

How To BECOME A SUCCESSFUL CONSULTANT IN YOUR OWN FIELD

By Rob Tonge



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We hope you find this information useful in evaluating this book

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CONTENTS

1) "The Consultancy Profession"	8
Trends in the Consultancy Profession	8
The Opportunities	10
Deterrents to Starting a Consultancy Business	12
What is a Consultant?	12
Why Consultants are Used	13
How Much Can You Earn?	14
Achieving Success	14
Essential Skills	14
The Main Characteristics of Successful Consultants	15
Twelve Factors Contributing to Failure	16
Seven Main Problems Experienced by Newcomers to Consulting	18
Selecting the Most Appropriate Consultancy Path in Your Field	18
The Importance of Integrity, Credibility & Professionalism	20
Is Consulting for You?	20
2) "Establishing Your Consultancy Business"	22
Partnership Issues	22
Location Considerations	24
Premises	24
Printing & Stationery Requirements	25
Using Multi-Purpose Document Covers	25
Essential Administration Records	26
Filing Systems	27
Your Reference Library	28
Insurance	28
Industry Association Membership	29
The Budget	30
Choosing the Right Accountant	30
Working Capital Requirements	31
Preparing a Business Plan	31
The Importance of Having 'Plan B'	32
Business Plan Checklist	33
3) "How To Set The Right Fee Structure"	35
Common Mistakes In Setting Fees	35
Productivity	36
Examples of Hourly Rate Calculation Formulas & Why These Should be Used	
With Caution	37
Calculating the Standard Hourly Rate	38
Fee Comparison	40
Variations to the Standard Hourly Rate	41
Secretarial Charges	45
Out-of-Pocket Expenses	45
How to Charge Travelling Time	46
Annual Fee Review	47
4) "Day-To-Day Operation"	48
Ethics	48
Time Management	49
Time Sheets	49
Mail	50
The Telephone	51
Email	51
Meetings	51
The Dangers of Litigation	52
Avoiding Burnout	52
Taking Holidays	53
Competition	53
Evaluating Your Business	54

5) "Marketing Your Services"	55
Marketing of Consultancy Services Versus Tangible Products	56
How to Avoid the Feast or Famine Cycle	56
Sell the Benefits	57
Three Things You Must Know to Market Your Services	58
Setting Goals, Objectives & Strategies	60
Four Primary Marketing Goals	60
Four Key Marketing Decisions	60
Twenty-One Ways to Market Your Services	61
How to Prepare a Marketing Plan	70
Gaining & Maintaining the Competitive Edge	71
6) "Handling the initial meeting with a potential client"	72
The Initial Contact	72
Establishing the Terms of Reference	73
The 7-Point Strategy for Selling Your Services	74
Presentations	75
Seven Tips for Attending Short-List Interviews	75
The Issue of Emotions	76
How to Avoid Giving Away Free Advice	77
7) "Building The Consultant - Client Relationship"	80
Managing Expectations	80
Potential Interpersonal Conflict in Large Organisations	81
Dissatisfied Clients	82
Difficult Clients	82
8) "Consulting for committees, charitable organisations & government"	84
Consulting for Committees	84
Consulting for Charitable Organisations	85
Consulting for Local Government Authorities	85
Consulting for State or Federal Government	86
9) "How To Prepare Winning Proposals"	90
Costing the Project	91
Writing the Proposal	91
Proposals in Letter Form	95
Page-Limited Proposals	95
Non-Conforming Proposals	95
Terms of Engagement	96
Presentation of the Proposal	96
Proposal Preparation Cost Considerations	97
Registration of Interest	97
10) "Conducting Projects"	100
The Importance of Planning	100
The 3-Stage Method of Conducting Projects	101
Keeping the Client Informed	101
Ownership of Intellectual Property & Copyright	102
Changes in the Brief	102
Delays in Completing the Project	103
Report Writing	103
Report Structure	104
Editing	105
Progress Reports	105
Ten Steps to Better Report Writing	106
How to Protect Your Reports	106
Disclaimers	108
Performance Evaluation	108
Keeping in Contact With Past Clients	109

HOME	Business Manuals	Tourism Manuals	Contact Us
----------------------	----------------------------------	---------------------------------	----------------------------

