

The Tangible aspects of a consulting business

Clients

It was already mentioned that consulting is a service business, and as such it is naturally strongly client orientated. A client is a consultants customer, the consumer of their products – knowledge, advice, studies, proposals, surveys, designs, construction and engineering projects, or anything else for that matter.

The key for a mutually beneficial relationship lies with you, the client. The balance of power is slightly tilted in your favour. You need consultants, because you have problems which, due to the lack of knowledge or time, you couldn't solve yourself. But your consultants need you even more, because their very existence depends on you and other clients. Without a steady flow of work, they would have to reduce staff levels and ultimately, close the business. In a sense, your misfortunes their fortune. Lawyers and doctors belong to the same group of service providers. Healthy, happy people without problems generally don't need doctors, lawyers or consultants.

The pace of doing business has increased dramatically in the last decade. Both you and a consultant working for you may be busy at times. However, no matter how busy the consultants are, YOU should set the time frames. It wouldn't be appropriate for consultants to say when they are going to respond to clients' requests. It is their responsibility to adjust their schedule in order to accommodate clients' requests and to respond within limits set by the client, not the other way around.

So, no matter how assertive you are and how much power you have over consultants working for you, keep certain facts firmly in your mind, at all times. This is the perspective I am talking about:

Clients are:

- the most important people to a consultant
- not dependent on consultants. The opposite is true
- doing consultants a favour by dealing with them. The opposite is not true.
- Not some outsiders to consultant's business, they are part of it.
- Not a nuisance or interruption to consultants' work; they are the source and the purpose of it.

What Sort of Problems Can Consultants Solve?

"The real problem is what to do with the problem solvers after the problems are solved." Guy Talese

Your success as a professional or a manager depends heavily on your ability to achieve results. In most cases, those results will be achieved by other people, including consultants, to whom you delegate tasks and who can help you reach your predetermined goals. Managing is the art of delegation.

To make your life easier and your success more likely, you have to recognise and hire talented people. You can hire them on a permanent basis, as your employees, or on an ad hoc basis (as and when needed) as consultants.

Most manager's problems that keep organisations and individuals from getting what they want can be summarised in the following categories:

- **Lack of funds.** Money problems. Liquidity and cash flow problems
- **Lack of expertise.** Insufficient technical knowledge about a product or a system.
- **Lack of communications.** Poor management of people. Barriers, groups and rivalry
- **Lack of time.** Poor time management skills. Poor planning and controlling
- **Lack of human resources.** Not enough skilled and competent people. Lack of experience or education
- **Lack of information.** Poor data gathering and fact finding skills.
- **Lack of organised and planned effort.** Goals are not clearly defined or communicated, maybe even non-existent
- **Lack of positive spirit, belief in the individual and group values and goals.** Bad organisational spirit. Poor motivation. Negative attitudes. Fear of unknown, success or failure.



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Why Do Clients Hire Consultants

- To learn
- To save money
- To avoid losses
- To solve problems
- To improve safety
- To improve image
- To improve efficiency
- To hire new employees
- To improve performance
- To increase sales and profits
- To help through busy periods
- To introduce, facilitate and sustain change
- To open up new markets and opportunities

What Can Consultants Do For You?

These are only some of the services consultants can perform for you:

- Investigate and objectively assess a problem or an issue
- Diagnose a problem
- Recommend a solution
- Implement or help implement a solution to a particular problem
- Provide training and teach employees how to solve future problems of a similar nature themselves
- Manage projects on your behalf
- Provide updated and accurate information about markets, competitors, new practices and developments
- Provide professional services – engineering, accounting, recruiting
- Provide specialist skills as an alternative to employing full-time staff
- Assist in making business decisions and in business planning
- Identify alternatives, analyse them and select the most appropriate one.

For further information on this topic, please go to the IDC Technologies web site at www.idc-online.com, and access the information on either the workshop or the publication: "How to Manage Consultants"



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