

Second Opinions: What's the best way to give valuable advice?

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Anyone can give advice. But just because someone spouts their opinion, doesn't mean it's the best advice for you.

Say your colleague is experiencing a stomach ache and you tell him/her to take antacid tablets. Though it may seem like a quick fix, it might not address the root cause of the problem. Therefore, it's not easy to give correct advice. It's even more challenging for us to give professional advice as a professional accountant.

I believe that seeking and giving advice is central to effective leadership and decision-making. Yet, managers seldom view them as practical skills they can learn and improve. Here are steps to take when providing valuable advice.

Firstly, start by gathering necessary information about the issues through questioning and listening. Use follow-up questions to deeply understand and identify the root cause and unique features of the issues. Avoid information overload, which can create a loss of focus. Try not to conclude a matter primarily based on the prima facie characteristics nor presume the root cause of certain similar issues would be the same. Going back to the example above, a stomach ache may not always be caused by too much acid inside of the stomach.

Secondly, remember that good communication is done by keeping the intended beneficiary in mind. Critically analyse the information gathered and formulate the tactics with your professional knowledge and experience. This process involves identifying key objectives, developing an appropriate overall strategy, prioritizing executable action plans, and, more importantly, integrating various advice into solutions to meet the expectations of the recipient.

Finally, one size does not fit all. Consider, select and adopt the most effective manner of communicating your proposed solutions by taking into account the personality of the recipient. Effective communication is best done with a caring, attentive and personal touch; some people may prefer to receive a proposed solution over coffee.

The above skill sets can be developed and strengthened throughout one's professional journey. The Institute's new Qualification Programme (QP), in particular the integrated Capstone workshop, puts a strong emphasis on developing and accessing higher-order enabling skills, such as problem identification and solving, critical and lateral thinking, and effective communication skills to equip the next generation with the ability to formulate and provide professional solutions.

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