

## **The Angst of a Weary Consultant**

The former CEO of Avis Rent-a-Car, Robert Townsend, once described consultants as “people who borrow your watch and tell you what time it is, and then walk away with the watch”. Not a pretty description. There sure seems to be a lot of skepticism about consultants. So the questions needs to be asked; Can consultants help your business or are you better off working through your challenges and pursuing growth on your own? The answer is – in true consultant form – it depends.

### **Expectations**

Certainly one of the critical issues corrupting the perception of consultants is exaggerated client expectations - hopes that are promoted and encouraged most often by the consultants themselves. Eager to be hired, too many consultants promise dramatic results, only to have the client spoil on them when impossible objectives turn into perceived failures. Managing the expectations of clients is a critical function of a consultant not only because it is only fair and honest to tell the client what you can accomplish (leaving them to consider hiring you based solely on a true assessment of what you can deliver), but also because it is good business. Meet or exceed expectations and you are a success. Fail to meet the goals (or deadlines) you yourself set, and you are rightly perceived as a failure.

On the client side, it is unfair to expect consultants to step into the nearest phone booth and come out able to fly faster than a speeding bullet. Consultants aren't supermen. At best, like myself, they are individuals with distinctive sets of experience that they wish to share with others, both so that they can learn from our mistakes and gain from our successes. The ideal relationship you want with a consultant is that of peer, so that he shares with you his ideas and opinions and works beside you to assist you in reaching your goals. Expecting more than that – expecting superhuman achievement or the gospel – is unfair not only to the consultant, but to yourself.

### **Timing**

When to hire a consultant is a question that often puzzles executives. First of all, hiring a consultant does not require that you concede that you do not know something, need help, or aren't as smart as the next person. Hiring a consultant simply means that you desire assistance in meeting your goals. Tudog, for example, offers our services under three scenarios:

1. You seek to fill a temporary need – you have a task (marketing, business development) that requires attention and do not wish to hire a full time employee to get the work done. We look at this as an Outsourced Service.
2. You seek to grow your company – you want to accelerate the growth of your company and are interested in the ideas, models, practices and contacts we may have to assist you in growing.
3. You seek to help resolve some pressing issues – you have challenges you wish to address and want some new perspectives on how you might approach them.

Tudog's view is that we can offer insights and approaches that may be of value because, through our association with so many companies, we have been exposed to so many situations, witnessing what works and what does not, that we can help structure effective

solutions. Moreover, just as a doctor constantly studies medicine to keep up with which drug heals which disease, we, as consultants, keep up with the science of business, studying and testing methodologies and processes that are written up as effective remedies for problems or boosts for growth.

## **Value**

So where does the value of the consultant lie? Certainly if we don't help you save money or make money then all we are doing is costing you money. The question then becomes how you measure the value and determine whether money has been saved or made as a result of the actions of the consultant. Surely there are some quantitative ways to measure a consultant's success. Yet beyond these measures (which usually can only be applied after some time – meaning that the measure of a good consultant is often felt long after he or she is gone) there is also true value that can be assessed, measured, and, dare I say, even appreciated.

The reputation of the consultant has been tainted by the high cost consultancies that engage in two horrible practices that have served to sour many companies on the value of consultants. These practices are; (a) the selling of experience and the use of interns and newly graduated MBAs to actually perform the work, and (b) the presentation of a “study” that basically rehashes everything the company told the consultant. Thus the perception of the consultant who borrows your watch and then tells you what time it is.

Simply stated, these are lousy consultants. Genuine consultants, those with a passion for business and a strong desire to help companies thrive, provide recommendations, creative solutions, opportunities and implementation so that the client can advance their status quo to an improved position. The honest consultant employs methodologies and processes that enable the client to focus while still busy with the day-to-day running of their business. The noble consultant eases the burden of the client by assuming responsibility for resolving certain challenges or developing certain growth plans, so that the company leadership can dedicate itself to managing their company.

This is where the value lies - consultancy as a proactive partner to the client.

## **Results**

Like with every aspect of business, results driven by consultants vary. And like the qualifier on investment funds, past performance is not an indication of future performance. The results a company enjoys from a consultancy is as much a function of its investment in the consultants as it is the consultancy's investment in the client. Beyond appropriate compensation, the client needs to dedicate time to work with the consultant, set up appropriate milestones, establish communication channels, create the necessary authority structure, and provide sufficient resources. In doing so, you are enabling the consultant to produce the results his or her experience, knowledge, models, processes and dedication should be able to deliver. Provided the results were reasonable, they should be accomplished, meaning the consultant brought genuine results to the client.

I confess to not always being comfortable as a consultant. I entered this field after learning a great deal through management positions I held. My goal was, and still is, to

assist companies in maximizing their potential so that they can grow strong, create wealth, and enhance society. I am embarrassed when clients suspect we (Tudog) are just another bunch of guys seeking fees for advice. I get upset when the value we can deliver is not recognized. Companies succeeding don't feel they need help, and companies failing claim they can't afford help. We believe we can help in all circumstances, because we not only serve to provide strategy, but we serve as the link between strategy and performance. In other words, Tudog goes beyond consultancy and actually implements what it recommends.

The marketing guru Philip Kotler is fond of saying companies "don't need consultants, they need resultants". I couldn't agree more.