

## Consultants: How to choose, use, and not abuse them.

Since my first consulting project almost thirty years ago, I have learned a lot about managing successful projects and the client/consultant relationship.

Here are some ideas that may help you with your consultants (and your lawyers, accountants and other professionals):

1. Before you introduce consultants to the process, be sure you **need** what you want and **want** what you need. Beware of consultants that agree to do whatever you want, instead of what you really need.
2. Look internally to confirm the three "C's" of project readiness: **Capacity** in budget, time and resources; **Commitment** of management and staff affected by the process; and **Capability** to support the project and implement the conclusions.
3. One more "C" - **Compatibility**. Select your consultants from an organization that is compatible with yours - are you a corporate multinational or a local entrepreneurial business?
4. Recognize whether your consulting needs are **strategic** - requiring outside expertise to inspire and facilitate your business planning process or **operational** - bringing knowledge, skills and experience that are not available internally.
5. Meet the **operating consultant**. It may not be the same charming, talented person that sold you the work. And you don't want to train at your expense that recent MBA, who started last week and studied your industry yesterday.
6. **Test** whether the consultant arrives with questions not answers; will operate as neither boss nor employee; and will win the hearts and minds of your staff. Successful consultants will listen, understand, empathize, analyze, strategize, and persuade better than normal people.
7. Remember you are hiring a consultant to **challenge and push** you. You are not renting a friend to remind you how smart you are.
8. Can you confidently expect a solution that will be **yours** not theirs?
9. Ask for **references**. Call them.

10. Ask **who** is not on the reference list and **why not**. Learn what they think causes a project to be unsuccessful. And which list will you be on when this is over?
11. Ask for fee rates and a work plan with estimated hours. Then agree on a **fixed fee for agreed deliverables** - dates, documents, milestones.
12. Don't let **progress reports** interfere with progress. Get what you need, not what they need for "CYA" requirements.
13. Check **who else** is billing time to your project. Sometimes there is a very expensive partner back at the office who needs to keep his billing rate up. Your budget can be quickly consumed while he "supervises" from a distance.
14. Avoid **surprises**. Ask about additional expenses - travel, telephone, printing. Terms of payment? Satisfaction guarantee?
15. Get it in writing, **read it** before signing it.
16. Watch for **signs of trouble**: selling more work before the work is done; long delays between on-site visits; too much time spent "back at the office" and billed to you.
17. And finally, remember consultants are people too. They want to boast about good work and satisfied clients. You can help them help you. **Don't be difficult**.

With respect and regards to all my favorite clients and consultants,

Del Chatterson.