



Confronting the EXPERT MYTH

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

Have you ever thought, with all those experts out there in the business world, “Why do companies still have problems?” or “Why do so many experts fail when they come into organizations with their next-generation, usually high-priced solutions?”

Just imagine how many profit dollars are being directed to the following: continuous improvement, customer service, IT and technology leadership, marketing, branding and advertising, operations, organizational culture, sales, social media, supply chain management, talent management, training and development, and workforce engagement.

Some of these business areas have been around for a very long time, yet many problems in business still exist. So what gives?

From my experience, many experts do not tell the entire truth. They

deliver what they believe the client wants. After all, these experts rationalize, they are listening to the client’s needs and wants even though they may know a better, less costly, and even quicker solution.

For example, 99.9% of all problems are because of absent to ineffective to overall poor executive leadership. This leadership problem occurs within Fortune 100 international firms to local sole proprietors.

In the book, *Fail-Safe Leadership: Straight Talk About Correcting the Leadership Challenges in Your Organization*, Linda Martin and David G. Mutchler provide a checklist of conditions present in many organizations:

- ✓ Can’t do attitudes
- ✓ Communication problems
- ✓ Chronically sagging sales
- ✓ Duplication of effort
- ✓ Fear of making decisions
- ✓ High staff turnover

- ✓ Lack of personal accountability
- ✓ Micro-management
- ✓ Motivation difficulty
- ✓ Personal conflicts or power struggles
- ✓ Preponderance of consensus-driven decision making (i.e., cover your behind mentality)
- ✓ Productivity, quality, and time management issues
- ✓ Reactive rather than proactive thinking
- ✓ Unacceptable results

Each of these, when viewed separately, appears to be a problem. However, if experts would invest a little more time and be far more honest in their assessments, they would realize these are all symptoms of poor leadership. Of course, who wants to tell a client willing to pay thousands of dollars that you and your executive team are the first problem to be addressed?

When leaders fail to take the right action to make the right decision, symptoms continue to happen. “Indecision is a decision.” This is a truism.

These symptoms, resultant from all the indecisions of leaders, start sprouting up like dandelions heralding the arrival of spring. Soon, the dandelions start going to seed, and then even more symptoms are sown into the wind. Of course, some are buried into the lawn and sprout the following spring when leaders believe they have everything under control.

Additionally, the desire to make money overcomes ethical and affordable solutions. How often do we hear of an expert wanting to redesign a particular process such as the entire hiring procedure? That same expert is unaware that the redesign is out of alignment with the organization’s current strategies, structure, other processes, rewards, and people.

For example, the Association for Talent Development certifies that experts published an article about how training must be delivered over a longer period of time. They cited proven research that 50 percent of what is learned in a one-day workshop is lost the next day unless there is ongoing reinforcement. Next to this article, there was an advertisement for a one-day workshop.

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Assessments are another bottomless, profit-sucking money pit. For the most part, there are already a plethora of assessments with proven and established track records.

Many of these assessments are very affordable, yet consulting firms (experts) are more than willing to create another assessment because they are paid more money. The newly-created assessment, however, has not been statistically validated, and collected data may then give some false indicators.

Of course, there are those experts who do not even apply any assessments to the situation or problem. They know best because they have “seen” this or that hundreds of times before.

Imagine for a moment that you walked into your doctor’s office complaining of a headache. Immediately, without any diagnostic tests, he or she schedules you for surgery. What

would you do in addition to running as fast you could out of his or her office? For most, they would seek another opinion.

Experts who implement solutions without employing any diagnostic assessments for individuals to organizations are, in my humble opinion, committing malpractice. When an assessment is published by an outside firm, this suggests greater truth and validity. Also, an outside assessment helps to avoid solution failure.

Then there is the issue of ego, especially within professional consulting services as well as academia. Just recently, a very well-known sales expert suggested in his blog that the word “results” should be avoided by leaders but the word “expert” should be embraced. I reread this article several times and just shook my head in disbelief. This

particular individual is indeed very full of himself.

Such experts might tout, “My company or I have to create a customized solution,” which increases the fees. Again, there are many existing curricula that have proven track records. These are successful and generally free or very affordable solutions such as Six Sigma or the Lean Startup Methodology. The desire to put the organization’s own brand on it only increases the price and potentially reduces the ability to achieve results.

Years ago, I was exposed to Dr. Don Kirkpatrick’s “Four Levels of Evaluation.” At least once a year, if not more, some noted organizational or talent management expert attempted to sell the “Five” or “Six Levels of Evaluation.” Sometimes what has already been created works and does not need a revamp at a much higher investment.

Ego also surfaces when it comes to business executives making decisions

about whom to hire to solve their challenges. Their belief is that a noted, national or international expert is far better than a local, experienced provider. Of course, when the solution fails, those in leadership roles do not want to admit they made a mistake.

In addition to poor to failed leadership, experts often fail because of this one word: alignment. Unless solutions are aligned to what Jay Galbraith identified as the Star Model™, gaps will exist and become a fertile ground for all those dandelions.

The question then arises: how do I know, as a small business owner, sole proprietor, sales professional, or even a C Suite executive, what individual or company to select to help me overcome current challenges or barriers?

Believe it or not, the answer is at your fingertips, your keyboard, and phone.

Begin a search of local professionals with expertise in the area where you

are having problems. This search would include the following: viewing their LinkedIn profiles, visiting their websites, and reading their blogs or other postings.

When you feel you have found several potential “experts,” then connect with them, talk with them in person, if possible, and just get to know them. Learn their approach from beginning to end, and ask for a general ballpark investment to see if you can afford their solutions. Listen for their answer when you question the return on your investment. Review their LinkedIn recommendations or recommendations on their websites and speak to companies or individuals who have done business with them.

During the sales process, study the proposal for deliverables. What will this particular expert deliver to your business? Review the time line as well as anticipated results. In spite of what the noted sales expert said, in business, leadership results do matter.

After making a favorable decision to hire an “expert,” create a communication process where decision makers will receive weekly updates. This is a critical and often ignored step because by the time it is discovered the “solution” was not effective, the expert may potentially offer a “reason” and suggest an “add-on” to address this unexpected obstacle. Some experienced and results-focused professionals will include this communication process within their proposal.

Yes, qualified and caring business experts do exist. Just because their solutions are a lesser investment, do not discount their ability to get the job done. Experts do not have to cost an arm and a leg. They can support your future business growth provided they understand how your business makes and keeps money. **N**

Leanne Hoagland-Smith is the heurist for the next generation of talent management. Her ability to guide forward-thinking leaders in all industries facing new and repetitive problems, from people to operations, earned her inclusion in the 2013 Top 25 Sales Influencers by Open View Labs. Leanne looks forward to hearing from you at leanne@processspecialist.com.