



What Should You Look For in a Ministry Consultant?

Having read the first two articles in this series, you might be most interested in the services of a good consultant. If the business world benefits from such help, why not the ministry world? Is it any less important? How do you find such a person? It's critical to the accomplishment of your ministry goals that you do your homework before selecting a church consultant. Thus, an important question is what should you look for in a ministry consultant? What are some of the qualities that distinguish the good ones from others in the field? Following are seven characteristics of a good consultant.

1. Christian character. Does the consultant know Jesus Christ as personal Savior? Though non-Christian consultants can provide some excellent help in their chosen areas of expertise, Christian consultants should bring spiritual discernment to the consulting arena as well as expertise. Just as important is a second question: Is he or she living a life marked by Christlikeness? Consultants model behavior for those with whom they minister, and it's critical that it be Christlike behavior.

2. Proven competence. What are the consultant's primary area or areas of expertise? What are his or her core competencies? Some consultants minister in several different areas. However, most are experts and are known for their work in just a few specific areas. We at the Malphurs Group, for example, are known for strategic envisioning. Look for one that is most competent in the area where you need him or her. Often, they'll be known for those areas, and some have published in them. Sometimes you may have to inquire. A consultant's references will clue you to his or her areas of proven competence.

3. Theological expertise. You would be wise to examine the consultant's theological credentials. Does the consultant have any academic training in the Bible and theology? Few do and the popular "in-thing" today is to pooh-pooh academics. However, one's academic preparation in theology serves to mold his thinking and launch him for a lifetime of ministry. Our group has discovered that good biblical, theological preparation is vital to the consulting equation. That is because strategic ministry planning is deeply theological. So, the question is has the consultant gone to a Bible college and/or seminary? If so, where? Is it a reputable school? Evangelical? What degrees does the consultant have? Does

he have a solid foundation in Bible and theology that he'll bring to the consulting experience?

4. Strong references. Does the consultant have references, and how do those references rate his or her services? It's imperative that you "touch bases" with those who've worked with the consultant. To a certain extent, consultants function much as another staff person, and you must check their references much as you would a new staff person. Someone once said "the proof of the pudding is in the tasting." Who has tasted and benefited from the consultant's pudding? Beware of those that have no references or have questionable references at best.

5. Special gifting. What are the gifts, talents, and abilities that the consultant brings to your ministry context? Some excellent gifts for consulting are leadership, administration, wisdom, and discernment mixed with lots of good, practical experience. While you're at it, check on the consultant's passions. (Passion is what you feel strongly about-what you care deeply about.) What is he or she passionate about? Passion excites people and "rubs off" on them. When your people work with a consultant, ask what will "rub off" on them? Will they come away excited or discouraged about what's ahead?

6. Practical experience. Discern how much experience the consultant has. Is he or she a novice? Are they just beginning to use their gifts and abilities in the consulting world? Has he ever pastored a church or worked with a parachurch organization? If so, when and for how long? While it's critical that a consultant start somewhere, maybe that first or second organization shouldn't be yours. How can you know? Ask for and check out their references. In addition, here are two disclaimers that you should jot down on your mental list. First, just because a consultant has lots of experience doesn't mean that it's good experience. You do learn from bad experience; you learn more from good experiences. Second, contrary to popular opinion, star performers don't necessarily make the best consultants. There's often a big gap between being a great leader and coaching others to the same. That's why so few star athletes become coaches.

7. Name recognition. What might seem like an unusual qualification is name recognition. When you think about the area in which you need a consultant's expertise, whose name rises to the surface? Who's known to be a leader in the field? When you ask knowledgeable people, whom do they suggest? There's a reason for this that is summed up in two words: proven expertise. While it doesn't have to be, often it will be someone who's demonstrated competence by ministering and writing in the field under a credible, recognized publisher. They write because they're passionate about what they do, and they want to share their competence so that it benefits others.

©Aubrey Malphurs, Ph.D.
www.malphursgroup.com