11) "Sub-Contract & Team Projects"	110
Two Main Pitfalls	110
Fee Considerations	111
Four Other Potential Problems & How to Avoid Them	112
Sub-Contract Terms of Engagement	113
Forming a Project Team	115
12) "More Traps For The Unwary"	118
The Fictitious Consulting Opportunity	118
Pre-Determined Consultancy Appointments	119
Hidden Agendas	119
The Truth May Not be as it Seems	119
Political Influence	120
Murphy's Law	121
13) "Getting Paid"	122
Setting Your Terms of Payment	123
Billing	123
Credit Control	124
An Effective Debt Collection Letter	125
Draft Reports & Payment Issues	126
Getting Paid for Government Projects	126
14) "The Question Of Quality Assurance"	128
The Certification Process	128
Quality Assurance Statement	130
15) "Expanding The Business"	132
Employing Senior Consultancy Staff	132
Secretarial Staff	134
Other Expansion Options	134
16) "How To Generate Additional Revenue"	135
Training	135
Speaking at Seminars & Conferences	135
Conducting Your Own Seminars & Workshops	135
Writing Newsletters for Clients	136
Writing Feature Articles	136
Writing Books & Manuals	136
17) "How We Developed The Competitive Edge"	138
It's Not Difficult to be Better	139
Criteria for Success in Business	140
"Ready To Use Forms"	142

[HOME](#)

[Business Manuals](#)

[Tourism Manuals](#)

[Contact Us](#)

When I started out as a consultant thirty years ago I had extensive experience and knowledge in my particular field, but, like many newcomers to consulting, I knew very little about setting an appropriate fee scale, writing proposals, marketing my services and protecting my interests. All these things were done on the basis of hearsay and guesswork.

Although I didn't think so at the time, I was fortunate with my very first job when I discovered right from the outset the folly of giving away too much free advice and failing to get an agreement in writing to ensure I received payment.

I also quickly learnt that having technical expertise and knowledge of basic business administration was not enough. If I was to survive in this business, let alone achieve success, I needed to know a lot more about the consulting process, so I set out to learn as much as possible about the profession and how it operates.

The time involved in this initial 'homework' proved to be a wise investment, and subsequently enabled me to develop my consulting services on a much more solid foundation.

During the next few years, as I came in contact with other consultants around Australia I found that most of us were experiencing exactly the same problems. This further stimulated my interest and in 1984 when I identified the opportunity to write the first edition of this manual, I began what has become an ongoing nationwide research program into the consulting profession, which addresses the latest trends and methods of operation as a foundation for our consultancy business and new additions of this manual.

“having technical expertise and knowledge of basic business administration was not enough”.

The consultancy profession provides a challenging and rewarding career for many people. However, consulting has also become the haven for a number of ex-corporate 'high flyers' who, having failed dismally in their previous widely publicised ventures, have become highly-priced consultants. Some former politicians also fall into this category.

It is little wonder the public has become cynical about the profession when these so-called consultants can often demand exorbitant fees. Many of these high flyers have received media publicity about their consultancy services, so it is not surprising there is the widespread public perception that, 'when all else fails - become a consultant'.

This illustrates the need for controls in the profession as a whole to ensure that people with poor track records cannot become part of this vocation, because it is these same people who make it more difficult for the vast majority of consultants who have high ethical standards and give quality service to clients.

There are a number of worthy professional organisations representing various sectors of consulting, but therein lies one of the problems; individually these organisations represent particular sectors of the profession, whereas, there are independent consultants operating in over 130 different fields, and many are excluded from joining existing professional bodies at the very time advice and support is needed, because their field of expertise is highly specialised, and/or because they lack consulting experience.

So, this manual has been written to provide practical 'how to' methods of operating a consultancy business in any field and in any location.

The content is based not only on my own thirty years of experience, it also draws on extensive research and the experience of a number of respected and successful consultant colleagues across the nation. Most importantly, it provides the information that is needed by newcomers.

[HOME](#)

[Business Manuals](#)

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While some readers will find several sections of the manual somewhat basic, this detail is included because I have found that not only newcomers, but many experienced consultants, are still making the same costly mistakes that have been made for many years in the operation of this type of business.

The past decade has seen many changes in management practices and attitudes in society, and while these changes have necessitated new and different approaches to consulting, the basic issues in operating a consultancy business remain valid - and this is what this manual is all about; establishing a sound foundation on which to build your business. In the intervening years since I wrote the first edition of this manual back in the mid 1980s, I have had a number of requests to include information on business structures, accounting procedures and taxation. However, these subjects are not included for several good reasons; firstly, I am not an expert in these matters, secondly, financial circumstances differ from person to person and business to business, and thirdly, the taxation system is complex and constantly changing.

