

7 Common Consulting Mistakes Your Physician Clients Want You To Avoid

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Consultants need to know how best to work with their physician partners for change in healthcare. Taking the steps to gain the trust and engagement of physicians is an investment in great outcomes. Resistance, lack of engagement, and missed deadlines are what consultants can expect if they don't consider the needs and mindset of physicians during a change process. The benefit to you and your clients when you do is greater ease, more fun and creating timely change.

The mistakes to avoid when working with physicians are so common that even experienced consultants make them. Avoiding these mistakes is most relevant when consultants are expected to provide expertise and solutions. By following these strategies, consultants can help themselves and their physician clients to be successful.

Seven common mistakes and how to correct them:

- 1) **Being vague about the purpose of the project.** Clearly state the challenges, process, and impact of the desired results. Your clients live in a diagnostic world and want to know the questions that need to be answered and why. Lack of transparency will erode trust and engagement.
- 2) **Limit the scope of the project.** Narrow your focus to what will be perceived as making the biggest difference. Consultants are perceived as making things more complicated than necessary. If

you can't narrow the scope, design the work phases so they are not seen as overwhelming in terms of time and information to process. Your clients will appreciate when what you add to their busy day is both specific and limited.

- 3) **Being unprepared in meetings.** Physicians have worked hard to be prepared and competent and value that in you. As most physicians are quite busy, they appreciate when you get to the point and make the information relevant to the practice of medicine. Be clear about how the change initiative is relevant to physicians and patients, as well as to the healthcare organization.
- 4) **Pushing your interpretation of the data.** Physicians are used to basing decisions on data. Share honest, relevant data and physicians will be more open to new ideas. Design the process so that the physicians are participating in the dialogue as well as examining the data to validate it themselves. Let them come to their own conclusions and incorporate their data based recommendations.
- 5) **Leading with a solution.** Focus on the physician as a unique individual. Nurture the relationship with your client, who often feels invisible as a person. Inquire about the physicians' concerns and views on the challenge or change initiative. Truly listen and respectfully acknowledge the physicians' perspectives, so they know their point of view has been heard, even if you feel that other ways to look at the situation exist.
- 6) **Meeting resistance with resistance.** Reduce resistance by giving your client control. Physicians have been taught to take control, to give orders. Look for opportunities to include your client in the in the decision-making process. Let physicians lead the planning phases and the teams that are responsible for implementing specific initiatives. Physicians most trust the perspective and intention of other physicians.

7) **Underestimating the power of acknowledgement.** Physicians are trained to put patients' needs above even their own physical needs. They will not reveal to you that they are tired, stressed, or even afraid. Recognize the physicians for who they are, their skill, and their commitment, even when things are not perfect. Acknowledging your client and their contribution, will go a long way to counteract the reality that they are already overworked and being asked to do even more. Your acknowledgement of the physicians will open the door to their greater receptivity in the future.

None of these mistakes is fatal, but any one of them could undermine your effectiveness. Reflect on both your mindset as a consultant and the mindset of your client. In most cases, a simple shift in behavior or thinking is all you need to up-level your performance and get better results for your clients.

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