Flawless Consulting
Third Edition

A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used

By Peter Block

What's New?

Rather than an introduction, Peter Block begins with a recap of what has and hasn't changed since he revised his 2011 original version in 2013. Promising expectations for a world marked by **"a new consciousness for peace and well-being"** were pretty much dashed.

Instead:

"Our dependency on computers and technology has only intensified, and a decade into the millennium, we are at war, still addicted to fossil fuels, and concerned whether the economic system we have grown used to is still relevant. This means that living with a vulnerable present and an uncertain future is going to be a permanent condition."

With that in mind:

"This situation bodes well for the world of consulting. The more complexity, confusion, and uncertainty in our lives, the more we realize we cannot go it alone or keep doing what we have been doing. The demand for help and advice should keep growing."

But due to this "uncertainty of our lives, both personally and at work", with "more and more people functioning in a consultative stance?, which in essence means wanting to influence the direction and outcome of things, the challenge for consultant becomes how to accomplish change "when you do not have direct control".

One of Block's key starting points is to recognize today that the term '**consultant**' applies to people who he terms, "**used to be in charge**". He includes: **"bosses, teachers, preachers, doctors, sergeants, mayors, and not least of all, parents."**

IMPORTANT POINT: " *Permanent vulnerability and uncertainty demand a level of relatedness based on listening, authenticity, and not knowing. This is what makes command-and-control behavior increasingly obsolete."* I tend to refer to this as 'top-down'. .. 'closed door'. . .

All of this is critical. And in order to adopt this **'consultative'** stance, we need to **"develop our capacity for deeper relatedness and partnership or we will be looking for a new job sooner than our careful planning might have indicated."**

In stressing this need for change and reform, he stresses how consulting skills can particularly be used in two sectors that have badly needed it: **healthcare** and **education**. He feels that '**reform**' in the Healthcare sector has primarily been focused on "*cost control, who pays, and increasing the pressure on standardization*". His stance is that:

"Real reform in health care will come from changing our relationship with our service provider and having service providers change their relationship with each other. In consulting terms, we need more balanced contracting, more joint discovery, and a new dialogue."

He refers readers to a more complete discussion of this in Chapter Twelve where he provides a great example from a very special surgeon, Paul Uhlig.

His criticism of education's handling of 'reform' is that it's not really reform: " *It's just more controls and imposed standards masquerading as reform.". . ."True reform will shift our thinking about the culture of the classroom, accountability of the learner, and the relationship between teacher and student."'*

In Chapter Eighteen, he gives the example of an amazing high school teach, Ward Mailliard. Although I won't be covering either of these chapters in my summary, if your field is either healthcare or education, it's just one more reason why you should buy the book.

Acknowledging the fact that we now live in a virtual world where *"Soon we will be able to hold all our conversation, be entertained, find a life partner, and visually be with our family all on a handheld device",* he concludes:

"Despite the growth of the virtual world, our days are still occasionally populated with live human beings and when we are in the room with others, we need to get to the point and make the most of it. Playing roles, being vague, speaking in generalities, and getting to the point in the last five minutes, waste the uniqueness of having all our senses available when we are face-to-face. We want to take advantage of real meetings to become personally connected in ways powerful enough to overcome the distancing and isolating effects inherent in an electronic connection. Thus, the need for authenticity and directness about sensitive issues outlined in this book increases."

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And although Block's work from the very first edition, has been called, **"The Consultant's Bible**", after you read his definition of a **'consultant'**, you can see that this book's content will apply to ANYONE who is attempting to bring change and improvement to a company or organization:

The very beginning you must realize his distinction between a 'consultant' and a 'manager': *"A **consultant** is a person in a position to have some **influence** over an individual, a group, or an organization but has **no direct power** to make changes or implement programs."*

He contrasts this definition with that of a "**manager**":

*"A **manager** is someone who has **direct responsibility over the action**. The moment you take direct responsibility, you are acting as a manager."*

How about this surprising statement which, if you think about it, is absolutely true and yet it is different from the way most of us would think:

"Most people in staff or support roles in organizations are really consultants, *even if they don't officially call themselves consultants. Support people function in any organization by planning, recommending, assisting, or advising in such matters as these: Human Resources or personnel, Financial analysis, Auditing, Systems analysis, Market research, Product design, Long-range planning, Organizational effectiveness, Safety, Training and development, and many more."*

A third definition category involves the recipients of all this advice and he calls them "clients": *"The client is the person or persons whom the consultant wants to influence."*

Keep these three definitions in mind as you review this summary and as you can see, in most cases, the 'consultant' stays in that role during the attempt to bring about change with no direct control over the action to be taken. But, in some cases – some good; others not so good – the consultant – voluntarily or involuntarily - gets put into the 'managers' role with direct responsibility over the action   One of the key points that Block makes in the introduction and which he covers in Chapters 15 and 17 involves giving feedback:

> *"Giving feedback is part of every consulting or support effort, but almost every meeting is one where ideas or analyses are presented with the intent of improving or shifting a person's or organization's strategy or operation. We still spend way too much making **our** point, often our PowerPoint, without realizing that the purpose of most meetings is not to make a point, or express ideas or to sell something, **but to move something forward**.". . .."The action does not move forward when one person is talking a group of people are listening. **It is dialogue, interaction, doubts, and commitments that move the action forward."***

Peter also says that one other addition he has made to this edition "relates to the shift occurring in the organizational world from a primary focus on needs and deficiencies to a focus on possibilities, gifts, and strengths. The belief is that more change occurs when we focus on the future and our capacities rather than try to make sense of the past or even the present and look so much at problems and what is wrong. He covers this in Chapter Twelve and we'll cover some of those key points.

He concludes this "What's New" introductory section by emphasizing the critical importance of relationships for technical and business success. And although he feels that "The value of teams and relationships is now more widely accepted than it was in the past, at least intellectually. We may not be any better at working together, but at least we know it matters and want to create more cooperative workplaces, whether virtual or in person."

And yet as he concludes, "*Even now, with all the rhetoric given to relationship, personal development, and even spirituality, our institutions still operate as if strategy, structure and technology are what really matter.". . ."Relationships continue to treated as a necessary inconvenience – as if they have to be endured and wherever there is an opportunity to automate a transaction or communicate electronically, we take it."*