Chapter 18

Ethics and the Shadow Side of Consulting

CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, consulting is the world's oldest profession. The first consultant was the Serpent in the Garden of Eden. Amidst a scene of unprecedented peace and tranquility, the Serpent, with the encouragement of top management, took it upon himself to assume an advisory role with Eve. When Eve followed his advice and picked the low-hanging fruit, the consequences were grave and long-lasting. So in addition to what some have called Original Sin, we now have the concept of Original Advice. We still feel the chill of this ancestral shadow cast over our work.

I raise the ethical side of consulting with some reluctance as the term “ethics” is one I like to avoid. Living in a glass house, talking about ethics can put the speaker in a position of judgment and righteousness that is false and hypocritical. Not the intent here; this chapter is meant more as confession than sermon, for there is a moral line in the consulting role that we have all stepped on or crossed.

Being clear about the dark side of consulting has a practical as well as a moral side. It makes a difference in the quality of our work, for when we get caught in our own self-interest or our need to assume a central or inflated role, our client feels it and withdraws from us for reasons rarely spoken.

I personally experience a shadow on the work because calling myself a consultant all these years has carried with it a certain uneasiness. There was a time on an airplane when I answered the question of what I did by saying I was a child photographer. Nice conversation stopper. When people ask you what you do for a living, and you decide to answer truthfully, as soon as you say “consultant,” you see their eyes glaze over as they search for a gentle way of asking whether you have ever had an honest job. Whatever their statement, I usually make light of the profession, thinking that if I can tell the jokes about consultants first, I will finesse the discomfort and ward off the other's cynical comments.

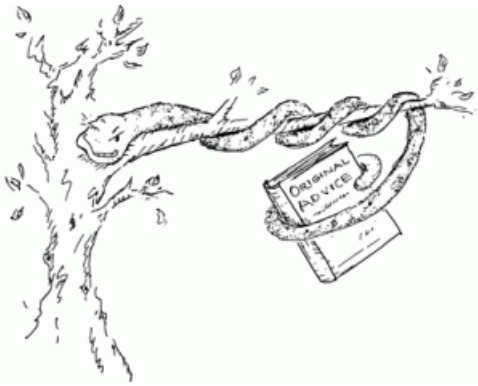
Twenty years ago, I began this book with my usual jokes about consulting, my favorite defense against criticism that contains the truth. I left them in the revised edition because, if anything, people's trust in the integrity of consultants has eroded even further. A popular magazine has a regular column about the exploiting nature of consultants. The business press has written about the cost and questionable value of many large consulting efforts, and about the inability of consultants to live according to their own advice. In November 1997 the *Wall Street Journal* reported that a well-known consultant and author confessed to revising his theories almost at the peak of their popularity; he found that in his passion for new structures, he had left people out of his thinking. Nobody's perfect.

So why this deteriorating confidence in consulting, even in the midst of enormous growth of the industry? I think the cynicism aimed at consultants is more about our ethics than about our competence or contribution. In the effort to avoid the discomfort associated with unflattering views of the profession, we maintain our sense of humor, but mostly deny our own culpability in deserving the culture's questions about our utility and value.

My intent in this chapter is to explore what might be deserved in the world's skepticism about whether consulting really brings the value that it promises. When consultants deny their own questions about both the value and the legitimacy of our stances in working with clients, we are feeding the cynicism and making the next generation of work more difficult.

The Promise

Part of the problem is that the promise of consulting is a commitment to care and to service. We promise to act in the interest of another, the client. When we can hold to that promise, we probably add real value and become legitimate. It is just hard to meet such a standard. What follows is an attempt to explore what interferes with our capacity to serve, even in the face of our best intentions.



Although most of the heat about the profession is about external consultants, the same conflicts exist with internal consultants and staff groups. The concern is certainly more urgent with external

consultants, but it also applies to those who consult within an organization. Staff groups are under great pressure to do the bidding of top management and often find it difficult to hold to their own values and beliefs. In this way they carry much the same burdens as external consultants. It is not accidental that internal staff groups are labeled “overhead items” or that staff groups are an early target of cost reductions and outsourcing.

