

The best advice I ever gave...

Yes, I know, the headline is usually the best advice I ever got.... But any advice I give is advice I've developed over decades of working with physicians and executives in collaborative, advisory and other working relationships. The advice I give is based on work and rework from experiences others were kind enough to afford me. So, here it is:

1. You're the best expert in whatever endeavor you are choosing to pursue.
2. Never over-estimate the knowledge of your audience.

If you're a physician seeking career transition, you probably have a hard time considering yourself an expert in your newly chosen field or endeavor. I know from experience, many, many of my clients are asking for help finding some job where they will be "mentored" for a period of time while they gain the confidence they believe they need to perform. Well, mentoring is called a residency and they don't offer that many residencies in business. So, you're on your own. That may sound harsh, but in reality, you're best on your own, and not trying to act in someone else's shadow.

The reality is simply this, you really do know more than you will give yourself credit for, and let's face it, whether in an exam room or a surgical theater, you have pretty good instincts and judgment.

Physicians usually carry the same attitudes towards risk or taking chances they have in practice into the business world. As an old friend said to me when I asked about his new, nonclinical job, "It's great Bob. No matter what I do, nobody is going to die!" So, just as you do in surgery, trust yourself and your own instincts more than you trust anyone else. But, again, just as you do today, be aware of your surroundings, and look for the opportunity to learn something from everyone you meet. Just don't sell yourself short.

Most physicians are knowledge experts.... That's a distinct management style that various researchers have characterized as those who *lead from the front, relying on personal knowledge, expertise and strength of character. They lead by example.* I further characterize knowledge experts or knowledge specialists as individuals absent any real management process. That's not a criticism, but a 30-plus year observation of physicians who simply "do." When I ask physicians about their approach to managing staff, I'm usually told, they don't. That is, they don't really like telling people what to do, they simply expect staff to know their jobs and fill in appropriately. Having to actually direct work activities, define job descriptions and responsibilities and address staff performance issues is not attractive to the vast majority of physicians with whom I work.

However, a side effect of being a knowledge expert/specialist is very often assuming other people share your perspective, your capabilities and your intuitive level of knowledge. That is,

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just as when you summon staff in your office with very few words and they perform properly, physicians too often believe they can communicate an idea, a concept or their objectives with great brevity and still get their points across – after all everyone you’re working with is very smart – right?

Yes, they are smart, but smart doesn’t translate into knowing what you know, or knowing the context of what you are saying. I’ve seen more business presentations fail from a lack of detail than from an over-abundance of detail. It’s easy to say, “I’ll skip this slide because I know from our conversation you already understand this information....” Than it is to say, “It’s obvious you have no clue to what I’m talking about, so I’ll restart my presentation at a more remedial level.”

You’re used to dealing with experts just like yourself. In the nonclinical world expertise, as you would define and apply it, is very different, much more nuanced and you always want to be absolutely certain your “audience” (whether one person or 1,000) is on the same page as you.

Cogent is the critical word in business communications. Be complete without being laborious or verbose.