



## Consultants: An emergency service or business requirement

### Consultants balance the odds in your favour

There is no one way to run a business. Like the marvel of life, no one is sure of what it is that makes one business work and another fail.

All one can do is to set the right environment, put in place the systems, work hard, persevere and hope. All things being equal, a business will be born that will grow, survive and perhaps, even prosper.

**“Professional advice can transform your business and employees into market leaders.”**

With so much then depending on chance, it would seem logical, like a good gambler, to play the percentages, to reduce the odds and try to bias outcomes as much as possible in your favour.

This all sounds very grand - but what does it mean? First and foremost, it is about information and knowledge. Secondly, it is about experience and, thirdly, it is about wisdom - as in having the wisdom to use the information, knowledge and experience in the best way possible.

Some people genuinely do possess all three of the above, but most do not. But even those who are fully equipped will never try to do it all themselves. Indeed, the more informed, knowledgeable, experienced and wise the manager, the more inclined he or she will be to seek advice, focus on core issues, delegate and use professional services. Enter the realm of the consultant.

Lots of bad things have been written (generally unfair) about consultants, especially management consultants. The news that the board has appointed a consulting group to review operations and make restructuring recommendations strikes fear into the hearts of most managers. But by the time a board of directors takes this action, many of the hard decisions that need to occur are recognised, and the consultancy report is often only a vindication of what the board recognises must be done.

This is not to say that the report is wrong - on the contrary, mostly they are correct - rather the pain of change can be blamed on the consulting company allowing senior management to implement without having to bear the blame for the pain such implementation causes.

Blame is abrogated, all those affected agree the management consultants are fools hiding behind a thick report, change is made and the business survives. All very unfair but highly effective.

So, at the very least, it can be said that consultants, in all their guises, do have a role - even if only as a whipping boy for the actions of others. But this is a very reactionary view and hardly correct.

Consultants - whether they be management consultants, recruitment consultants, technology consultants, engineering consultants, or consultants in general - do have a valuable and proactive role to play. They have the ability to transform your business and your people from “also rans” to market leaders.

Properly used, they increase professionalism, boost revenue, and save time and money. This presupposes, of course, that the people doing the consulting have the skills, knowledge and experience to truly offer a service of value, a service which, if procured by a company, will greatly add value to that company, assisting it to achieve its goals in a far more satisfactory way than if that business had not made use of that service.

As in all sectors of commerce, there are the good and the bad among consultants, and many shades in between.

Choosing between good and bad must be handled with care and diligence.

Presentations must be made, quotations benchmarked, references and supply records checked. Once decided on, the consultancy must be given access to the information it requires and be given the time necessary for it to gain a complete understanding of the company's needs.

**Good consultants build rapport and respect without losing objectivity. They focus on the task and ensure its completion in the required time frame.**

In these days of outsourcing, it is a “given” that companies should concentrate on their core business and leave noncore aspects to those companies or providers whose core business it is.

This prescription also applies to the use of consulting services, which in essence is only outsourcing a specific task, generally project related. As such, the need for consulting services must be seen as an ongoing business need to be used as a matter of course, rather than only in times of emergency or despair.

Indeed, it is when consulting services are used as an everyday resource that the best results are achieved at least cost. If consulting services are used only when there is a desperate need - when all else has failed - don't expect a miracle cure, but do expect to pay.

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