Many internal staff groups also operate as virtual consulting businesses: They are self-funding, bill out their services, and experience the same tension between serving their own interests and doing what is best for their clients. And with the increasing cost pressure on most organizations, many are even free to extend their services to other, outside clients.

The Commercialization of Service

One fundamental tension in consulting work is between delivering service and the economics of the consulting unit. When a service becomes a business first and a service second, something fundamental about the work is changed. Most of us did not begin our consulting work with the business in mind: We were attracted to a set of ideas and trained in a set of skills. We also wanted to make a living. It wasn't until we became successful that we got caught between commerce and care.

There is an inherent strain between the economic demands of a consulting practice and the care and service we wish to offer in the interest of the client. Care comes when we can customize our service for each client, when something new is created with each client. The consultant's promise is most accurately fulfilled when the person selling the work is the person doing the work. This way the client knows exactly who will be doing the work after the decision to proceed. Care is delivered when we build the capacity of the client to design their own changes and the client is not dependent on the consultant. In a practice based on care, each client becomes important, and the marketing strategy is basically to do good work.

Consulting becomes commercialized when the service gets standardized and becomes a product to be marketed. The economics of a service business drive you in the direction of standardized or packaged service. Salaries are the major cost item, and one way to reduce labor costs is to make the service predictable. It takes a very experienced, and therefore high-cost, consultant or staff person to be able to create a strategy and service for each particular client. It takes a lot of experience for one person to be able to conceptualize the project, sell the project, manage the project, and do the work. One way to solve this dilemma is to, in effect, package the service so lower cost, less experienced people can manage and do the work. Then you only need highly experienced people in the front end of the project, doing the selling.

Many consulting firms and internal staff groups divide themselves into those who sell the work, those who manage the work, and those who do the work. As the overhead costs of the consulting unit come under more pressure, the drive to build sales and make repeat sales within each client organization becomes intense. At some point, the success of the practice gets measured by standard

business criteria—annual growth, margin, earnings, return on capital. At this point, commerce has become dominant over care.

The shift from care to commerce can occur in any size firm or staff unit. It often just happens to us, rather than being something we planned. It happens when what we do works, and it happens in many professions. Physicians, architects, and lawyers, for example, often find themselves driven more by the economics than the professional objectives of their practice.

The inherent pressure is to make a business out of a profession. We worry about how to create growth opportunities so we can keep good people. We believe we need a large group to offer a full range of services and to take on really big change efforts, and it takes money to support more services. Plus the culture places a high premium on economic success. But the commercialization of our profession is more a mind-set than a requirement of growth. It is a question of purpose and focus, and that is why it becomes an ethical question.

Growth Diminishes Can Undermine Service

The growing marketplace for consulting services has intensified the problem and also changed the industry. For example, in the large accounting firms, consulting services used to be a second cousin—something done because the client demanded it or the consultants themselves got restless with the more routine financial work they had been doing too long. There were the large consulting companies, but they were primarily experts in a particular aspect of business, such as marketing, regulatory requirements, or technical innovation. Services aimed at information systems and changing organization culture were not really on their radar screen.

Much of the growth of consulting has been riding the wave of the information explosion combined with the downsizing of industry. Most large organizations have found it more profitable to shrink and merge and outsource jobs; this mentality dominated the Eighties and Nineties and shows no sign of abating. This creates the challenge of how fewer people can do more work, and the consulting industry has been the beneficiary of this movement.

There has also been growth in the consulting services business because of the interest in quality improvement, better customer service, and changing cultures toward more team-oriented and involved workplaces. All of these goals are worthy, but what I want to explore is how the commercialization of our services has subverted their intent. I have picked four examples—you might come up with different ones—each of which has noble intent, is widely accepted, and has generally under-delivered on its promise.

