

## 6 REASONS TO ENGAGE A CONSULTANT

As leaders strive to seek God's vision for their congregations, the opportunity to work with an outside facilitator or consultant may prove necessary. For some, working with a consultant can be a new experience. In some cases, the only outside resources previously used have been other leaders from neighboring congregations or other nonprofit groups. By default, some church boards utilize members within a congregation to lead retreats. While going this route may be cost efficient, there are several reasons why outsiders can help move your leaders closer to their goals. As you ponder the idea to seek outside assistance, this list of six reasons to engage a consultant may be worth reading.

Having sat on both sides as a church leader utilizing outside consultants and as a consultant facilitating leadership retreats and strategic conversation for nonprofits and faith based groups, I have the unique understanding of what matters when utilizing outside assistance. As you ponder, think of these practical insights.

1. **Fresh Perspective** – A good consultant provides an unbiased look at how to tackle familiar issues. Getting an outside perspective can lead to new understanding of an old situation. By circumstance an outsider does not carry the emotional connection to old traditions, familiar ways of doing things and even the attachment to some people in leadership. It is often those attachments that lead congregations to keeping doing what they've always done.

When utilizing an outside consultant, the leaders experience the benefit of hearing new questions and new ideas that may not be readily communicated by participants from the inside. Also a consultant's experience with other congregations, nonprofits, research and ministry, allows a more global perspective on a local situation.

2. **Good Relevant Questions** – Sometimes the best use of a consultant is their ability to ask, "Good questions." I liken the questions of a good consultant to that of a good doctor. When we have a stomach ache and visit a doctor, a good doctor often starts with asking relevant questions. They may ask you what you ate, how often you have had this experience and whether there are any times during the month you normally feel this way. Hearing these questions from a doctor are a lot different than hearing them from a

family member. The same is true with working with consultants. It's not until we hear the doctor ask, "Did you eat any...? That we realize the root of the problem.

Good consultants are able to get at the root of the problem by asking good relevant questions. Experience, knowledge and spiritual understanding guide the questions that can lead to more shaping of a vision. When congregations have the benefit of working with someone who knows the questions to ask, the confidence that the direction will be unveiled becomes more of a reality.

3. **New Ideas** – Are you looking for new ideas to reach out, invite or welcome? If the answer is yes, you may want to bring a consultant to the table. Having a trained, experienced outsider lead a brainstorming conversation can lead to more ideas than sitting around a table with just the family of members. Being lead with a focused process of brainstorming allows new insight and opportunity to freely explore new ideas. Good consultants have the skills and knowledge base to lead brainstorm discussions in ways that lead to new ideas.

One of the best uses of a consultant is to request the interest in gaining new insight for new ideas. A good consultant can bring research findings and expertise that allows fresh, new thinking. When new ideas are birthed out of well planned brainstorming processes, the group's confidence in the ideas and possible outcomes can be strengthened.

4. **Expertise** – One of the best reasons for going outside of the church or nonprofit group to a consultant is to gain the benefit of experience and knowledge. My best experiences as a recipient of consultant work have been with consultants who truly demonstrated expertise in their given field. Consultants with expertise are able to move the team to better understanding of the situation and more direct shaping of the vision.

Expertise in church consulting or nonprofit consulting is very meaningful when hiring outsiders to assist. If a consultant has skills in working with the secular community such as corporations but very limited exposure to churches or non profits, there may be a true disconnect with the usability of information shared. Some consultants are not able to comfortably serve both areas. And yes, there is a difference in leading strategic discussions for corporations

versus strategic discussions for faith based organizations. Having someone with expertise in the area and biblical understanding is the unique expertise needed by most congregations.

5. **Strategic Understanding** – Being able to sort through the research data, introduce a process for discovery and build learning that supports strategic thinking is what good consultants do. Their ability to sift through lots of data and come to an understanding for direction and purpose gives the advantage of using outside consultants.

Strategic direction is often the reason leaders turned to consultants. The good consultant understands he/she is there to provide strategic direction through questions and process but not to tell the leaders what to do. The strategic plan is the work of a team lead by good consultants.

6. **Flexibility** – Having a good consultant frees up the leader of an organization. Sometimes the work of strategic planning and change can consume a leader's role. Employing a good consultant allows for flexibility in work schedule and involvement. When an organization has a strong leader through its consultant, the process can be lead with little to no involvement of the leader.

Having sat on both sides of consulting scenarios, one of the best pieces of advice for any congregation is to seek strong, capable consultants. Get people with experience, knowledge and a willingness to truly lead the process. Gain clear understanding from the onset what you expect and what they can expect from you. Seek God's guidance as you move to shape a vision for your group. You may want to ask these questions, before you engage the consultant:

What is the process being planned to assist us in reaching our goal?

What part of the process will you be responsible for?

How will our experience and results be different by utilizing your consulting services?

After you hear the answers to these questions, you will possible know if this is the best consultant for your team.

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