The only way to obtain the correct advice on these subjects is to seek advice from an accountant and legal advisor.

I am grateful for the input provided by many associates and readers during the past 20 years, and in compiling this new edition I am particularly indebted to several respected colleagues for their substantial contribution and constant encouragement of my writing endeavours.

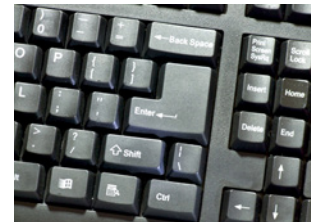
I am equally grateful to Barbara my wife, business partner, personal assistant and 'fishing mate' of over 45 years who continually manages to make sense of my appalling handwriting. We learnt many years ago that teamwork is one of the keys to success.

If this manual helps you to avoid some of the difficulties I have had to overcome the hard way, it will have been well worth the effort.

ROB TONGE
SUNSHINE COAST
QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

www.e-trainingmanual.com





CHAPTER ONE

To many newcomers to consulting the profession appears to be cloaked in mystery - a situation the profession itself has tended to perpetuate.

Practical information on the establishment, operation and marketing of consulting is not always readily available. The majority of books on the subject have been published overseas, mainly in the US, and tend to encourage high-pressure tactics that simply do not work in this country. Most other books skim the important issues such as setting fees.

These issues tend to deter some people who otherwise could be successful consultants. As well, a high percentage of those who do start consulting quickly find that while they have expertise in their chosen field, they lack knowledge of such matters as setting the right fees, handling different types of clients, preparing proposals, selling their services, getting paid, and the many other important basics which establish the foundation for success.

This manual is not a get-rich-quick scheme, nor can it guarantee success, because the level of success achieved depends on the individual, but in the following chapters you will find step-by-step guidelines that will point you in the right direction, save you many hours of wasted time, and help you to avoid costly mistakes in the establishment, development and day-to-day operation of your consultancy business.

For small, established, consultancy firms the information shows how to operate and market your services more effectively and maintain the competitive edge.

The principles described in this manual can be applied to most fields of consulting, in any location, but, because of the variation in the type of consulting from industry to industry, it is a matter of modifying these basic principles where necessary to suit your particular method of operation.

TRENDS IN THE CONSULTANCY PROFESSION

In the USA, the home of consulting, it is estimated that the profession is regarded as one of the most rapidly growing sectors of business and it is estimated that over 4% of the workforce is involved in some form of consulting.

In Australia, the increase in consulting services has been equally spectacular, with an estimated annual growth rate of around 15% during the past 10 years. In the evolution of consulting in Australia during recent times, the provision of these services has undergone considerable change, with a number of significant trends:

1) Decreasing Dominance by Large Firms

Some years ago the consultancy profession was dominated by the large, well-known, multinational firms, however, this dominance has been steadily eroded with the emergence of many small firms offering highly specialised skills and more personalised services (often at less cost), as well as greater flexibility and innovation now demanded in the marketplace.

DETERRENTS TO STARTING A CONSULTANCY BUSINESS

Although many experienced people consider becoming consultants, only some actually make the move. Apart from financial constraints, this reluctance is often caused by:

Fear of going into business. Not everyone likes the thought of taking on the responsibilities of running their own business. This is particularly relevant in today's economic climate with the high failure rate of small business.

The uncertainty that you may not have sufficient knowledge of your particular field to be a successful consultant. It is often said that most people do not realise how much they know, and if you have many years of experience in a particular field or specific skills that have been developed over a long period, you can be reasonably sure you do have sufficient expertise.

Lack of a tertiary or other formal qualification. Some years ago consultancy work was almost exclusively the realm of those with a tertiary education. However, there are hundreds of consultants who have achieved success without formal qualifications.

So, it is possible to be successful on the basis of knowledge and experience, and I cite my own case as an example. With a very poor scholarly record and no tertiary qualification I established a successful consultancy business based only on extensive experience in my particular field. Within three years the business had achieved a sound track-record working for a large number of clients in many areas of Australia and the Pacific, including local, state and federal governments.

