

Assuming and Optimizing the Internal Trusted Advisor Role

“With regard to excellence, it is not enough to know, but we must try to have and use it.” Aristotle

Fundamentals

- Trusted Advisors “make rain” – they provide differentiated, holistic and strategic advice to their CEOs
- Trusted Advisors go beyond the intellectual and technical and the single-solution
- Trusted Advisors always trade on personal credibility, differentiated insight and deep trust
- Ultimately a Trusted Advisor’s contribution will be measured in financial terms
- Trusted Advisors know that their personal brand, key relationships and ultimately their career equity grows as an outshoot of their Trusted Advisor role

Internal Trusted Advisors are special talents from within organizations who are known and valued in the C-suite. They provide their CXOs with differentiated, holistic and strategic advice. This advice goes beyond the technical and the single solution and leads to game-changing paradigms, strategies and moves. Their advice has traction and is evident in key decisions and can be measured in commercial or financial terms.

Internal Trusted Advisors career equity is funded by the power of the advice they provide to their senior executives. When their CXOs win, they win.

Trusted Advisor Definition

Trusted Advisors understand their CXOs world and worldview. CXOs while powerful, often feel overwhelmed by data and complexity; with no real peers in the organization, they struggle for empathy, support, unique insight and strategic advice.

Trusted Advisors recognize their primary role is to provide CXOs with what they need and in the way that they need it. They recognize that over time, their personal brand and career equity will grow as a result.

At OLE Consulting, we describe an Internal Trusted Advisor as:

“A credible and trusted internal talent who provides insightful, often game-changing advice, to senior leaders. In doing so, they maximize their contribution to their organization, build credibility and trust with senior leaders and grow their personal brand and career equity.”

The Trusted Advisor Primer

In short, Trusted Advisors know things because intellectual capital (knowledge, insights and pragmatism) insight and instinct are their key currencies – they know themselves, their organizations, their executives and they know the critical success factors for the Trusted Advisor role.



Step 1: Understand the Trusted Advisor role

Invest in understanding the internal Trusted Advisor role and what that must look like within your organizational culture and context. What challenges and opportunities are current on your organizational agenda – strategic, commercial, operational, talent – and identify where you can add unique and powerful value. Reflect on the type of Trusted Advisor you want to be and set the plan for how you will enliven the role.

Step 2: Know thyself

Trusted Advisors exhibit deep self-awareness. They know their intellectual, technical, emotional and social selves very well. They know their strengths, weaknesses and derailers and they are socially and verbally fluent – knowing when to push (advice, opinion, options, solutions) and when to hold back. Above all, Trusted Advisors respect their Executives as Executives (not friends), they maintain an appropriate distance and always exercise good judgement and personal integrity.

Step 3: Understand your organization

All Trusted Advisor work is contextual and fluid. Invest in understanding the internal and external dynamics that impact your organization, its competitive positioning and its operational excellence and political make-up. Locate your advisory services where you can add most value and where you can unlock organizational potential. Above all respect boundaries and the management chain and seek to be a “force for good” in the organizational culture.

Step 4: Know your CXO customers

Trusted Advisors are ready when they believe their intellect, insight and instincts have currency in the C-suite and critically, when the C-suite seeks their counsel. Trusted advisors work best when they know their executives as people as well as CXOs – from the ethereal (e.g., the CXOs desired career legacy) to the granular (are they analytical or intuitive, a reader or a doer, a morning person or a night person). Invest the time in getting to know your CXOs, their agendas, preferences and goals.

Step 5: Commit to an ongoing process of personal excellence

Trusted Advisors are always voracious learners. They commit to learning from multiple sources – from personal practice and experiences, from observing others and leveraging published sources to stay current and formulate the insights upon which they trade.

Bottom-Line

Becoming a Trusted Advisor is both a privilege and a challenge. Typically, around 5% of employees will occupy this role at some point in their careers. The Trusted Advisor thinks and feels, looks, sounds, and acts like they belong in the C-suite. Their advice is sought, used, and cherished. The role comes with responsibility but offers you a chance to sit at the right hand of power and to try to positively influence the organization and the people who work there – to become a “force for good” in the business and culture and to feel great about your contribution and legacy. It is a role worth striving for.