

These services, as one might expect, can be pricey. Fees for Independent Educational Consultants can be tens of thousands of dollars, depending upon their experience and the services offered. Some parents find the fees worth paying to help their child receive the advantage of the "right" degree from the "right" college to help them succeed for the rest of their lives.

Wouldn't it be nice to have an Independent Educational Consultant for other moments in life? In our professional lives, IEC could coach us prior to a job interview, or remind us what not to say at the company picnic. In our personal lives, an IEC offering tips to deepen our relationships with our spouse, our children and even our parents would be helpful. In our decision making, having someone give us perspective and a sense of right and wrong would bring us a level of peace.

The good news is that we already have an IEC. Her name is Sophie, and she's our personal IEC for life. She is our guide for whatever challenges life brings. Sophie is the dream consultant because she is so much more than all others. Her proper name is Sophia, the Greek word for *wisdom*. In this chapter of Proverbs, the author introduces us to *sophia*, the wisdom of God, as if she is a human being. These verses are a resume intended to convince us to follow Sophie as our IEC, rather than trusting our own intuition or the conventional wisdom of the day.

Sophie is readily accessible. Unlike other educational consultants, Sophie is always available, answering whenever we call. When we contact our doctors to get some answers, we may be given an appointment for which we will have to wait weeks. Call for tech support for our new computer or software, and we're likely to be put on hold to wait for the next available representative. Contact our stockbrokers, and we may be forwarded to voicemail and our calls may not be returned for hours or days. Sophie is different. Rather than waiting for us to call her, she comes to us whenever and wherever we are along life's journey. The Bible invites us to ask for help: *If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you* (James 1:5).

Sophie helps everyone. Because some IECs specialize in helping high school students get into the most prestigious and competitive schools, they will not help just anyone. Their services are only available to the best students in the class. This will never happen with Sophie. When things are going well, and we are comfortably walking the heights of life, Sophie is there to celebrate. When we find ourselves at a crossroads, Sophie is there to advise us. When we are

standing at the threshold of something new, Sophie is there to encourage us. There's no application process or prerequisites that need to be met. She is ready to consult for us, no matter who we are, where we come from, or what we believe. Sophie calls out to all people, all who will listen and follow, and is already at work in our lives before we are even aware of it.

Sophie has experience. When looking for an IEC, experience matters. We want someone with a rich background who will not be surprised by our circumstances. We want someone who has seen it all before. No one has been doing it longer than Sophie...literally. Before the first day of creation, God made Sophie and appointed her a consultant to humanity. Sophie was in on the ground floor. Sophie has seen it all.

This wealth of experience means her advice is different. She does not offer empty platitudes that sound good but provide no real help. Nor does she endorse principles or theories meant to be studied and debated by great minds. Instead, Sophie's assistance is "rubber-meets-the-road" practical. Sophie knows how the "real world" works. Sophie was there as the world was created, watching the Master Builder every step of the way. Sophie knows and understands what truly makes up a meaningful life. Sophie can be trusted. There are so many other would-be consultants available with far less experience and less knowledge of the workings of the world. Despite their agreements, making up what we might call the conventional wisdom of the day, they don't know what they're talking about compared to Sophie.

Sophie is trustworthy. When we're getting conflicting messages, we can trust Sophie, even when her advice is vastly different from what may *seem* right to us and others. No one has more intimate knowledge of the world than Sophie does. Sophie will always steer us in the right direction.

Another reason to trust Sophie is her pure motives. Everything Sophie does, she does with our best interests in mind. Some of those who readily seek to give us advice have ulterior motives. Mortgage companies sometimes push the loans that make them the most money, rather than the one that will be best for us. Pharmaceutical companies sometimes offer incentives to have their medication prescribed over one manufactured by a competitor. This is never true of Sophie. She always shares what is best for us.

As Sophie watched the Master Artist create our world, she appreciated this amazing creation, and especially delights in us who are created in the image of God - the one whom she

worships. Sophie has worshiped God from the beginning of time, and her greatest delight is to deepen our relationship with God. She longs to help us live into the goodness for which we are created. Where other consultants may have their judgment clouded by other interests, Sophie can be trusted. She is God's delight, and loves her work for us. She seeks what is best for us.

Sophie gets results. Delving a bit deeper into Sophie's resume, we find that she gets great results. She has been a consultant to kings, princes and other rulers. Those who have listened and followed her in the past give high recommendations, calling her direction more valuable than gold or jewels. Maybe the most convincing testimonial is that her previous clients are happy. Those who have listened and followed experience a deep sense of joy and peace.

So, how do we hire Sophie? The Bible says we don't need to. She's already calling to us. We simply need to be quiet enough to hear her speak. When we gather as the people of God for worship, we are afforded the opportunity to open our ears and hearts to the wisdom of God. Sophie may speak through the words of a sermon, a Scripture reading, a prayer, or the lyrics of a song. When we quiet our minds and spirits enough, we make room for Sophie speak to the deepest parts of ourselves.

Hiring an IEC is no guarantee of getting into the college of your choice. An IEC can coach and advise, but it is up to us to put the advice into practice. The same is true with Sophie. The wisdom of God is not available simply to make us smarter, to give us inside information or to give advice to others on how they are to live their lives. If we want the peace and happiness available through a life lived for God, we must practice what Sophie tells us. IECs help high school students receive a letter of acceptance into the college of their choice - the one they believe will start them on a journey that leads to a successful career. Get to know Sophie, your IEC for life. Follow her toward a closer relationship with God, and a life of happiness and peace.

Sources:

- Starkman, Ruth. "Private college admissions consultants: Does your child need one?" *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, July 22, 2013.
- "Top 100 -- lowest acceptance rates." *Top 100 – Lowest Acceptance Rates. U.S. News & World Report*. colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com. December 6, 2015.

Meet Sophie, Your IEC

April 17, 2016

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Getting into the college of our choice can be quite an arduous venture. At the most academically competitive schools, thousands of students apply, but only a handful are accepted. If your first choice school is Stanford, for example, it's going to be very tough. Stanford accepts only 5% of their applicants. That's one acceptance for every 20 applications! Or, said a different way, 19 disappointments out of every 20 applicants. Getting into Harvard or Yale is a little easier: each school accepts 6% of their applicants. Massachusetts Institute of Technology accepts only 8% of applicants, and California Institute of Technology, only 9%. Notre Dame's acceptance rate is more than double those at 21%, but that still means that 4 out of 5 applicants do not receive a letter of acceptance.

For a growing number of occupations, a college education is vitally important, and a degree from a prestigious university can open doors to employment upon graduation, and networking advantages for advancement all the way to retirement. At least, this is the perception of many parents who want their child to have the best opportunity to succeed. That's why, to improve their child's chances of acceptance from the institution of their choice, some parents are employing the services of an Independent Educational Consultant (IEC). These IECs offer a variety of services for high school students.

- Many IECs assist with the application process by coaching students in writing the application essay, preparing for the admissions interview, and helping students assemble a complete and thorough application packet.
- Some IECs offer their expert opinions of which colleges will be the best fit and most likely to accept their clients, decreasing the number of expensive application fees that need to be paid.
- Other IECs, hired before the student's junior year of high school, can provide tutoring for the SAT and ACT tests.
- And some IECs help students select high school courses and activities, clubs and other associations that may help bolster a college application.