I observed the type of work large consultancy organisations were doing, identified the opportunities in my field which had been bypassed or overlooked by those organisations, found what the market wanted, and supplied those services.

WHAT IS A CONSULTANT?

There are a number of cynical and humorous definitions describing a consultant - the best one I have seen was faxed to me some time ago - author unknown:

consultant *n.* [From *con* "to defraud, dupe, swindle" or, possibly, French *con* (vulgar) "a person of little merit" + *sult*, elliptical form of "insult"]. A tipster disguised as an oracle, *especially* one who has learned to decamp at high speed in spite of the large briefcase and heavy wallet.

The earliest literary reference appears to be the ninth-century Arabic tale; ***Ali Baba and the Forty Consultants***.

On a more serious note, by definition, a consultant is a specialist who gives expert advice or information. Consulting is acting in an advisory capacity on professional matters.

A consultant is an agent of change, the consulting process focusing on:

- Skills, knowledge and expertise;
- Building relationships; and
- Adding value to client activities.

2) **Increase in Home-Based Consultancy Businesses**

Many sole practitioners are finding that with the advances in communication technology, they can work just as effectively from home, again with the advantages of low overheads and an improved quality of life.

3) **Specialisation**

The most significant trend that has become evident during the past decade is the increasing emergence of specialist services in a particular field. This change from generalisation to specialisation is occurring for two reasons:

- Firstly, as business and industry strive for greater efficiency, productivity and reduced costs with the constant advances in technology, there is increasing need for specialised advice and expertise.
- Secondly, in most fields, the potential client market can only absorb a limited number of generalist services before oversupply occurs.
- Despite the growing demand for specialists, many small consultancy firms are still failing to recognise this trend and are continuing to try to 'be all things to all people', rather than refining or developing services for niche markets. Experienced consultants consider that specialisation is a key factor in building a successful consultancy business.

4) **Decentralisation**

A growing number of independent consultants are establishing their businesses in regional centres rather than the traditional capital city base, with the advantages of lower overheads and a better lifestyle.

5) **Changes in Client Attitude**

In years past, many client organisations traditionally relied on the large, well-known, trans-national consultancy organisations, however, today there is growing realisation that standards of expertise, quality of service and the ability to meet specialised needs at reasonable cost, are more important than the size of the firm.

The most significant change in both private and public sector client attitudes is the requirement for consultants to take a practical approach, and to provide solutions and recommendations that are realistic and compatible with the financial and other resources of the client. Also, many clients who are experienced in the use of consultants will no longer pay fees that are perceived to be excessive.

6) **Increasing Requirement for Lump-Sum Quotes**

More clients are now requesting quotes for a total fee. These particular clients are not particularly interested in hourly or daily rates. What they want to know is the total cost including expenses, to undertake a project.

7) **Increasing Requirement for the Tendering Process**

As the consultancy profession expands, more clients are placing emphasis on the tendering process to take advantage of the growing competition between consultancy firms.

8) **Relevant Experience**

A growing number of clients are requesting confirmation that the consultant who will undertake their particular work, actually has the project experience described in a Proposal or Capability Statement/ Company Profile.

During recent years a number of consultancy firms have retrenched staff, and clients are becoming more aware that those consultants with the relevant project experience may no longer be with a particular firm, although this experience may still be included in the firm's overall skills stated in their Proposal and/or Company Profile or Capability Statement.

9) **Greater Accountability**

Clients in both the private and public sectors now require consultants to be far more accountable. Also, there are indications that many clients require consultants to be involved in the implementation of recommendations and to take more responsibility for project outcomes.

10) **Increased Community Participation in Consultancy Projects**

In areas where a consulting project is likely to have any form of direct or indirect impact on the community, a high level of community consultation and participation is virtually a mandatory requirement of the project brief, particularly in work for local, state or federal government.

In addition to these trends and despite the high rate of growth in consulting, the quality of consultancy services generally has often been subjected to public criticism relating to instances of excessive fees and poor standards of work.

While these cases are in a minority, there have been sufficient numbers to call into question the credibility of the profession as a whole, thereby tending to make it more difficult for the ethical majority to gain client confidence and the respect the consultancy sector deserves.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

It is universally acknowledged that one of the business sectors exhibiting strong growth is the service industry, which includes the provision of specialised advice and information.

The world is firmly entrenched in an era of technological change which is having dramatic impact on all sectors of society and business. As further advances in technology occur, this impact will become even greater as business finds the requirement for permanent staff is reduced, but the need for specialist skills on an 'as required' basis is steadily increasing.

