

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE CONSULTING:

A Self-Assessment Tool for Consultants Who Serve the Nonprofit Community



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Management at Robert Morris University
and the
Program to Aid Citizen Enterprise

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Infrastructure to improve the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations has grown dramatically over the last decade. Pressures for accountability and the increasingly competitive environment in which nonprofits conduct their business has led to many new programs and services that enhance management and governance. The rise in infrastructure resources has contributed greatly to social sector success. However, recent research conducted by David Birdsell of Baruch College for the Alliance for Nonprofit Management revealed the depth of disappointment with the consulting relationship that sometimes exists in the minds of both clients and consultants. Clearly, this field suffers from unclear expectations and too often magical thinking about what consultants offer to nonprofit organizations. Communities are beginning to recognize the importance of consultant education as a priority for excellence in these critical support activities.

The whole spectrum of work as it relates to nonprofit consulting practices needs to be examined. Some of the issues include: the existence of a community referral system that is often too narrow to produce a vigorous pool of candidates; the reluctance of clients to move outside the known consultant pool. This reluctance may stem from their belief that they will only please their funders/investors by employing certain respected consultants. This thinking is pervasive and limiting. The consultants' aversion to clarifying their strengths and weaknesses, the "trying to be all things to all people" syndrome continues the charade.

OTHER LIMITING FACTORS INCLUDE:

- Lack of effective contracting skills on the part of the consultant and the lack of clarity of needs and deliverables on the part of the client;
- Need for improved basic business practices by consultants (Birdsell's research documents that most consulting is done on a handshake basis!);
- Failure to recognize the need for consultants to have the ability to work effectively within different cultural contexts;
- Need for emotional maturity, perspective and balance by consultants dealing with people and organizations in trouble;
- Lack of time by busy consultants to do thorough and timely work;
- Lack of willingness by consultants to refer clients to other consultants who might do a better job on this task;
- Need for teams, rather than a single consultant, to properly address the range of problems in the organization;
- Recognition of the stress clients experience as related to the time necessary for thorough education of a team of consultants;
- The inability for the management support system to employ teams of consultants with varied expertise because of cost concerns;
- Belief that brief encounters can effectively address major problems. The result is that all concerned are frustrated and dissatisfied and the organization is still in trouble at the conclusion of the engagement.

These and many other factors often prevent the consultant community from serving its intended purpose of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of nonprofit organizations.

This tool is for use by individual consultants. It is intended to serve as a guide for anyone who is serious about improving his consulting skills. If we as individuals enhance our ability to determine our capacity and limitations, we can assist our clients in making better choices. This information will help us to build alliances with other consultants to create teams that deliver more effective and comprehensive service. The nonprofit sector is continually challenged to be superior in program delivery and management of ever more scarce human and financial resources. It is our charge as community leaders to see that any resources dedicated to consulting are well-used.

This tool was developed as a part of the Master Consultants Series (MCS), a partnership of PACE (Program to Aid Citizen Enterprise) and BCNM (Bayer Center for Nonprofit Management at Robert Morris University). For the last three years, participants have been studying effective consulting practices. The program has included several visits by national experts in nonprofit consulting; use of a text book, *Consulting with Nonprofits: A Practitioner's Guide* by Carol Lukas, published by the Amherst Wilder Foundation (1998); field work by all participants and an analysis of both successful and unsuccessful consulting engagements.

The Self-Assessment Tool is comprised of the following sections:

Section I: Technical Skills Required for Consulting to Nonprofit Organization. This includes an assessment of the consultant's knowledge of nonprofit organizations, one's personal experience and knowledge of the work, knowledge of models, research and applications, process skills, business skills and dedication to growth and development as a consultant.

Section II: Marketing and Referral. This includes the availability of marketing materials, ability to identify and secure new clients and the consultant's knowledge of referral networks.

Section III: Knowledge and Ability to Manage to Major Phases of the Consulting Relationship. This includes an assessment of the consultant's skills in the following areas: entry/engagement, contracting/establishing the boundaries of the consulting relationship, completing the scope of work, completing/terminating the engagement.

Section IV: Your Professional Improvement Plan. You may use this tool to establish specific priorities for professional improvement.

DIRECTIONS:

This tool is designed to assist you in identifying areas of strength and areas that may require further development. You may decide to complete the entire self-assessment tool or only specific sections related to topics/issues you wish to explore. Please use the space provided to make notes and list questions that you may have as you reflect upon your knowledge, skills and abilities in each areas you decide to address. We hope that it assists you in your learning and skill development journey.