The areas are *reengineering, performance management, leadership development,* and *change management.* Each of these areas of practice has power and relevance. Their intent is inarguable. Something shifted, though, when they become commercialized and popular. Here is a snapshot of what has been occurring.

The Reengineering Wave … Promising Magic

Reengineering is a good example of an idea that became the rage and consulting firms that made promises to the point they were unsustainable. After a good run, the work has fallen of its own weight. Left behind is a residue of something less than goodwill. We might say that the clients did not adequately implement what the consultants recommended, but that argument is too one-sided.

The idea that organizations should be structured according to the customer-driven work process rather than by discipline-driven vertical silos makes sense. It is a way to break up the bureaucracies that have made organizations unable to give customers a unique, quick, anytime-anywhere response. Popularized by Michael Hammer through his book and presentations, reengineering brought what used to be called "socio-technical systems redesign" into the mainstream. The idea had been around for a long time, but Hammer renamed it, expanded it, and made a market for it by connecting the methodology to the new customer environment.

It reached a point where whatever change we had in mind was called reengineering. Every department thought it was reengineering itself. I even heard individuals say they were in the process of reengineering themselves. The energy was more about becoming modern than becoming better. Reengineering became synonymous with restructuring and was sold by the large accounting and consulting firms with promises of a 30 to 50 percent return on the investment.

The bloom is now off the rose. A large fashion company spent $600 million in consulting fees alone to restructure itself and bring up-to-date information technology to its business. After years of investment, a leader of this company acknowledged publicly that the effort had not been successful and eventually 2,500 employees were reassigned, retired, or laid off to help, in effect, finance the venture.

The dark side of reengineering, which threatens the whole profession, is that the promises made to sell the work either were never fulfilled or could finally be achieved only by eliminating jobs on a wide scale. The goal of restructuring the work process for the sake of the customer was more

often than not unrealized. In fact many of the users of reengineering are now undoing its efforts because they found the concept unworkable. Some have even sued to get their money back.

Reengineering is a good example of two larger problems: how consultants take advantage of what is in vogue and how we pursue covert purposes. When an idea is fashionable it becomes, almost by definition, a cosmetic solution. When consultants offer a service primarily because clients want it, we have chosen commerce over care. If we were strictly a business you would say, What's the problem? Customer is always right. We only gave them what they asked for. Being also a service function, though, means that something more is due the client.

Clients have a right to expect the consultant to decide whether what the client is willing to buy will deliver what the client really needs. If the client manager asks for a service that will not help, or may even be harmful, then when does the consultant say no and turn away the work? It is a tough thing to do, especially for internal consultants.

The other questionable edge to consulting is a form of double-dealing, for example, when force reductions are packaged as organization improvement. Reengineering had some of this quality. Who can argue with restructuring for the sake of the customer? Organizations went through a long process of interviews, redesign teams, and extensive selling and training for the new system, when the real net result of the effort was the elimination of jobs with little real change in culture or function.

Performance Management … Let Me Do It for You

In a culture in which profitability and efficiency have become the priority, accountability becomes everyone's favorite word. We think that there is a relationship between holding ourselves and others more accountable and increasing performance. If we can just tighten our accountability grip, the organization would deliver more. This illusion creates a market for methodologies and consultant services that promise better gripping power.

There are consulting firms that guarantee concrete results in return for a fee. If you don't see the results, you don't pay the fee. This is the ultimate in performance consulting. How could a consultant make this kind of guarantee? Simple. Take over that segment of the business that you promise to improve. The consultant becomes a surrogate manager, and the line management clears the way and effectively steps aside. The people in the unit live under the power of the consultant, and generally the consultant delivers on the “performance improvement” by closer controls and ending with fewer people doing more jobs.

This is not really consulting. It is something we might call “in-sourcing”: bringing into the organization, on a temporary basis, surrogate managers who are willing to take a difficult stand, reduce head count, confront people in a way that the permanent, resident management is unwilling to do.

