



Design For Ministry™

Depth Perception

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by Mark L. Vincent

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Specialists are a benefit

In a specialized world, it is ridiculous to think individuals, committees or organizations do everything well. For example, I can't distinguish weeds from herbs so I rely on (and sometimes pay) skilled persons to tell me what **not** to pull from my flowerbeds. All fields of specialized knowledge work this way. Specialists cost now, but can bring significant savings over time.

True, we might spend less if we acquire the expertise ourselves, but doing so requires desire, ability and occasion – items we don't always have. So sometimes we develop the specialty. Sometimes we choose not to. Most skills we cannot become expert in. . . **ever**. In my case I am able to play conga drums, am not likely to learn Mandarin, and my hand-eye coordination prevents me from becoming a calligrapher or surgeon. Not having some skills, but needing them, I use specialists.

True, I earn my living as a specialist and cannot help but advocate. Remember though, that in this economy most of us are paid for our skills and specialized knowledge. And we regularly hire specialists to serve us. If anyone has the ability to understand the benefits and problems, we do!

True, some specialists are embarrassing. They are arrogant, do not listen or are ineffective. In all honesty though, the bigger problem for organizations face is found in good ol' boy networks that neither welcome advice from outsiders, nor bless fresh ideas from newcomers. Their commitment to pooling ignorance results in raising less money and bringing less result to capital projects, in organizational bloat, excuses for why issues cannot be engaged or fixed, redundant meetings, decisions that ignore good process and fail to address underlying issues, and organizations that are politicized and/or marginalized. The price paid in money, personnel and result far outweighs the price for good advice, expert skill, or even rented leadership for difficult tasks.

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Interestingly, households are more open to expertise than are organizations. Households regularly use specialists to perform tasks when there is no resident expertise. Think chimney sweeps and dishwasher repairmen. But organizations, especially non-profits, live as if all tasks should be covered by employees or volunteers. They resist paying specialists to come and do it right. However, if organizations carve out portions of the payroll to cover specialists, they not only get focused results at less cost, they also become better poised to handle unique issues as they come – without waiting to propose solutions during the next annual budgeting process.

Why not build this discussion into the education portion of your next executive board meeting? Perhaps you think it is difficult to discuss the subject without a good facilitator present. Specialists are out there that can help you. Design For Ministry comes to mind!

-mark