

# Book Reviews

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The Consultative Approach: Partnering for Results! Virginia LaGrossa and Suzanne Saxe. 1998. San Francisco: Jossey Bass/Pfeiffer. 192 pages.

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**THE CONSULTATIVE APPROACH** is defined as "partnering with others to produce optimum results and simultaneously build trust and commitment." This concept embodies the spirit of the quality management profession and provides a mechanism for a collaborative process that increases the chance of success. The book provides a partnering strategy action plan that clearly shows how real people at all levels of an organization can use a professional partner to resolve issues that confront them in the workplace. It accomplishes this through utilitarian management models, elucidating exercises, practical worksheets, and informative case studies that are derived from the authors' experience and research.

In the first section of the book, LaGrossa and Saxe open their presentation by examining the role of a partner and the importance of expertise in both the areas of people and process. The authors cleverly illustrate the relation of process and people balanced on an "expertise" fulcrum. This powerful image provides the reason why an initial partnership might be established between a quality professional and an executive, operations, or administrative manager. The synergy between these individuals is shown to progress through various stages to the point where a long-term open relationship of trust and mutual benefit is achieved.

A funnel is another helpful image that is developed to illustrate how expertise is shared between collaborating partners. The funnel is used to show how experience is channeled and synthesized into specific findings about the issues at hand. This information is further compressed into relevant statements as it progresses to the narrow end of the funnel and is finally expressed as an expertise statement. This visual metaphor implies that focus is a key element in dealing with an issue and that communication must be succinct.

The second section of the book deals with the art of managing client interactions. Here a linear model is employed to illustrate the process. It begins with a readiness stage that suggests that consultants prepare for any client interaction by preparing themselves mentally and physically.

Specifically, this means that distractions should be minimized. The model's next point is to define the interaction's goal, which is needed to assure that the discussion stays focused. Once this is done the final four steps, including a feedback loop, involve: questioning, listening, refining, and responding with questions. The dialog that will emanate from this process will be rich, meaningful, and germane to resolving the issue at hand.

The third section of the book, entitled "Journey to Success," puts the process together in four phases: creating the work agreement; defining the key issues and solution ideas; gaining commitment for recommendations; and implementing the plan and following up. Joyce Bennett, total quality manager at United Defense, provides a testimonial to the effectiveness of the process. Her brief statement detailing how she successfully used the first phase of the consultative process to define "how we were going to work together and what was expected. It was like the rebirth of the project. Once the meeting was over, we both felt clear and ready to roll and agreed to check in periodically to make sure we were still on track"(p. 101). Bennett's enthusiasm for the process is typical of the various testimonials given by other fervent supporters of the methods developed by LaGrossa and Saxe. The entire process is reviewed in the final part of the book that consists of one chapter. Here the process is outlined in a nine-step "Partnering Strategy Action Plan," along with the supporting graphics.

This summary provides a good working document to use the ideas and suggestions presented in the body of the text. A glossary and list of resources and references are included to assist readers to develop a full understanding of the vocabulary and theoretical source of the process.

In final analysis, LaGrossa and Saxe have contributed more than a how-to handbook on partnering. Their book provides an approach based on solid academic research and extensive field-testing. It truly provides a road map that will guide a quality professional on a "Journey to Success."

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