Even if the job needed to be done, the use of consultants in this way undermines the legitimacy of the consultant role. Consulting is no longer educational, advisory, or capacity building. Line managers cast the consultant in the role of the Serpent in order to protect their own good image

with their own people. When we go along with this, it may be good for our business, but hard on the service dimension of the profession.

There are milder forms of performance consulting, the main problems of which have more to do with taking measurements than with taking charge. There is a resurgence of the belief that anything you cannot measure does not exist. And internal staff groups are under more and more pressure to be more business oriented and return-on-investment minded than in the past. Hard to argue with in theory.

The risk is that staff groups will no longer be in the business of cultural change or confronting the culture with aspects of its own blindness. Performance consulting will drive staff groups to be more like the culture that surrounds them. This will reinforce services that treat only symptoms and seek acceptance at the cost of some greater impact than the consultant or staff group has the potential to make.

There is great pressure for this in the human resource area. The HR function comes under siege because much of its value is hard to quantify. In periods when people concerns are in remission, the push to "rationalize" HR almost leads to its elimination. There has to be a way for qualitative services to demonstrate their value without sacrificing the power of their unique perspective.

Leadership Development … Entertainment Tonight

Another economic growth area of consulting comes from our love for leadership. We have been in search of leaders since the late Seventies. Before that we were in search of managers. We now have a leadership industry fueled more by training and presentations than by consulting. The industry is led by authors and ex-chief executive officers who, in many cases, have found more meaning teaching leadership than providing it. The headliners come not only from private industry, but also from politics, sports, and the government.

The high end of the leadership industry is probably more accurately called the "edutainment" industry, for its emphasis is more on entertainment than on learning. At the top the pay is good, the hours are reasonable, and the expectations are pretty low. No one asks about the financial return to the organization as a result of a celebrity presentation. They just wish the celebrity could have stayed around longer. From edutainment to the one-or two-week immersion events, the number of leadership courses offered within companies and as public conferences has grown rapidly. I have even been the beneficiary of this trend.

One large company required a week of training for the top two thousand executives. Forty sessions run for fifty executives at a time. Monday was globalization, Tuesday was finance, Thursday was product innovation, and Friday was a talk with the top. Wednesday was a day on empowerment, and I had written a book on the subject. So I showed up as the centerfold of the week and talked about creating an empowered workforce, a subject of greatest interest to myself and those sitting in the back of the room who sponsored the program.

Most of the participants were there to get their ticket punched. Some were very interested, some seemed somewhat engaged in what they were learning, most were going through the motions. I finally withdrew from the program and as a postscript to the experience, I received from the support staff a special goodbye present. The four people who handled the secretarial and logistical duties for the program gave me a T-shirt. In gold letters on the back were the words "Empowered My Ass." A little crude perhaps, but an apt commentary on the impact of the effort.

All of the emphasis on leadership these days is disturbing because it holds on to the belief that organizations are the creation of those who run them and will forever live in their shadow. Training its leaders becomes the centerpiece strategy for improving the organization. There is little evidence that training leaders has any impact on organizational change, and there is little accountability for the investment made in leader training.

This is in sharp contrast to the scrutiny given training at lower levels, which really is a form of elitism. Train supervisors for two hours a week for six weeks and we are asked to defend the investment. Send the top management team to a university for four weeks, and the question of value received is limited to asking the participating managers whether they liked the program. Four weeks in Cambridge, Charlottesville, Evanston, Palo Alto—what's not to like?

Change Management … Contrast Between Intention and Form

Faced with increasing competition and a loss of customers, managers decided in the Eighties that what was needed was a change in culture. Pressures for better quality and sharper customer focus added to the traditional pressures for cost reduction and accountability. We needed workplaces in which people acted as owners of the institution, employees felt empowered and involved, change was welcomed, and fear was driven out.

To achieve these goals, managers brought in consultants to end command-and-control and bring in more participation. Bosses were to become coaches, employees would now be called associates;

all were to work in teams, even across functions. It reached the point where employees were to evaluate their bosses, just as college students have been evaluating their teachers.