With large organisations focusing on downsizing, and with a lack of job security, more people from the top and middle management level have been forced to join the ranks of the unemployed - people with years of experience and with specialist skills in different fields. So, on one hand we have business and government becoming more inclined to use specialist input on an as-required basis, and on the other hand there is a large pool of people who have the potential to earn a good living as consultants.

In future years many different types of organisations will seek these skills rather than employ full-time staff. Consultancy businesses can be successfully established by people from all walks of life with experience and specialist knowledge, provided there is a demand for the services offered.

The wide range of opportunities for consulting can be seen on the following page in the list of over 138 fields of expertise in which independent consultants are currently operating - and the list is by no means exhaustive:

[HOME](#)

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SOME FIELDS OF CONSULTING

Aboriginal Culture	Environmental Economics	Negotiating
Accounting	Ergonomics	Nutrition
Acoustics	Engineering	Organisational Change
Advertising	Exercise	Packaging
Aerospace	Feng Shui	Payroll
Agriculture	Financial Planning	Personal Development
Alternative Technology	Fire Protection	Personnel
Animal Husbandry	Fisheries	Planning
Antiques	Food Technology	Plastics
Aquaculture	Foreign Trade	Policy Development
Architecture	Forestry	Pollution Control
Art	Franchising	Printing
Asian Business	Freelance Journalism	Public Relations
Audio Visuals	Fundraising	Publishing
Automation	Health	Purchasing
Aviation	Horticulture	Quality Assurance
Beverages	Hospitality	Quantity Surveying
Biotechnology	Human Resources	Real Estate
Boating	Hydraulics	Records Management
Botany	Hydroponics	Recreation
Building	Image Development	Refrigeration
Business Migration	Immigration	Regional Development
Business Planning	Import / Export	Research
Career Planning	Indexing	Retailing
Catering	Industrial Relations	Retirement
Climatology	Information Technology	Safety
Colour	Interior Decorating	Security
Communications	International Property	Small Business
Community Services	International Protocol	Social Work
Computers	Internet	Sound Systems
Conferences	Inventory Management	Sport
Conservation	Irrigation	Surveying
Copyrighting	Landcare	Systems
Counselling	Landscaping	Taxation
Credit Control	Law	Technical Writing
Cultural	Lighting	Technology Transfer
Data Processing	Lobbying	Theatre
Design	Management	Total Quality Management
Development	Manufacturing	Tourism
Drug Abuse	Marine Science	Town Planning
Ecology	Marketing	Training
Economics	Media	Transportation
Editing	Metallurgy	Valuing
Education	Meteorology	Veterinary Science
Energy Management	Military	Viticulture
Entomology	Mining	Warehousing
Environment	Natural Resources	Waste Management

In essence, consulting involves:

Identifying a client's problem/s and needs;

- Providing solutions to those problems and meeting client needs
- at a fair price
- with the highest possible standard of service and professionalism
- on time and within budget, and
- building a strong consultant-client relationship.

Consulting is often a matter of commonsense and logical thinking, assuming of course the consultant has the necessary expertise. While this is perhaps an over-simplification, clients frequently overlook the obvious and for whatever reason, do not consider all the issues involved in addressing a particular problem or need.

At times the work can be quite straightforward, which often means bringing the obvious to the attention of the client and ensuring this is done in a tactful way.

Clients sometimes become too close to a problem to clearly identify the underlying reasons, recognise the solutions, or to be objective. As an outsider it is far easier to see the overall 'picture' more clearly. A consultant can provide objectivity, supported with experience and specialised knowledge.

WHY CONSULTANTS ARE USED

When a client buys consultancy services the transaction is not just a straightforward purchase and sale of a tangible product. Professional advice and the supply of specialist information is an intangible, and, in reality, the client is buying time, knowledge and experience.

There are a number of reasons why consultants are used, for example:

To obtain specialist skills and knowledge in a specific field when these skills are not available in-house;

- To obtain specialist skills which are required on a once-only basis;
- To obtain specialist skills as an alternative to hiring full-time employees;
- To gain new perspectives on particular issues;
- To obtain an objective assessment of a particular situation and to resolve problems;
- To overcome internal politics;
- To assist in making business decisions, and in forward planning; or
- To release executive staff for other work.

