Help! What’s the meaning of help?

Dale Briers, Career Practitioner from Perth Australia, and founder of the Collaborative Career Conversations LinkedIn group asks what mental image do we create when we use the word ‘help’ with our clients?

People routinely react to tragedy and catastrophic events by helping. This is a noble and altruistic trait that comes naturally to many. Particularly when we are witnessing terrible events via television and other media from our own safe and secure environments. We are galvanised to react and provide support in a myriad of ways such as volunteering, humanitarian or financial aid. Some may say we are hard wired to help.

Is career development about helping? Logically thinking, this is absolutely the case.

Yet, what image and relationship do we create when we offer to “help” our client? My personal and professional philosophy regarding career development is that I am an educator, facilitator and guide. I endeavour to “assist” my clients. This is closely aligned with many of the teaching philosophies that are significant to me. In particular the collaborative learning pedagogies presented by educators such as Barrie Bennett, Carol Rolheiser and Jeanne Gibbs underpin this perspective.

So, do we help or do we assist in career development? I know that this may sound like a play of semantics. Assisting others to make well informed decisions about their career presents a partnership model. Partnership models can be a very powerful resource. A great macro example of this is the town of Otorohanga in New Zealand (please excuse an Aussie citing a great New Zealand example). [we positively encourage you, Dale! Ed]

The initiatives and shared resources rallied by Otorohanga’s mayor, Dale Williams, were focused on helping the youth of the town. Yet, everything I have read and seen about this amazing project was focused on collaboration and finding ways to assist the entire region. The leadership team focused on developing a broad strategy to address the requirements that would promote youth engagement in Otorohanga. By all accounts these strategies were very successful. A key element of this partnership model was that the people involved took responsibility for the actions that needed to be taken. They were not waiting for help.

In our professional roles using a partnership model offers significant benefits for our clients. There is an ancient and enduring saying based around the Greek Philosophers - "Know thyself". Knowing ourselves helps us understand others. In the careers field, our role is to clearly understand our clients "as they know themselves".

When we commit ourselves to assist our clients, we have the potential to take on a far greater significance to them. Some may be familiar with “the guide on the side” analogy from the teaching profession (King, 1993, p. 30). I don’t think I am sermonising on our individual professional practice, and the way in which we should work with our clients, when I say this can be applied to many situations in life and terms such as mentor sit well in describing the actions that we may take with our clients.

Whether we “assist” or “help” our clients, there are foundation elements that facilitate this process. Paramount to this is meeting the needs and expectations of the person we are working
with. Perhaps, for many practitioners ensuring that the client is able to make informed decisions about their career planning is critical expectation. Assisting the client with career decision-making strategies and resources comes to the heart of our professional role. Personally, I find this is the exciting bit. Developing a new awareness of career opportunities and skills with a client is fun. This is where the client starts to assist me. Meaning that we are starting to learn from each other and our partnership model begins.

The success of our partnership is measured by the quality of the outcomes for both of us. Specifically, if it is evident that we now have a greater knowledge of the career development strategies that are most relevant right here, right now. The client is able to take this and apply in their daily lives. And, the practitioner takes this learning experience and places it in their professional toolbox.

Realistically it does not matter if we use words such as help or assist. Perhaps, the true measure of ‘help’ is our desire to contribute to others through our professional work.

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References