All of this was a large undertaking, which created a logical need for consulting help. In many ways this culture change effort fed the interest in reengineering and leadership and performance consulting. The ethical question arises from the disparity between the claims and the reality. The promise of culture change was essentially that a shift in power was needed: Teams close to the work had to have more control over how the work was done and how money was spent.

Much of the consulting that accompanied this, however, was done in a way that undermined a true resurgence of worker power and choice. To begin with, we believed that the workers were presently incapable of exercising more choice without intensive training. They had to be given empowerment tools. They had to be taught to work in teams. They had to be persuaded that they should act in ways that serve the well-being of the business. And it was the consulting companies that owned these tools and methods of persuasion, which they sold through a series of training and consulting products to the employees, albeit paid for by the organizations.

The consultants' marketable tools were not limited to training products. There were major projects to define the new competencies that would be required in the new age. There were new assessment and measurement products that would help gauge the progress of the change effort. There were major communications programs to publicize and explain the new culture both to employees and to the outside world.

The questions I want to raise about these efforts are not really about their effectiveness, even though the reports are mixed on how much of a given culture actually changed, depending on who you talk to. If you talk to the top management who sponsored the effort or the internal and external consultants who implemented it, they think the effort was very successful and the culture has indeed shifted.

But if you talk to employees in most companies that made the investment, you generally find fear is still a daily part of their lives; they work in some teams, but individualism is still the dominant mode of operation; and while they may have more budget and spending authority than before, top management is still very much in control and patriarchy is alive and well.

The question of whether the culture has shifted becomes almost a projection exercise for the person asking. Whatever you want to see, you can find evidence to support it. What is more disturbing to me is the way that the consultants and managers approached the task of making organizational changes. Whenever the change effort serves to build the business of the service provider more than the client, or when the change effort serves to simply reinforce the existing culture and belief systems about control and power, then the work is open to question. Here are the practices to question:

They Are the Problem; They Need to Change, We Don't

In defining the lower levels, and often middle management, as the “problem,” change management reinforces the patronizing and imperial attitudes of management. There is collusion between

consultant and top management in deciding that it is the rest of the organization that needs changing. There is the widespread illusion that top management either doesn't need to change or all they need is a quick study, so they get a half-day version of the training that takes other employees three days to absorb.

There sometimes is recognition—or at least rhetoric—that the top needs to change also, and many top teams have worked on their own relationships as part of a strategy to bring more teamwork to the organization. But most of the time the thinking is that the real change needs to take place at lower levels. When consultants affirm this belief and become its main economic beneficiaries, we are on thin ice.

The dilemma was most evident in the reengineering rage. Very few reengineering efforts began by focusing on the job of the person signing the check. Very few efforts resulted in reducing the number of jobs at the level where the project was commissioned. When the promise was to restructure the work around core processes, the real impact was usually to rationalize a reduction in force.

Using Assessment as a Way to Market Services

In many cases consultants are engaged to define a problem or to assess "training needs." Too often it turns out that the training *needs* identified are best met by the training *services* and *programs* offered by these same consultants. This fit between diagnosis and prescription is in fact a business strategy for many consulting firms. Some even give away the assessment as a loss leader for future business.

To make the strategy credible, the consultants offer a false customization of their product. The assessment or training product stays constant, but is cosmetically altered to look like a unique offer to each customer. No matter how "customized" or "tailored," each training program is only superficially different from the last, and the consulting firm is the economic beneficiary of their own supposedly objective analysis.

Colluding with Cosmetic Change

In the early Nineties the Association for Quality and Participation found that 73 percent of large companies surveyed said they had an employee involvement program, but these programs had impacted only 13 percent of the jobs within those companies. This spread defines the gap between promise and reality. The growth in employee involvement occurred at the same time organizations were eliminating levels of management and reducing the labor force as a means to greater productivity.