SECTION I: TECHNICAL NONPROFIT CONSULTING SKILLS

KNOWLEDGE OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

1. Models of governance and staff structure.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

2. Understanding the implications of a strong board/weak executive.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

3. Understanding the implications of a strong executive & staff/weak board.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

4. Strategies for assisting client organizations that lack board/staff leadership.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

5. Ensuring that the mission/vision/values of the organization are clear and employed.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

6. Ability to assist the organization in clarifying it's goals and objectives.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

7. Ability to assist the organization with operational and strategic planning:

- a. Strategic thinking/problem-solving: EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

- b. Organizational development: EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

c. Business planning: EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

d. Operations: EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

e. Leadership development: EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORK

8. Experience in key leadership roles within a nonprofit organization.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

9. Experience as an executive director/CEO in an agency with a budget:

Under \$1 million, staff of 10 or fewer	<input type="checkbox"/> SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE	<input type="checkbox"/> LIMITED	<input type="checkbox"/> NONE
\$1-10 million, staff of 10-50	<input type="checkbox"/> SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE	<input type="checkbox"/> LIMITED	<input type="checkbox"/> NONE
Over \$10 million, staff 50+	<input type="checkbox"/> SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE	<input type="checkbox"/> LIMITED	<input type="checkbox"/> NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

10. Understands financial management issues faced by organizations with budgets.

Under \$1 million	<input type="checkbox"/> SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE	<input type="checkbox"/> LIMITED	<input type="checkbox"/> NONE
\$1-10 million	<input type="checkbox"/> SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE	<input type="checkbox"/> LIMITED	<input type="checkbox"/> NONE
Over \$10 million	<input type="checkbox"/> SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE	<input type="checkbox"/> LIMITED	<input type="checkbox"/> NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

11. Knowledge of fund development challenges.

PRIMARILY: government funded

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE LIMITED NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

PRIMARILY: contributed income (foundations, individuals, corporations)

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE LIMITED NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

PRIMARILY: earned income

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

LIMITED

NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

12. Personal board experience.

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

LIMITED

NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

13. Providing staff support to a board.

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

LIMITED

NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

14. Establishing relationships with community resources.

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

LIMITED

NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

KNOWLEDGE OF MODELS, RESEARCH AND APPLICATIONS

15. Board development and evaluation.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

16. Staff development and evaluation.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

17. Financial management.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

18. Succession planning.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

19. Strategic planning.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

20. Business planning.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

21. Use of technology.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

22. Program planning and evaluation.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

23. Executive coaching/consultation.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

24. Access to current research on all of the above.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

PROCESS SKILLS

25. Knowledge of group process/group dynamics.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

26. Building trust and rapport with the client- safe place.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

27. Receiving authority from group.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL
QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

28. Dealing with fear and anxiety.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL
QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

29. Use of motivation, encouragement, support.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL
QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

30. Ability to keep the group on time, on task and productive.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL
QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

31. Ability to manage conflict and "dynamics of difference".
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL
QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

32. On-going critique of self and process.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL
QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

33. Ability to identify the appropriate consulting role needed. (Coach, Expert, Facilitator, Teacher/trainer)
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL
QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

34. Ability to "fire" a client.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL
QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

35. Ability to transfer the responsibility for implementing the strategies developed to the client.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL
QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

BUSINESS SKILLS

36. Knowledge of the market.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

37. Developing comprehensive contract products, costs, etc.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

38. Developing and managing budgets.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

39. Meeting timelines.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

40. Ensuring quality while meeting contractual responsibilities.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

41. Branding your business.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

42. Recruiting staff/building virtual team.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

43. Knowledge of community resources.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

DEDICATION TO GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT AS CONSULTANT

44. Knowledge of current research.

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

LIMITED

NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

45. Participation in training.

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

LIMITED

NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

46. Strong peer group.

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

LIMITED

NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

47. A curious and seeking mind.

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

LIMITED

NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

48. Accurate self-knowledge.

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

LIMITED

NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

49. A professional community that provides accurate feedback.

SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

LIMITED

NONE

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

SECTION II: MARKETING AND REFERRAL

50. Clear and accurate capability statement developed in "copy ready" format.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

51. Capabilities statement is available on the web.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

52. Identifies potential clients.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

53. Prepares proposals and secures new projects.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

54. Regular networks regularly with potential referral sources.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

55. Has knowledge of other consultants' skills.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

56. Engages in partnering/team work with other consultants when required.

- EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

SECTION III: KNOWLEDGE AND ABILITY TO MANAGE THE MAJOR PHASES OF THE CONSULTING RELATIONSHIP

ENTRY/ENGAGEMENT

57. Ability to articulate the initial expectations of the scope of work.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

58. Clarifying role of confidentiality with client.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

59. Ability to conduct an assessment of whether your personal skills match those required for an engagement.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

CONTRACTING/ESTABLISHING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE RELATIONSHIP

60. Determining who is the client? Staff leader? Board?

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

61. Clarifying the role of the funder in the client/consultant relationship.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

62. Ability to identify "Who is the expert?" and "about what?" within the consulting relationship.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

63. Establishing clear expectations and identifying to roles/responsibilities of both the consultant and client.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

