

# Depth Perception

## CLERGY COHORTS

**Walter Sawatzky and Anne Kaufman Weaver lead a pastors' discernment group that is both safe and effective.**

**A new cohort gets underway in mid-October. [Click here to learn more.](#)**

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Beginning with this issue of *Depth Perception* we shift to a monthly publication in a new format. Combined with [The Appriser](#) and our regular [blog posts](#) Design Group International continues to provide quality content for leaders and organizations transforming for a vibrant future.



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Are you turning down a consultant's proposal?

## Say no and still be classy

Maybe you are an exception, a consummate professional, committed to excellence in all things and actually doing them. Perhaps you are well versed in the art of saying "no." If so, I welcome your suggestions and comments to this article. You would also agree that most anyone can improve their practice in saying "no" with class.

Consider it part of being decent. Consider the truth that treating a customer, a vendor, an employee or a consultant poorly by not bringing matters to a close leads to negative impressions that do not remain private.

A relationship with a consultant usually begins with your invitation to make a proposal, bid or quote. Perhaps this is a competitive process in your shop. Perhaps they are a regular provider of services to you. It doesn't matter which it is really. You asked for them to respond. If they did, that is reason

enough to say "no" with class when you must. Here is how.

**Say no instead of going dark.**

It really is as simple as picking up the phone or sending the personal e-mail. Even a cold and impersonal "We regret to inform you" is better than silence.

Not communicating forces the consultant to follow up with you, asking you to complete what you are responsible to complete. This is humiliating for them and it doesn't look well on you (and besides, the consultants that are professional enough to follow through even when you do not are the ones you want to be working with).

Actually, you consume less time and energy by saying no instead of avoiding calls and deleting their e-mails.

**Offer the reason why.**

Great consultants respect honest feedback. Even saying "it is not our policy to reveal how we come to decisions like these" is better than

nothing. And yet, if you think this consultant might serve you well in the future, why not provide them the feedback that will help them?

- ♦ *We took the low bid.*
- ♦ *We wanted more of a specialist.*
- ♦ *We required a certification you don't have.*
- ♦ *We weren't assured that you have a qualified person available to step in should you become incapacitated*
- ♦ *We felt you were pressuring us.*

Again, those with a strong professional commitment will receive this information thoughtfully, weighing it carefully, often asking what you believe it would take for them to win your business. This gives you opportunity to teach and prep them for an even better proposal the next time around.

Do you think such a conversation is a waste of time? Consider the alternative of searching out new consultants who have no experience with you and then reading their uninformed proposals. Does that save time? Does that help you achieve the goals of the projects and initiatives for which you seek consultative help?

### Communicate when you say you will.

Consultants who will exceed your expectations of service are not waiting for your call. Their hopes do not hang on you extending your scepter and granting a boon. They are working with a sales pipeline just as you do with your customers or clients. If you do not indicate your response in the timeframe you promise, that person or firm you want just might [tell you no](#), not because they don't want the work, but because they are no longer available.

If you don't honor the deadline you set you are indicating what sort of client you will be for them. They will already be expecting duplicatory meetings and delays--all of which costs you more and casts your willingness to do your part of the work in shadow.

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As a long-time consultant who has spent a couple of decades recruiting and training consultants, I am a frequent recipient of "no." As a result I have found there is an interesting comparison to make between those who said no with class and the current state of those same organizations today--all of which tie to the leader at the helm, the one creating the organizational culture of

professionalism or the sloppy treatment of others.

I also find that those who say "no" in classless ways tend to say "yes" in a similar vein--remaining uncommunicative with their consultant, and failing to be specific even when the consultant repeatedly attempts to flesh out the real objectives they want to achieve.

Regardless of how we are told yes or no we want to offer our proposals with class:

- ♦ Offering a fixed price whenever we can.
- ♦ Detailing the objectives as thoroughly as possible.
- ♦ Providing an expiration date for our proposal that indicates how long we can promise to keep a specific consultant available, and making sure it offers several days of grace beyond the deadline a client set for their decision.
- ♦ Offering our proposals in draft form, so that we can continue to refine the proposal in conversation with the client until it becomes a signed Agreement.

Think of the possibilities when organizational leaders and organizational consultants are jointly committed to excellence, gracious treatment of others, and acting with class.

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