Other reasons include providing services for clients who wish their names to be kept confidential, and for staff selection and training, and so the list goes on. Sometimes a client will have the necessary knowledge to solve a problem or achieve an objective but cannot allocate sufficient time, and so a consultant is appointed.

Unfortunately, on occasions consultants are also used as 'scapegoats' for jobs which clients find unpalatable.

HOW MUCH CAN YOU EARN?

The level of income depends of course, on whether you operate the business on a full or part-time basis, the hours you are prepared to work, your fees, and your reputation. However, on the basis of national averages, working full-time it may be possible to generate revenue of \$30,000 to \$80,000 or more annually during the initial build-up period of the business.

Once the business is established, productive (chargeable) time increases and it is possible to generate gross revenue between \$100,000 and \$250,000 + annually as a sole practitioner, but it requires a high level of productivity, a proven track record, and a solid client base to achieve top income levels. Many small firms earn an average gross revenue in the range of \$80,000 - \$200,000 per consultant.

Operating costs are relatively low and profit margins are good, so, assuming there is a market for the services offered, it is reasonable to expect to earn a good living, with the added advantage of being your own master. But keep in mind it is a business, and before starting out it is essential to assess your prospects for long-term work. It can take many months to build a client base and generate a steady income.

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

Success is defined as the favourable outcome of something attempted, and is usually perceived as the attainment of wealth and fame. But success can mean different things to different people; establishing a successful consultancy business can also mean the freedom of working for yourself.

It can mean earning a sideline income working on a part-time basis. It can mean new challenges, travel opportunities, or building a business you can operate from home. It can be the means of earning a living if you suddenly find yourself unemployed (provided you have the necessary expertise), or it can mean a way to avoid being bored out of your mind after retirement.

While each of us defines the successful outcome of our efforts and activities in different ways, in the context of this manual, becoming a successful consultant means the establishment and operation of a viable business and building a strong, credible, professional reputation as a respected authority in a particular field of expertise.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

To achieve success as a consultant, you must have the following core skills:

1) Technical Expertise

Obviously you must have the necessary knowledge to resolve problems and meet client needs.

2) Communication Skills

You must have the ability to communicate effectively at all levels. Over the years I have come to the conclusion that this is perhaps one of the most important skills along with technical expertise.

3) Knowledge of the Consulting Process

You must know how to set fees, prepare proposals, deal with different types of clients, and conduct projects in an efficient manner.

4) **Problem-Solving Skills**

A high level of problem-solving and analytical skills are mandatory in order to provide the solutions to meet client needs.

5) **Negotiating Skills**

You will need the ability to negotiate contracts, fees and all aspects of consulting. These skills are allied to communication skills.

6) **Time Management**

Efficient and effective time management is a critical issue in consulting.

7) **Report Writing Skills**

You must be able to write reports that are succinct, constructive and professionally presented.

In addition, you must have or be able to acquire expertise in:

- **Administration**

You must know how to manage all aspects of the business on a day-to-day basis.

- **Marketing**

You will need to sell your services effectively to ensure a constant flow of work.

Few people starting out have all these skills, but this need not be a deterrent. You must have technical skills, knowledge of the consulting process, communication and report writing skills, but administration and marketing expertise can always be purchased.

For example, in my various business ventures over the years it took me far too long to recognise that bookkeeping was not one of my strong points. When I finally woke up to my limitations in this regard and obtained the services of a good accountant, the improvement in financial monitoring and management efficiency in our business affairs was quite dramatic.

The main issue is to take a long, hard look at your own expertise and identify your limitations, then take positive action to overcome any lack of expertise in a particular skill either by attending training courses or, as previously stated, by purchasing the necessary skill/s.

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL CONSULTANTS

Having identified the essential skills, it does not end there. Research shows that successful consultants have the following characteristics:

Knowledge of the business environment, and industry trends: You must be continually aware of changes in global and national economic conditions, and trends in your particular field.

Motivation: You must be a self-starter and have a 'get-up-and-go' attitude. If you have a habit of procrastination, forget about becoming a consultant.

The ability to make decisions: Some people find decision-making a difficult task, particularly those who have worked for large organisations where the important decisions were made by others.

Willingness to work long hours: You will need to operate the business, sell your services, and conduct projects. If you dislike hard work, do not, under any circumstances, enter the consultancy profession.

