

## When is “helping” acceptable?



It is easy to go to sleep and forget who we are and the unique value we have to offer when we bring our authentic selves forward. Waking up occurs every time we stand on our truth (i.e., remain true to what we believe to be in a client's best interest despite their objections). A common wake-up call for us is when clients ask for “help.”

There are plenty of times when a client's request is consistent with the approach to implementing change our experience has shown to be in their best interest. That's not what I'm calling help—that's being fortunate

enough to have a savvy client who truly understands what is needed to succeed and who is asking you to practice your craft while assisting him or her. “Help” is what clients ask for when they want you to support misguided efforts to address their change-related challenges. (*We know what the issues are and what needs to be done so all we need is for you to be a pair of hands for us. Don't question our thinking; just help us get done what we have decided to do.*)

I'm not suggesting that practitioners should never “help” clients. My point is, we need to remain mindful of the difference between providing help and practicing our craft. Anytime we consider furnishing help, we should proceed only under certain circumstances:

- What you are being asked to do is at least moving things somewhat in the right direction and/or causes no harm. (“Harm” means it is seriously counterproductive for the client and the damage will be difficult to recover from.)
- You have been direct with them about your assessment of the situation so they know that you believe the course of action they have asked you to help with is not in their best interest.

If you decide to provide “help,” your client should hear three specific things from you:

- Why you think what they are asking for isn't the best course of action
- What you believe is the path they should follow
- That you will support them as they have asked if they make an informed decision to do so (i.e., they fully understand your opinion about the risks to realization of their goals)

Be prepared—your view that what they are engaging won't work or could even make their situation worse may not be well-received by the client.

Providing “help” is a slippery slope and must be entered into cautiously. Done right, it calls for you to ensure your client knows what you believe is the proper standard as far as next steps in the implementation process. For business or political reasons, they may decide not to heed your advice, but they should always make their decisions with the knowledge of what you see as the

best path forward for them. In this way, the “help” you provide may be far from what is really needed but at least the client is properly advised about the implications.

To help execute a plan you don’t believe is in your client’s interest without telling the client your concern is an act of self-serving, unprofessionalism of the highest order. On the other hand, it can be extremely beneficial if you inform clients of the concerns you have for their planned actions but then to go on to say that you’ll help them as best you can under either of two conditions:

- They agree that the path they are pursuing is not what they should be doing, and they are only asking for your “help” while they shore up what is missing so a more effective strategy can be applied.
- They don’t see your recommendations as the best way forward, but agree that if certain symptoms start to surface it will be confirmation that their course of action needs re-evaluating. At that point, either you’ll assist them in making the needed adjustments to their implementation plan or you’ll exit the situation because you won’t be able to generate any more value for them.