While employee participation and culture change were genuine in some companies such as Ford and Harley-Davidson, for many companies they were a way to put an attractive face on the real objective of contraction and belt tightening. Consultants became an ingredient in the cosmetics. There is an intolerable strain between an institutional promise of participation, or empowerment, or caring for the customer, and a consulting change process that uses language like "driving down change," or "taking the vision and drilling it down through the organization." What you

end up with is high-control management, shoulder to shoulder with high-control consultants "selling" and "installing" participative restructuring, empowerment, and the illusion that people are the "number one asset of the institution."

If an organization believes in high control, speaks high control, and hires consultants to tighten it all up, this is well and good. When consultants sell services to create high-involvement packages that mask the reality that business will continue as usual, then we deserve the arrows we receive.

Who Takes Credit?

Assessing the value of a professional service is difficult. The wish is to attribute to the consulting effort direct cost savings or improvement in performance. Although the need to prove our value is important, when consultants take credit, it is most often an exaggeration of our role and inflation of its worth. Unless the consultant has become a surrogate manager and taken over the management task, no credit accrues; organizational results are earned by those living in the system.

As a side comment, consultants are predisposed by role and personality to self-inflation. In fact, the role almost demands arrogance. Clients want someone to lean on, someone who seems to have answers to unsolvable problems. Plus, when meeting a new client, the consultant has maybe an hour to make contact with the people, read the situation, make suggestions, define a plan, and negotiate general price and terms. Not a job for the meek.

Plus, if you find a consultant who also likes to conduct training, give presentations at conferences, and write books, you have found a person who likes the spotlight and usually partakes in all the protestations of humility that make it all plausible. With all this, the instinct to take credit is even more understandable.

The reality, though, is that the risks of change—and its payoffs—belong to the line organization. Courage, will, and the persistence to see a change through are required of the managers and employees, not of consultants. We may contribute greatly at key points, but when we list their

cost savings and performance improvement in our brochures and publicity, we in some way have overstated our role at the expense of the client. This is true even when they give us their permission to use their results for our own benefit.

Seller Beware

When I reflect on the ethical snares we face, the most surprising one is the willingness of line managers to follow the fashions and buy what is popular. When one high-profile company and executive starts claiming victory with a new approach, the approach is transformed from service into fashion. No matter that reengineering author Michael Hammer states that 70 percent of reengineering efforts will fail, everybody wants one. Maybe each organization is arrogant enough to believe that it will be among the 30 percent that succeed, but most are wrong. Many of the largest consulting efforts never deliver on their promise. Once the fashion parade begins, though, there is no stopping it, and we consultants participate and profit from it.

Every organization claims it desires to be number one, a leader in its field, a center of innovation and creativity. Yet, when it comes time to experiment with a new strategy, management wants to know where else this idea has worked. If some other high-profile company has done it, we will do it. If we are to be the first, let us wait. Consultants benefit from this caution by offering safety.

Consulting firms make a living by giving legitimacy to a manager's efforts to sell an idea internally. Or to play the bad cop in pushing unpopular decisions, rationalizing cutbacks, implementing get-tough, back-to-basics strategies. It is the timidity of our captains of industry that drives these uses of consultants, but we need to own the nature of our participation.

Owning the Shadow—Some Thoughts on What to Do

For each profession, what began as a calling at some point became a business. We enter our professions because that is the work we want to do. As we succeed, we get pulled from the work itself and get drawn into managing the work. The pressure to sustain and succeed pushes our attention from how to deliver quality service to how to build a successful business. The tension between the two is inevitable. It is a paradox that has no simple answer.

Consulting is also a service, and so customers are likely to project qualities on you that you do not possess. In a sense, the client looks for hope where little exists. Seeking a consultant has an element of seeking a super-someone, be it man or woman. So there is a willingness from the client to demand and expect more than we may be able to offer.

In the face of this, there are some steps, or at least ways of thinking that will at a minimum raise our consciousness about our contribution to the cynicism and doubt that infect the consulting industry. At best we may find a way of working where the longing that brought us into the work can be realized.