The ability to be a good listener: Being able to listen actively is a prerequisite to becoming a consultant. When clients come to tell you of their problems and needs, they expect to be heard. If you are too busy talking you will find it extremely difficult to obtain a clear indication of their needs, much less identify the possible solutions.

A high level of tolerance: In day-to-day work you will deal with many different types of clients. With some, a high level of tolerance will be essential.

Objectivity: You must take a completely objective approach to all projects. Maintaining objectivity will sometimes be difficult.

'Gut feel': A hackneyed term but an important one nonetheless. You must develop a solid 'gut feel' for your particular industry and the projects you undertake.

The ability to probe for information: You must have a leaning towards research and the instinct and tenacity to dig deeply in problem-solving projects and identify the key issues, because sometimes particular situations are not what they appear to be on the surface.

The ability to relate to the client: Clients come from all walks of life and you must be able to relate to different attitudes, needs, aspirations, and the variation in levels of education and knowledge.

Attention to detail: Is a skill lacking in many businesses and is one which can be the 'make or break' factor.

Discretion: Much of the information you will obtain in conjunction with your work, will be confidential.

The capacity to deliver: You must have the capacity not only to deliver your promises, but to deliver them on time and within budget.

TWELVE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FAILURE

We have seen that as a consultant you must approach your clients, conduct each project and operate your business the right way if you are to succeed. It is easy to take a step in the wrong direction, a step that could cost you dearly in terms of money, credibility and client referrals.

Apart from the more obvious reasons for failure such as lack of technical, management and marketing skills and under-capitalisation, there are other factors which can contribute to the failure of consultancy businesses:

- 1) **Overcommitting time:** It is easy to overcommit your time by taking on too many clients, particularly in the early stages of business development.
- 2) **Failure to recognise technical skill limitations:** You cannot be all things to all people. Too often consultancy firms, large and small, in their eagerness to obtain projects, often convince clients to give them work which may well be allied to their field, but outside their skills and experience.
- 3) **Excessive fees:** Some consultants charge excessively high fees and wonder why they do not get repeat business.

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- 4) **Undercharging:** It is equally disastrous to charge a fee that is too low, because you will not be taken seriously. Clients do not like paying more than they have to - but there may be the thought that if a consultant charges a fee they perceive to be too low, the level of competence could be questionable.
- 5) **Exceeding quotes:** A quote is just that - a price that the client knows your services are going to cost. Too often quotes are exceeded because the consultant found that the job cost was higher than anticipated. Quotes should never be exceeded. If a client requests a total fee, it is up to you to make sure your price covers the work. If you miscalculate you should stand by your original price. It is your problem, not the clients.
- 6) **Attitude:** Some consultants take the attitude that they 'know it all' and endeavour to ride roughshod over the client's ideas. Everyone has an ego, and if it is necessary to tell a client he or she is wrong, do it diplomatically.
- 7) **Charging senior staff rates for junior or inexperienced staff:** This applies mainly to larger consultancy organisations where the senior partner or principal wins a project, passes it on to a staff member with less experience, but charges time at the top rate. Clients are becoming more aware of this practice and are taking the attitude that if they are paying top rates, they want to be sure their project will not be fobbed off onto a junior staff member with limited experience.
- 8) **Failure to allocate sufficient time to marketing:** You must set aside time each week or month to market your services, irrespective of the number of jobs you are working on.
- 9) **Poorly written and presented proposals:** The proposal is one of the core issues of the selling process, consequently, this document must be well prepared if it is to achieve its objective.
- 10) **Failure to bill clients on time:** Many people in small businesses fail to allocate time to send out accounts at the end of each month or at the appropriate time - and then experience great difficulty when cash flow becomes cash trickle.
- 11) **Lack of credit control:** Adequate credit control is crucial in the business climate of today. Consultants often fail to recognise this fundamental point.
- 12) **Using a client's name without permission:** Never use a client's name in your publicity material without first obtaining permission. For various reasons, some clients may not wish the world to know they are using the services of a consultant.

SEVEN MAIN PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY NEWCOMERS TO CONSULTING

The majority of independent consultants are sole practitioners or small firms with two or three partners who have complementary skills.

Because of the day-to-day business pressures together with limited human resources in smaller firms, there is often the feeling that the difficulties encountered when starting out are confined to one's own business.

