Can we really teach our professionals to be trusted advisors?

Type: Q&A Subject:Adding Value
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Question

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Answer

Any firm knows that it's extremely hard to find professionals who have both technical skills *and* the capacity to manage trusted advisor relationships at the most senior levels. Given the scarcity of this talent, it would be easy to conclude that either you've got the natural juice to do it or you don't. My many years of research on this topic, however, tell me that it's clearly a combination of innate qualities *and* learned skills and behaviors.

Take Empathy, for example, which might seem like an innate ability. Psychologists have researched this and they believe that 50% of empathy is learned and about 50% is natural-born. This is in fact intuitive: even someone who is not naturally very empathetic can learn to become a much better listener, given practice and feedback. The same is true for other trusted advisor skills and capabilities such as big picture thinking (hard to teach but one can definitely improve with effort), persuasiveness, and trustworthiness.

What we do know is that while you can learn and improve, it's hard to directly ***teach*** how to be a trusted advisor. We are talking here about a combination of skills, behaviors, and best practices which together sustain your ability to build trusted advisor relationships with clients, and a simple, classroom-based training program is usually insufficient to noticeability improve these. An integrated set of interventions--formal professional development, coaching, peer-to-peer experience sharing, and others must be employed to really make a difference.