

How to Utilize a Management Consultant to Your Advantage

It's not getting any easier to be at the helm of a company or organization today.

Profits are more elusive, costs continue to rise dramatically over time, and finding the right kind of skilled people and leaders is more difficult than ever.

Sometimes, finding the road forward is not as clear as the road that is behind you.

Often, it starts as a feeling in your gut. It is a feeling of being unsettled, or of uncertainty.

Things may not be working as well as you would like, and recent new initiatives seem more difficult to implement.

First, a few, and then, a few more of your good people decide to leave your organization to "pursue other opportunities".

You may feel "stuck" at a time when you know it would be better to be "unstuck".

Even with good experience and great instincts, you are not sure how to move through your next intersection or crossroad. You begin to think that it might be a good idea to look for outside help.

With close to 200,000 people in the United States calling themselves management consultants, it is in a company's best interest to do some homework.

Look Inside First

- **What are the critical issues, or barriers, that are keeping you from achieving what you are trying to accomplish?** Try to identify the nagging problems that never seem to go away and keep you awake at night.
- **What will your company look like when these barriers are removed?** This is a way to see what success looks like when the consultant has finished his or her work.
- **What are you willing to invest to achieve the results that will get you back on track?** Often, fees are seen as and added expense for activities that will be thrown against uncertain outcomes. This does not have to happen if an experienced professional comes to work alongside you who can offer a focus on results and a value driven approach.

Look Outside Next

- **Decide if you need an expert in a specific field or discipline (consultant as “expert”), or the steady hand of a seasoned professional in leadership and strategy. (Consultant as “coach”)** Either approach can work, if the match is made correctly, however, their approach to work will be somewhat different.
- **Ask for referrals.** This is the strongest asset that consultants have since relationships, ideas, innovation and results are their stock in trade. If a consultant does not deliver outstanding work to all their clients, their career will be short. Word travels fast and far, and thus the term, “Those Doggone Consultants”.
- **Ask for credentials.** A graduate degree in management, or a related field, is a plus, along with a significant number of years of experience in the profession. Look for articles they have written as well as teaching or speaking experience in their field of expertise. Find out if they have ever met a payroll themselves, in good times and bad. These are ways for you to know that others have tapped this person as a trusted resource and it demonstrates knowledge, professionalism and success. These are all things that will be useful to you in your company as well.
- **Ask how the consultant plans to achieve success with you.** It is not unreasonable for you to expect a dramatic return on your investment with increased revenues, greatly enhanced performance and focused execution. The consultant will not want to run your company, but they will expect to lead the process.
- **Ask for a proposal and work plan.** Meet with the consultant to talk about your company. An experienced and effective consultant will want to learn more about you and what you may need and will talk less about who they are and what they have done. Most will spend up to a half day with you, if you are willing to pay travel expenses. It is an opportunity for you to see the consultant and for the consultant to see you. A “win” for the consultant is a “request for proposal”.

We know that the decision to engage outside help is not an easy one. It is, however, an opportunity to work on significant tasks together to achieve dramatically new results for your company.

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