This is not so. Over the past decade our annual research into the consultancy profession shows that the vast majority of newcomers experience the same seven main problems during the establishment of their business:

- 1) Avoiding giving free advice
- 2) Setting the right fee structure for different project situations
- 3) Marketing consultancy services
- 4) Costing projects
- 5) Writing proposals
- 6) Obtaining on-time payments
- 7) Peaks and troughs in work and cash flow

The chapters that follow explain the most appropriate ways to overcome these obstacles. In addition, the information shows how to avoid the little known pitfalls that can occur when least expected.

SELECTING THE MOST APPROPRIATE CONSULTANCY PATH IN YOUR FIELD

When people starting out in consulting have a wide range of experience and knowledge gained over many years in a particular industry, business sector or other broad field, it can be difficult to decide those specialised sectors on which to focus the provision of consultancy services.

If you experience this difficulty, work through the following skills audit and document your answers. This list is by no means the complete solution, but it will assist you to clarify your thoughts, and it should at least point you towards the most appropriate path:

SKILLS ASSESSMENT

- 1) List your skills and rate them most to least.
- 2) List your experience and rate most to least.
- 3) List your subject knowledge and rate most to least.
- 4) List your educational and other qualifications.
- 5) List the aspects of your past work in which you excelled.
- 6) List the aspects of your field of expertise that interest you most.
- 7) List the types of work you like doing most.
- 8) Identify the subject areas in your field in which you would like to provide specialist consultancy services.
 - Problem solving
 - Human relations
 - As an organiser
 - Time management
 - Communication – written & verbal
- 10) Identify your greatest strengths and weaknesses as they apply to your consultancy expertise.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRITY, CREDIBILITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

Mark, note and digest this section because integrity, credibility and professionalism are the three basic building blocks of your business. You must continually aim to achieve the highest standards possible, and you must operate with dignity.

You must consider any action you take in the light of the possible impact on your credibility and professional reputation. Your reputation takes a great deal of hard work to establish in the minds of clients, but can be negated in an instant.

Thoughtless comments, failure to be sensitive to the client's need, personality and attitude, and a poor standard of work, among other things, can undo many months or years of effort, so you must set your standards high and continually strive to lift them higher. You may never achieve perfection - we are but mere mortals - but the action of aiming high will ensure your standards are the very best you can achieve.

Your credibility will, to a large extent, dictate the level of business you obtain. The greater your credibility in a particular industry, the more you will be perceived to be an expert and the client will have more confidence in your ability to do the job.

But credibility alone is not enough. You must operate effectively, giving the best service in the most professional manner possible, and you must be consistent in the quality of service you provide.

If you are skilled in a particular line of work but give poor service and have an unprofessional approach, you will rarely get repeat or referral business, no matter how much knowledge you have. By the same token, you may operate to high standards, but if you provide inadequate advice to the client, you cannot expect to succeed.

Integrity, credibility and professionalism must go hand-in-hand.

IS CONSULTING FOR YOU?

Consulting is not for everyone. As we have seen in this chapter, consulting is a demanding job. It is sometimes cold and lonely when you and only you are faced with making major decisions and formulating recommendations that will have far-reaching effects on client organisations. It can also be extremely frustrating when you have to deal with bureaucracy and committees.

Many people outside the consultancy profession see it as a glamorous and prestigious occupation. Don't be fooled; after over three decades doing consultancy work I've yet to find the glamour. Yes, you can gain prestige, but it takes a long time to get to the stage where you can bask in this prestige – and prestige alone won't pay the bills.

Think carefully before making the decision to enter the consultancy profession. Read this manual in its entirety and in doing so keep in mind that firstly, it is written from thirty years of practical experience, and secondly, it tells you what it is like in the real world of consulting.

For those who dislike routine, consulting provides a challenging, interesting life. You rarely know what projects are ahead, and this in itself makes life anything but dull.

Depending on your particular field of expertise and geographic area of operation you may have opportunities to travel extensively and you will come in contact with many interesting people. As a sole practitioner or in a small consulting partnership, you will work hard - often long hours under great pressure.

You must be able to administer your business, market your services and cope with clients who make unreasonable demands on your time, expecting projects to be completed 'yesterday'. Some people find it difficult to cope with these conditions and prefer a more orderly way of life.

Despite the problems it is worth the effort, particularly in job satisfaction when you see the tangible results of your work, when clients express their gratitude for the results you have assisted them to obtain - and when the money comes in.



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