ForeWord Reviews

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

Consulting Mastery: How the Best Make the Biggest Difference
Keith Merron
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This book shows readers (especially consultants) how to go beyond the conventional model of problem solving to a deeper level of insight, to help transform their clients and make a lasting impact. “In short, to move from being a problem solver to an empowering partner requires a fundamental shift in one’s inner stance as a consultant,” says the author. Merron uses scenarios to illustrate the qualities that enable this shift, such as integrity, confidence, humility, and strong self-esteem, along with the three keys to self-mastery and four other principles of conduct.

The book was developed from interviews with fourteen experienced consultants, as well as ten executives in client organizations who have worked extensively with consultants. Examples throughout the volume are based on the experience of the author and those he interviewed. Merron has years of consulting experience with more than two hundred worldwide companies, including Hewlett-Packard, WorldCorp, and the Healthcare Financial Management Association; is founder and managing partner of Avista Consulting Group; and wrote *Riding the Wave: Designing Your Organization for Enduring Success*.

Here, he transcends the conventional rules of consulting by presenting a more holistic view of how consulting can add value to a client. “The goal of consulting mastery is simple: to impact the fundamental patterns of the client organization in order to produce profound and deep change.” Masterful consultants partner with their clients to affect change that can transform the company, well beyond what the initial challenge may have appeared to be. It illustrates the advantages of a client-centered consulting approach over alternative consultant-centered, task-centered, payee-centered, and technique-centered consulting approaches. The client-centered consultant teaches clients how to solve their own problems rather than fixing the problem for them. Underlying principles are shared ownership of the process between client and consultant, deep learning and honesty, and full partnership.

“Too many consultants readily serve up tools, processes, and techniques while failing to appreciate the deep thinking and understanding that created them in the first place.” One example illustrates how a consultant helped a client company execute a Six-Sigma process by

steering them toward a pre-conceived answer, rather than guiding them to determine which decision was right for their own company. The second approach would have yielded better results because the client would have owned the outcome and been left “more capable than when the consulting process started.”

This book is geared toward consultants, but anyone in a position of hiring a consultant or working in a field of counseling, marketing, business analysis, or helping people and organizations would find it relevant. It’s written in an effective authoritative voice, the examples are insightful, and the author encourages readers to reflect on and apply the principles to their situations to achieve their own consulting mastery.

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