment for the long term not just a fun and games day. 16% felt overwhelmed and or wanted a fresh perspective; they sought "outside eyes/ ears."

I was constantly in a fire-fighting mode. Coming to work made me feel sick to my stomach because of the stress. I have been the CEO with [this organization] for many years. I thought I knew what my employees wanted and needed. I thought we were on the same page...

After reading the results of your intake summary, I realized I had only a small understanding of what they needed. It wasn't pleasant to read those things, but it was necessary. Now I know what I need to do differently. 5% believed that due to rapid growth in their organization they needed to grow their leadership skills accordingly. Three years ago we had forty employees and one location. Now we have over 200 employees and four locations. The learning curve has been very steep. We had sever growing pains and didn't know where to start but knew we needed specialized help across the board with our management and leadership skills.

Looking back is a bit like checking out where we've been from the perspective of the rear view mirror. It can be very helpful, especially if we at least occasionally take the time to focus that mirror on ourselves and look honestly at our own reflections. Seeing ourselves through other's eyes can inform us on what we need to continue and what we need to do differently.

Agreeing with George Bernard Shaw that "we are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future," we want to thank our many clients for their articulate feedback detailing what motivated them to seek out individual and organizational development services, how these services benefited them and what we can do differently to better serve them in the future.

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