

HOW DOES YOUR CONSULTANT STACK UP?

Even large companies need help. When a company is in dire need of change, it seeks help when internal resources are not considered sufficient. They explore the possibility of engaging consultants who can recommend ways to bring about desired changes. The resolution to seek outside help is explained by current thinking that a consultant can take a more objective view of the problems plaguing the organization. A second reason is that companies lack the expertise required to implement changes. Business consultants with several years' experience on the field are also able to draw from past sessions spent in other companies that operate in a variety of industry sectors. The expertise of consultants even becomes more valuable when they have worked globally. Of course there's a price to pay for good service. Some companies are fortunate enough to find the right profile consultant the first time; others, however, go through a hit-and-miss process until they find the most suitable one. Looking for a Needle in a Haystack Just as there are an infinite number of bottled water brands on your supermarket shelf, there are as many business consultants in the market today. Most companies prefer to hire a consultant who comes highly recommended. Word of mouth is probably still the most common way of finding one. Logically, you'll want a consultant who is familiar with your industry and who has an impressive list of companies that he has worked with. We'll venture to say that if it's specific changes you're implementing, you may want to consider a consultant who is knowledgeable about change management – not only with the concept and principles but also with the several tools used by the gurus. Before exploring what you should be looking for, we'll tackle those situations you do not NOT want to be in:

- trainees do not take the consultant seriously because he has not convinced them of his abilities. This attitude can be attributed to the consultant's rusty communication skills. You want someone who can communicate, not just talk.
- your instincts tell you there's a delta in the price to product ratio. You've paid 50% down for the consultant's services. You're now in week 2 and you see no progress.
- "now you see him, now you don't" – it's no wonder he's been labeled a consultant "on high demand." It is unprofessional and unethical for a consultant who works solo to accept multiple assignments. A consultancy firm should assign a specific number of people to your company exclusively and this should be stipulated in the contract. A consultant who is running off in different directions defeats the change process mission.
- lack of materials – if a consultant does not produce and distribute materials - handouts, videos, manuals and worksheets - how will he provide adequate training and guidance? Consultants with an excellent record of delivery and performance don't come cheap. You get what you pay for. If there are compelling reasons for your company to embark on a change management program and if there is a pressing need to capture market share and lure customers back, then be prepared to pay the price. Willing to pay the price however doesn't mean forsaking due diligence.

What should you watch out for? Engaging a Consultant: Checklist Pay for a good consultant, but don't pay for these expensive mistakes:

- Request credentials and bio-sheets of the consultant's staff members who will be assigned to your company;
- Have the consultant or his firm prepare a detailed costing sheet with time frames and results that will be measured at the end of the consultancy period. Ask for a list of expenses that will be incurred and justification for these expenses;
- Require a full report or intermittent reports for each phase of the project;
- Discuss and negotiate fees for potential repeat business (if you think another department is on schedule for changes, ask the consultant if he would charge a reduced fee for taking on another department);
- Specify the number of "one-on-one" meetings with the consultant to thoroughly discuss progress of the project;
- Finalize, in advance, what outcomes are expected and when they will be delivered;
- If the consultant gives you the option to "kill" the project at midstream (you're dissatisfied, there are budget constraints, a merger is pending) negotiate the kill fee.