64. Establishing and adhering to timelines.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

65. Completing high quality deliverables.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

66. Clarifying responsibility for Funder updates – whose job?

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

67. Establishing payment schedules.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

68. Giving client permission to decline entry into the consulting relationship.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

69. Ability to refuse a client.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

COMPLETING THE SCOPE OF WORK

70. Creating effective decision-making procedures.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

71. Adherence to timeline.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

72. Using client time well?

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

73. Using your time well?

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

74. Identifying the need to renegotiate the consulting contract and/or statement of work.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

75. Acknowledging any improper, illegal actions or violation of your values.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

76. Assisting leaders to managing changes within the organization.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

77. Making appropriate referrals to other resources.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

78. Identifying the need for other expertise to conduct a consulting engagement.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

79. Knowledge of the Importance and need to phase work.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

80. Managing the expectations of client.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

81. Developing practical, achievable plans.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

82. Developing resourceful and innovative solutions in partnership with the client.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

COMPLETION/TERMINATION OF THE ENGAGEMENT

83. Preparing the client for termination of the engagement.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

84. Obtaining preliminary review and revision of work product from board and staff.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

85. Ability to instill the capacity for experimentation instilled within an organization.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

86. Ability to recover from failure and apply "lessons learned".

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

87. Identifying options for future development – encouraging the capacity to dream.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

88. Delivering professionally presented final report to client.

EXPERT IN THIS AREA

DO WELL

EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

89. Supporting the client's responsibility to report to funders.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

90. Providing mechanism for the client to evaluate your services.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

91. Completing a self-evaluation on a routine basis.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

92. Exploring the opportunity for additional work.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

93. Thanking client for the opportunity to work with him/her.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

94. Maintaining all necessary recordkeeping.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

95. Billing client on a regular and timely basis.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

96. Maintaining a strong relationship with client after the contract is completed.
 EXPERT IN THIS AREA DO WELL EMERGING SKILL

QUESTIONS/NOTES _____

SECTION IV: DEVELOPING YOUR PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

DIRECTIONS:

Please review your responses to the items addressed in the Self-Assessment Tool. Identify your three top priorities for professional improvement and list them below. Please describe your strategy for addressing each of the priorities specified and a timeline for acquiring the requisite new knowledge and/or skills in the space provided below.

1. Professional Enhancement Priorities: _____

Strategy to Support Professional Improvement: _____

Timeline / Target Date for Acquiring New Knowledge/Skills: _____

2. Professional Enhancement Priorities: _____

Strategy to Support Professional Improvement: _____

Timeline / Target Date for Acquiring New Knowledge/Skills: _____

3. Professional Enhancement Priorities: _____

Strategy to Support Professional Improvement: _____

Timeline / Target Date for Acquiring New Knowledge/Skills: _____

About the Program to Aid Citizen Enterprise (PACE)

The mission of the Program to Aid Citizen Enterprise (PACE) is to identify and respond to the needs in the African American and disadvantaged communities, particularly in southwestern Pennsylvania, through the direct funding of nonprofit agencies, service programming and technical assistance. As a community resource, PACE provides the following:

- Small grants to nonprofit organizations that might not qualify for funding from other sources;
- Technical assistance and training through the Community Based Asset Development Program (CBAD) to enhance the leadership capacity and financial and program management skills of community-based organizations;
- Post-secondary preparation and support through the PACE Opportunities Program (P.O.P.) that provides one-to-one tutoring, career assessment and counseling, SAT preparation, college tours and social skill development for at-risk high school students; and
- Career exploration through Setting the PACE, an after school program for middle school students.

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About the Bayer Center for Nonprofit Management

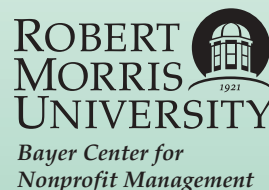
The Bayer Center for Nonprofit Management at Robert Morris University was founded in 1999 to provide the necessary tools for nonprofit organizations to effectively manage and compete in today's society. The Center works with clients to assure that the money invested from the public and private sources is efficiently and effectively spent to advance their charitable mission, the Center offers consulting services in many areas including:

1. Financial management
2. Business planning
3. Organizational effectiveness
4. Development
5. Technology planning
6. Collaboration and alliances
7. Fund development

The Center offers workshops on topics such as: collaboration, technology, innovative financing, human resources, and on various management topics presented by national experts. The Center offers certificate and degree programs; information and referral services; conducts applied research; and serves to convene in-depth discussions on the problems of society addressed by nonprofit organizations.

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“Everyone knows” is the invocation of the cliché and the beginning of the banalization of experience, and it’s the solemnity and the sense of authority that people have in voicing the cliché that’s so insufferable. What we know is that, in an unclichéd way, nobody knows anything. You can’t know anything. The things you know you don’t know. Intention? Motive? Consequence? Meaning? All that we don’t know is astonishing. Even more astonishing is what passes for knowing.

- PHILIP ROTH

