

“Outsider” Help

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2002, published 7/9/2002 in the Houston Home Journal

Individuals and organizations sometimes enlist the aid of an “outsider” to provide specific kinds of help.

A bewildering variety of services is available. No wonder people rely on self-help books and the advice of friends and family members!

The many terms associated with professional assistance can be confusing: trainers, mentors, consultants, coaches, counselors, therapists, and collaborators. Whew!! Let’s take a brief look at each.

Training is focused at providing an individual with new knowledge or skill. The agenda is usually fixed with some very explicitly defined desired outcomes. Organizations seek outside trainers either because the skill or knowledge is so specialized or because of an unusually competent process used in transferring the knowledge and skill. Training usually occurs in groups, but can also be delivered one-to-one.

Mentoring usually occurs as a career-oriented relationship between an older or more experienced person (the mentor) and a younger or less experienced individual (the protégé). Interactions usually focus on creating future behaviors of the protégé based on the experiences of the mentor. Success of mentoring relationships in the workplace has caused the concept to spread into schools and other developmental organizations.

Consulting is similar to mentoring, except that the relationship is usually short-lived, focused on resolving some specific problem, or maximizing some unique opportunity. The consultant is called in to assess the situation, then provide options or answers based on specialized knowledge or experience. The contracting organization or individual then chooses to accept, reject, or alter the proposed suggestions.

Counseling usually focuses on overcoming or bolstering some deficit or limitation. Some organizations have created programs of employee and family assistance for interpersonal difficulties or a lack of clarity or direction. I can testify to their value, as I have set up employee assistance programs in three different facilities, and I have used and encouraged others to use the counseling available through these arrangements.

Therapy typically deals with dysfunction, healing, or repairing a past pain, feeling, or issue. Therapists tend to disclose little, so there is a power differential with the client. Therapy for troubled individuals may be conducted in groups or privately and may be minimally invasive (perhaps indistinguishable from counseling) or extensive (even requiring medication or in extreme cases, hospitalization).

Coaching is a high form of customized learning. The coach creates an environment where clients are free to generate and explore options, dealing with their strengths and aspirations. The coach helps individuals move from where they are now to where they want to be, asking thought-provoking questions and evoking answers from the client’s own awareness and perceptions. A good coach deals with the client’s agenda, sees the client as capable, and assists the client with discipline, holding them accountable for following through on the actions to which they commit.

An insightful observation by Stephen Covey in Seven Habits of Highly Effective People is that all things are created twice, first mentally, then physically. Coaching and consulting deal with the mental creation; **collaboration** goes beyond that to the physical creation. In collaboration, the coach or consultant actually partners with the client in executing the action steps the client has chosen.

Well, do you know now what would help you or your organization? If you’re still not clear, contact me at the e-mail address above or at my office (478-988-0237) and I’ll work with you at no charge to sort through your needs. Then we can figure out who might be your best source for that help.

I recently participated in two intense days of training to enhance my coaching, consulting, and collaborative skills. Next week, I’ll share some remarkable statistics I learned about the success of various forms of training and coaching.