Say No As Often As You Say Yes

Consultants should make their own decisions on which projects to accept. We should say no to projects as often as we say yes. There are many reasons to back away from business. Clients often want us to treat a symptom. They think training or restructuring will solve their problem, when it will only postpone resolution. Say no when the chemistry between you and the client is not good. Be careful when the client has expectations of you that you cannot fulfill. Say no to a five-dollar solution for a fifty-dollar problem.

Stay True to Your Worth

Stop measuring the success of your internal staff consulting work by the size of your staff, the volume of work you can generate, or the approval rating of top management. If you are an external consultant, don't judge your practice by the sales volume of your business, return on equity, or margins. Setting high growth targets for your business will force you and others to take marginal business. It will push new services into the marketplace before they are fully developed. Your ambition will also be sensed by the client, and although they might say yes today, they will feel used over time.

Start measuring your work by the optimism and self-sufficiency you leave behind. Consulting is fundamentally an educational and capacity-building function. You need to be economically self-sufficient, true, but that is not the point. You are successful when the clients feel more accountable for their own system, more able to learn by themselves in the future, more confident

and powerful in creating an organization they believe in. These are qualitative measures, but they are knowable if we pay attention.

Grow on Your Own Terms

Accept the fact that the work you have chosen will most likely and appropriately remain a boutique business. Professional practice is the point, not the size of the practice. For external consultants, decide how much money you need to live on and how many days you are willing to work, peg your rates to that equation, and avoid conversations with other consultants in which they will ask how busy and successful you are.

If there is more demand for your services than you can handle, give the business away. Build a network of people who do what you do and you respect and send the business to them. Don't take a finder's fee, or talk about mergers and partnerships that are driven by economic opportunity. If this seems bizarre and counter-cultural to you, it means you are on the right track.

Show How Everybody Counts

The whole system is your client. All parts of it need to be supported, to learn, and to be fully informed. Ensure that the client manager making the decision to hire you is as vulnerable to the effects of the change effort as others at lower levels of the organization. If a project begins as a way to control or change others, it will be very difficult to turn its focus back to where it began. Real change has to be chosen, it is a voluntary act. If we are in the business of joining with the top to change others, we have become an agent of top management—and a part of the problem. We have become a stealth operation that will eventually undermine trust and make it harder the next time around.

Ask whether you would be willing for all members of the client organization to be witnesses to the selling and planning conversations you have with the client—a fresh-air test to the promises we make and the plans we develop. Meeting this test would change many of the conversations. It would be harder to blame people not in the room and harder to plan for the transformation of others.

Leave It All Behind

Commit yourself to the concepts of “home schooling” and building capacity. Clients have the capacity to learn and create for themselves the future they thought they needed a consultant to provide. Your job is fundamentally an educator, not a problem solver. You may have to problem solve in the short run, but over time you need to develop ways for people to learn about your expertise. Be a support system for your clients' self-sufficiency.

And, Finally, Forgive

In thinking about these conflicts and paradoxes, forgiveness is required. No one can fully live according to his or her beliefs. That is why we are called humans. In fact that is why, in the first consulting act, God suggested to the Serpent that he chat with Eve. By eating the apple, she and Adam lost their paradise and gained their humanity and all the freedom and flaws that go with it.

What we can do with our freedom is tell the truth, at least to ourselves, about the choices we make. If we take business because we need the money, so be it. If we over-promise because that is the only way things will move forward, if we seek too much approval from the top, if we are swept along with a fad and find ourselves mimicking the language of others—all of these are forgivable.

What is hard to forgive is self-delusion and positioning ourselves as a cut above our clients and others who do our work. This is pride and hubris and it seems to come with our working papers. It is our own awareness and courage to see who we are that enables us to offer the service and care that is the best of the profession. And maybe some day I will be less embarrassed by my choice of work and, better yet, can stop telling bad consultant jokes.