

Image Consulting Within Industrial-Organizational Psychology

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Abstract

This paper is a brief summation of an informational interview conducted with Karen Brunger, Certified Image Consultant and member of the Association of Image Consultants International. Through the interview and some extensive research into Industrial-Organizational Psychology this summation provides an interesting look at the relationship between the two fields and briefly discusses how the fields of psychology and image consulting are interlinked while still being separate enough that you can pursue a career in one without ever considering the other.

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During a recent discussion question a fellow student commented that she would never “have thought [image consulting] would be in the I/O field as [she] think[s] more along the lines of performance improvement for employees” (K. Graham, personal communication, June 9, 2004). This made me think hard about this assignment and the best way to complete the summary of my interview. Ultimately, I was going to tie an interview from a psychologist and an image consultant together to show how the two fields were interlinked and how they would work together in my vision for a future career. Due to several mishaps and unforeseen set backs I was unable to include the interview with a psychologist.

I was successful in completing two interviews with Ms. Karen Brunger, a Certified Image Professional (CIP) and member of the Association of Image Consultants International (AICI). Ms. Brunger has been a full-time image consultant since 1985. She takes a wholistic approach to image consulting that assists in changing her client's self-concepts, expanding their self-awareness, and may even assist them in achieving a certain degree of enlightenment. While Ms. Brunger is not formally trained in the field of psychology she says that her “consultations typically involve some form of belief or self-concept repatterning. Optimizing appearance is a tool and catalyst for optimizing self-awareness and personal development.”

Due to the inability to complete the interview with the psychologist that I had corresponded with I conducted further research and used Ms. Graham's insightful question to discover that that Industrial and Organizational (I/O) psychology is a little more involved and covers a wider array of topics than I first thought. “Industrial-

organizational psychologists contribute to an organization's success by improving the performance and well-being of its people. An I/O psychologist researches and identifies how behaviors and attitudes can be improved through hiring practices, training programs, and feedback systems" (siop.org, n.d.); while image consulting is "a professional who advises individuals and companies about their image" (Gurevich, 2004).

The relationship is quite simple when one looks at the many job opportunities and services that an I/O psychologist could hold. For example, training and development, employee attitudes and satisfaction, employee motivation, and customer service issues (siop.org, n.d.). Each of these areas presents opportunities for an image consultant to move into a company and work their magic. Training and development is the bread and butter of the image consultants business, it is the skill that is most valuable to their success. An image consultant trains and develops clients on a daily basis by providing presentations about wardrobe management, verbal communication skills, phone etiquette, and nonverbal communication skills (Gurevich, 2004; K. Brunger, personal communication, May 4, 2004).

Having felt this way about the link between psychology and image consulting prior to starting this project, it is interesting that I only discovered the link as I started to complete this paper. When I set out to conduct the interviews I was hoping that the interviewees would provide me with the link or explain how they saw the two fields fitting together. My interview with Ms. Brunger identified that most image consultants believe that counseling and image consulting are two fields that can successfully combine together; however she does not believe that a psychology background is necessary for success in image consulting. Although, she states that "a background in psychology, counseling, communication, or human behavior definitely helps" and that some consultants actually use these specialties with their clients (K. Brunger, personal communication June 4, 2004).

I have always wanted to have the background in psychology and the ability to provide counseling services as well as image consulting because I have a desire to ensure that I am helping the person improve their image for the right reasons and that there is not an underlying issue that needs to be worked first. When asked about this, Ms. Brunger said that she does not worry about a larger psychological issue because she is not "responsible for [her] clients." She is there to determine which "results [need] to happen [in order to] make [the] consultation successful." She further states that the reason that a client is transforming is not important because her job is to reveal who they are not to create them (K. Brunger, personal communication, June 4, 2004).

Her insight and approach to image consulting provided me with a very different look on what the field is all about, or at least their approach to helping people. I have always viewed image consulting as a way to help people that have self-esteem and body image issues; to that extent I still believe that the psychology background is important. I can understand why Ms. Brunger is not concerned with having psychology credentials as she is not seeking to specifically work with people that have psychological issues, whereas, I am.

Ms. Brunger's opinion that she provided about my career goals and approach to accomplishing them was also helpful. She let me know that the vision I had for a store or image consulting business was typical of most consultants' businesses, she said that the location was not important that I might find it easier to establish a business in a cosmopolitan area. She emphasized the importance of networking and developing contacts for the skills that I do not possess (i.e. hair stylist, makeup artistry, vocal trainers, nutritionists, etc.). She encouraged me to seek business management training and to approach my training with a less logical approach and more through intuition and following what I love. She suggested that I might find classes that are unique to my training; therefore, offering something that other consultants are do not have.

Ultimately, Ms. Brunger was very supportive of my career objectives and provided me with some very insightful and helpful information for focusing my future training and efforts. I still want to pursue the psychology degree, first with the masters in I/O and then a doctorate in counseling. However, I now realize that I do not need to pursue all the service that I wish to offer because I can successfully network with other professionals to offer those services (i.e. hairstylists, make-up artists, vocalists, speech therapists, etc.) (K. Brunger, personal communication, 4 June 2004; Gurevich, 2004).

References

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