

SUPPORT INSTEAD OF ADVICE

Advice usually touches the surface of the personality, not the core. Advice is often odious; when I cannot solve the problems in my life I do not hesitate to tell another how to deal with the complex problems of his existence. Even when it is good, advice has its dangers. If the person follows my advice, his sense of dependency is reinforced: if he does not follow the advice, more distance tends to creep into the relationship.

Though I believe all of these things with the top of my mind, when I give advice, I feel like I am being helpful. I find that I am better able to diminish the amount of advice I give when I have something else to offer in its place. Paul Tourmier, a Swiss psychotherapist suggests that we offer “support” instead of advice:

What we are looking for is not someone who will cut through our dilemmas for us, but someone who will try to understand them. Not someone who will impose his will upon us, but someone who will help us to use our own will. Someone who, instead of dictating to us what we must do, will listen to us with respect. Not someone who will reduce everything to an academic argument, but someone who will understand our personal motives, our feelings, and even our weakness and our mistakes. Someone who will give us confidence in ourselves because he had unshakable confidence in us, who will take an interest in our struggles without prejudging their outcome, who will not allow himself to be discouraged if we take a different road from the one he would have taken.

The majority of those who consult us are not primarily seeking advice. They have already said to themselves, over and over again, all that can be said about their problems. They may even have an idea of how it can be solved, but they have not dared, or have not been able to follow it out. The support they want is a support to counter their own weakness. They need to express themselves, not to have an arbitration award pronounced against them. They need a place where they can be completely sincere, and feel themselves completely free. That is so rare in this world! Freedom is a wonderful support to have. They need to be able to say what is holding them back, before they can manage to overcome their inner resistance. The support that is essential to us is the support that will help us to win that battle, to be more faithful to ourselves, to dare to grow, to dare to let go what we must let go if we are to grow.