

INTERACTION CONSULTANTS



Self-Help vs. Professional Help

When in distress, many persons these days are turning to self-help books, seminars and well-marketed schemes promising a better life following a plan laid out in books and recordings.

The self-help material, even when provided with step-by-step instruction is always aimed at a general market within the target audience. It is never tailored to the needs of a specific individual because the specific individual is unknown to the self-help helper.

To the person in distress, this means he or she will have to sort through, at times hundreds of pages to find the nugget that may apply to them in their situation. Further, when seeking self-help, many persons are unable to recognize their own contribution to their distress and hence even when faced with potential solutions, they are unable to make use of it as it goes by unrecognized of value. Thus a good many persons appear to be on a quest, searching through the volumes of self-help material, trying and trying different things, yet still finding themselves as distressed as when they began.

Professional help offers the person very specific feedback and guidance, tailor made to the person and circumstance. Hence the likelihood of relieving distress is greater. Further, in the event the person is unable to recognize their own contribution to distress, the professional can draw this to their attention. In so doing, the person can then more directly seek to change themselves and their conditions.

As with finding a decent self-help book, persons are well advised to find a credible and experienced therapist. Training and years of practice matter greatly with regard to receiving good therapy, guidance or direction.

Typically the more years the helper has practiced, the more honed their skills at detecting issues and

offering meaningful guidance. Notwithstanding, in any therapy situation, it always remains to the person seeking help to heed the input of the therapist and make good use of the guidance provided.

If you have been on a quest, seeking to improve yourself or a situation without success, consider professional help next. It can assist people get off the merry-go-round of ups and downs of hope and failure, commonly associated with self-help adventures.

Be forewarned however. You may consider yourself an expert in psychology owing to explorations into the world of self-help, but your explorations may have only served to cloud the real issues before you.

Many professional do not indulge themselves in the world of self-help material and will likely be unfamiliar with the myriad of self-help offerings, in favour of their training and experience in more theoretical and research oriented materials from the professional social science literature. It is like the difference between a home remedy and real medical help. Don't expect the physician to necessarily be acquainted with the home remedy; their concern requires a more scientific basis. So too with professional helpers.

If you chose to enter the world of professional help, it is likely time to put the self-help material away. Now you are on a different path.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.