

Maintaining Spiritual Integrity and Professionalism

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Eph 4:1-3

As a church health consultant it is important that one adopts principles and practices to ensure Godly and ethical intervention. Consultants recognise the boundaries within which they work in a church, and attend to regular and ongoing spiritual, personal and professional growth.

Principles for Effective Consulting

Consultants have different perspectives on effective consulting. The following guidelines might be useful as you reflect on your own principles for effective consulting.

- 1. A healthy process for the church arises from who you are as a person as much as from what you might bring in terms of knowledge and experience.**
If a Christian community senses that you genuinely care for them, you trust in and listen to God, you care about and seek growth and health for the sake of all, the impact on the community is much more than process or knowledge. One of the most powerful influences that can have with a church is to model the leadership and facilitation that you want from them. 1 Tim 4:12
- 2. Your value is in the flow of the process.**
The church community will value you if both of you continue to work together in a process that is collaborative, well understood, communicated to all and focused on bringing health.
- 3. The "way forward" in complex church situations may not be 'your' solution.**
The "way forward" in relation to any congregational objective emerges during the consultation as you and the church community work collaboratively to discern the issues and address them, while learning at the same time.
- 4. Encourage and recognise diverse values and perspectives.**
An experienced church consultant remembers there are many perspectives on an issue in the life of a Christian community. Each of those perspectives should be encouraged and explored because they can often create creative outcomes. Listen, listen, listen. God often works at the 'edge' rather than the centre.
- 5. When working with a church, start from where they are now.**
Understand the church community perspective on their own issues, including what they have tried, what has worked, what has not worked and what they think should be done now. It is better to go slower *with a church* than faster without them.

6. **Come to consulting with a basic process-based framework in mind.**

Early in a consulting relationship, the major purpose of a framework is that it can be used as a common frame of reference when talking about objectives, methods, recommendations and learning together. Be willing to tweak this framework as you and the church work together.

7. **Be a consistent non-anxious presence and do what you say you are going to do.**

In the midst of your a church in confusion or crisis, you can help a great deal by remaining grounded and centred, clear and consistent. A non-anxious presence in a time of angst is of great value to hurting people. Your consistency builds trust and commitment.

8. **Know yourself.**

As a consultant you are an "instrument" of change in a church system with considerable 'power'. This creates a duty of care. You should be willing to face and suspend your biases, hooks, assumptions and 'pet' ideas when working with church groups. Be honest about them to yourself and your team members when they arise during consulting and supervision.

9. **It is up to the church community themselves whether they act on your recommendations or not.**

This is sometimes one of the hardest principles for consultants to accept. While you will make every effort to work with a church and listen for what God is saying in, through and to his people, in the end you are not responsible for a church decision. consulting and its consequence, change, sometimes creates tension and pain. Every once and a while, this is too much for a church and they back away.

10. **Do not take it personally.**

When a church backs away from your report and recommendations, it is hard not to take this personally. Gentleness and humility again need to be personally affirmed. You are seeking to be a servant of God, this will sometimes take you into uncomfortable territory. Your support networks are important in which to debrief and get patched up.