

DIFFERENT WAYS TO USE YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL SKILLS

by Rex P. Gatto

Since the fall of 1999, several critical events have caused many people in the business world to step back and reflect on change. Laws prohibiting CPA and law firms from merging have been put aside. Congress passed a law permitting financial, investment, and insurance institutions to merge. These mergers could result in an entirely new way to do business.

The American Institute of CPAs suggested that requirements to be a CPA be changed to include general business knowledge and communication skills, because these are greatly needed in the profession. Hospitals are in the newspapers indicating disenchantment with the monolithic hospital associations. Pharmaceutical chains are questioning the low fee structure of larger recognizable medical insurers and refusing to do business with these insurers. What does all this change have to do with psychologists?

Change — uncertainty — insecurity — are causing people, while employed, to second guess themselves. Most of what people have been prepared to do via careers may no longer be valid. These changes give you, as a psychologist, the opportunity to reexamine your skills and discuss what you can offer people struggling in the workplace. What skills do people in today's workplace need to be successful?

Some of the necessary skills are communication, team building, effective interaction, decision making, self-esteem, and cognitive ability (knowledge). What people want from the workplace are challenges, rewards, satisfaction, a sense of belong, and financial and emotional security. Because of workplace change, there is a gap between what the workplace offers via opportunities and what people need.

The statistics of APA indicate that 20-40% of the people in the work force have problems such as Adjustment Disorder, social phobia, and/or are in need of career counseling. This 20-40% creates an immediate opportunity for psychologists in that we have been trained to help people with these problems. Thus, what people today are looking for dovetails precisely into what psychologists can provide.

Your psychological skills could be translated into service to people in the workplace through workshops, continuing professional education, and workplace consultations. Psychologists can help employees with coping skills, social phobias (presentation skills, team building) formats for decision-making and performance evaluation.

The American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) provides demographics on work force 2000, including the facts that the work force is now 52% female and 48% male. Diversity is a critical issue, with a distinct mix of people, cultures and age groups. However, probably the greatest area of diversity is that of intellectual diversity. This diversity creates the need to understand different styles of communication, leadership, followership, and decision-making abilities, during this time of continual change.

“In tumultuous times, we need to contemplate and adjust our inner thoughts that drive our actions, emotions, and physical and spiritual well being.” (Gatto, 1995). To be successful, workers need to balance work, family and self. Expectations of long hours, pushing oneself to the limit, is almost a daily occurrence for many. Psychologists can play a very special role in the transition between present day worry and future anxiety.

Here is a format to translate your psychological skills into business consulting. Answering the following questions may help you to decide if this is something you would be interested in. Your answers will help you design a business plan and identify the skills needed to work with businesses. From there, you can decide if you have the skills, the desire, and the opportunity to go into the business of consulting.

1. What are your strengths as a psychologist? Examples: effective listener, can use many assessments to identify skills and abilities, help people to focus on goals, can give presentations, present workshops, and/or coach or mentor.

2. What business topics are you familiar with? Examples: change, presentation, coaching, team work, leadership, stress, career counseling and/or various assessments.

3. How could you begin to acquire business clients? Examples: give presentations to the Chamber of Commerce, Lions and Rotary Clubs, join the Pennsylvania Personnel Association (PPA).

The following outline will guide you through a process of identifying and defining a business plan to transition your skills into business consulting.

Marketing Your Skills

Below are four questions about transitioning your psychological skills into business consulting.

1. What do you feel you have to offer as a Business Consultant (coaching, training workshops, assessment, counseling and or organizational analysis)? What do you feel are your greatest strengths?

2. Can you write a business benefit statement, taking into consideration the type of products or services you could provide? Write that statement, and base your response on Question 1.

3. What are (could be) the needs of your potential clients?

4. What type of large or small businesses are within your geographical area? List the types of businesses that you would like to work with.

Marketing to Potential Clients

The following are some types of marketing you will need to consider if you plan to go into business consulting:

1. Marketing with a price: magazines, newspapers, radio and TV.

2. Marketing without a price: volunteer to be a presenter for the Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, Rotary, church/congregational meetings, or schools (parents' groups); also volunteer to be interviewed for local publications.

3. Networking: contact people you know in the business area; ask them who they know that you could contact.

4. Professional organizations: join professional organizations such as the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) 1-800-628-2783, American Management Association (AMA) 1-800-714 6395

Reading Material: Read business and training magazines. For example: Training and Development magazine comes with a membership to ASTD 1-800-328-4329. These magazines are filled with the information you need. They:

- identify the hot topics in the training industry;

- identify key competitors and what services and products they offer through the analysis of ads;
- give information on conferences and proposals to speak at local and national conferences.

Generally *Training* has a conference early winter December/January and ASTD usually has its conference in May.

How to Sell Yourself and Your Products

Help your prospective clients make informed decisions.

- Do not come across as a sales person.
- Present your understanding of the business situation.
- Discuss in analytical terms the issues and problems.
- Identify the needs and wants of the client.
- Show how you can resolve through your intervention what the client needs and how the client will benefit.

Create a level of trust.

- Identify the customers' agendas, (what they think they need).
- Find out what the clients want.
- Help the clients problem solve by addressing their needs.

Based on your expectations, how could your consulting business get started? Establish business goals, look at the competition, define a client/customer base, define action for success. Think of this as a blueprint for a new house construction.

If you take on the challenge of business consulting, you will be part of a fast-paced change in business. Financial, insurance, investment and medical industries affect everyone. People within these industries are going through great changes. The effects of such changes may well be the opportunity for you to help people with great needs, and at the same time, benefit you directly by developing and enhancing your skills as a psychologist.

References

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