

Advice: Why Many Eyes See More Than One

“Refuse good advice and watch your plans fail; take good counsel, and watch them succeed.” –Proverbs 15:22 MSG

I was once under the gun to hire an associate to work with our business partners. I needed to recruit, interview, and fill the open position within two weeks or I wouldn't be able to hire *anyone* for that position. And an empty role meant that the work and relationship management would fall on my plate.

Steve seemed like a great candidate. However, a couple of key leaders warned me: “Don't hire him. He's not a good fit. If you do, it will be a mistake.” And yet, a trusted peer highly recommended Steve: “He has the right experience and transferable skills. With a little coaching, he'll be great.”

I moved swiftly and selfishly to hire Steve.

Fast-forward one year.

While Steve was hired into a harsh work environment and we believed he could break through, he never gained traction with his assigned business partners or market. The business partners demanded more than Steve could deliver. When Steve stumbled, I had to compensate.

Even though I had ten other team members and was accountable for eighteen markets, I spent 80 percent of my time with Steve and his specific territory. I didn't want Steve to fail. I saw his success as my responsibility since I'd decided against others' counsel. I wanted to prove that I could help Steve reach his potential.

Over time, his key stakeholders rejected him because of a perceived lack of credibility. Steve was no longer invited to

meetings or trade rides and lost his ability to influence or add value. I shared the business partners' feedback with Steve along the way. Trying to support him, I continually spent time helping him solve problems and discuss his concerns. I always encouraged him. And I was genuine with him. We built a plan to improve his performance and connection with the business partner. But Steve didn't follow through. He'd lost heart.

I realized that I couldn't develop Steve as I'd thought. His skillset and motivational fit weren't right for the role. I also realized I'd made a mistake. I'd listened to advice that validated my predetermined choice and immediately discounted differing opinions.

Why? Because I saw *potential*, or so I told myself. I'd heard what I'd wanted to hear and ignored the ultimately correct guidance provided by others. Acting out of arrogance, I believed that I could single-handedly develop Steve's analytical, relationship-building, and leadership skills—and that proved not to be the case.

A change needed to happen for Steve's benefit, for my team, for our business partners, for the company—and for me. Ultimately, Steve was placed on a performance improvement plan and eventually exited from the organization.

Looking back, here's what I learned about advice:

Seek many opinions

This Latin phrase is right: *vident oculi quam oculus*—many eyes see more than one. When you face a difficult decision, consult multiple advisors. Seek the opinions of those with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and thinking styles.

These counselors should have integrity and trustworthiness. They should listen well, think deeply, possess an optimistic outlook, be strategic, and be grounded in reality. When you

receive advice, ask: Is this advice honest, actionable, and timely?

John C. Maxwell says, “If you combine the thoughts you have and the thoughts that others have, you will come up with thoughts you’ve never had!”^[i]

Be an *unselective* listener

Even though I sought wise counsel from others, I selectively listened to what they said. I sought validation, not guidance. I pieced together what I wanted to hear and rationalized my decision.

Admittedly, I had my own agenda, I was stubborn, and I acted out of arrogance. The Bible says, “Fools are headstrong and do what they like; wise people take advice” (Proverbs 12:15 MSG). If I’d listened early on, Steve and I wouldn’t have suffered through tough circumstances. When seeking counsel, objectively listen to others and don’t filter your thoughts with predetermined bias.

Pray always

I didn’t pray about my decision to hire Steve and moved without consulting God. It became a mess. But I did pray amid the mess and God was faithful.

For believers, we need to lift *everything* in prayer, and it should become a lifestyle for us. The Bible says, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:17 ESV). Take every moment and opportunity to pray. Pursue God’s divine understanding, discernment, and wisdom. Make it a continual conversation with God and a way of life. If you do, God will guide you, your decisions, and your circumstances.

Consider

- Do you have trusted, integrous advisers who will provide diverse points of view?
 - When you pursue their counsel, are you looking for guidance or validation?
 - Are you willing to listen and suspend judgment?
 - Will you pray about the advice you receive and the decision you will make?
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[\[i\]](#) John C. Maxwell, *Thinking for a Change: 11 Ways Highly Successful People Approach Life and Work* (Center Street, 2005).