

MindShare
Consulting^{LLC}

Consult This!

62 Tips for Consulting Success

Michael W. McLaughlin

Principal, MindShare Consulting LLC

Coauthor, *Guerrilla Marketing for Consultants*

Consult This!
62 Tips for Consulting Success
By Michael W. McLaughlin

Published by
[MindShare Consulting, LLC](#)
10292 SW Taylor Street
Portland, OR 97225
USA
(503) 841 6047
E-mail: Michael@MindShareConsulting.com

Editor: Sally A. McLaughlin

First Edition: January 2007

Copyright © 2007 MindShare Consulting, LLC
All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

Contents

Foreword	v
Managing Your Practice	1
Get Ready—Here Comes a New Year	2
When to Fire a Client	3
Put Clients Second	4
Should Consultants Blog?	5
All Work and No Play	6
The Consulting Process	7
Enter with an Exit Strategy	8
Choose the “A” Team	9
Ignore the Moose Head	10
Stamp Out Deliverables	11
When It All Hits the Fan	12
Solve the Right Problem	13
Endure Consultant Bashing	14
The Secret to Consulting Success	15
Mediocrity Is the Kiss of Death	16
Send a Lumpy Package	17
Learn to Recognize Big Ideas	18
What’s the Best Advice You Ever Got?	19
How to Get Unstuck	20
Be Accessible	21
What’s the Brain Got to Do with Business?	22
Marketing	23
Avoiding Marketing Pitfalls	24
Think Guarantees	25
The Myth of the Generalist	26
How Not to Write a Press Release	27
Are Your Client References an Asset?	28
Write Case Studies That Sell	29
Rethinking Logos	30
Patience	31
What’s Your 100-Pound Advantage?	32
How Much Does “Free” Cost Clients?	33
The Aim of Marketing	34

Pricing Your Services	35
When Price Matters Most	36
Hourly Rates—Confusing Effort with Results	37
Get Paid What You're Worth	38
How to Dump Hourly Rates	39
Proposal Writing	40
People, People, People	41
Words to Avoid in Proposals	42
Resisting the RFP	43
Win—Don't Just Answer—Every RFP Question	44
When Words Get in the Way	45
The Seven Deadly Sins of Proposal Writing	46
Keep Proposals Short	47
The Language of Consulting	48
The Consultant's Jargon Generator	49
Has Your Paradigm Shifted Today?	50
What Do <i>You</i> Do?	51
On Bullsh*t	52
The PowerPoint Blues	53
Words Are Worth a Thousand Pictures	54
Selling Your Services	55
Ten Realities of Complex Sales	56
What Clients Want	57
Clients Buy, They're Not "Sold"	58
The Consultant Is a Buyer Too	59
Share Your Stuff	60
Are You Really Listening?	61
Forget Getting Your Foot in the Door	62
The Myth of Client Pain	63
Five Mistakes Every Consultant Should Avoid	64
Take a Deep Breath before You Answer These Questions	65
Your New Buyer	66
Your Toughest Competitor	67
When to Give Up on a Sale	68
The Next Competitive Advantage	69
About	70

Foreword



In 1891, Carl Eisner invented the now-famous Swiss Army Knife, which is shipped by the thousands every day. Although this e-book cannot hope to rival the utility of Eisner's invention, the tips in it were inspired by the tool's versatility.

This modest book offers a range of ideas for you to consider as you work to become a better consultant. The topics aren't totally random—I chose them from posts I wrote for my *Guerrilla Consulting* blog.

Like the Swiss Army Knife, these tips won't solve all of your problems, but maybe you'll find an idea or two you can use or pass along to someone else.

Your comments and insights are welcome.

Michael W. McLaughlin
Michael@MindShareConsulting.com

Managing Your Practice

**“Once you find a management technique that works, give it up.”
- Richard Farson**

Get Ready—Here Comes a New Year

At least once a year, you should reflect on the past year and resolve to do better in the next. If you're thinking about resolutions for your consulting business, here are a few thoughts, in no particular order, to kick-start your brain.

- **Dust off your marketing plan.** Go back through your marketing plan and review what's working and what's not. Should you consider adding new services to your practice? Should you discontinue others? Is your target market right? Are your marketing tactics working? Is there something new and different about your business you'd like to highlight in the market?
- **Raise your rates?** Whether the consulting market is picking up or losing steam, consider if your rates are aligned with the market. Take a fresh look at your services and fees. You may find an opportunity to raise your fees, particularly for new clients.
- **Prune your client list.** Consider which clients you'd rather refer to others this year, instead of serving them yourself. Are there client relationships that aren't working for you, either professionally or financially? Examine your existing client list and decide if you would be better off not working for any client on the list.
- **Strengthen ten relationships.** With client relationships—current and past—fresh in your mind, find ways to renew and strengthen the relationships you want to keep. You're likely to end up with more business if you do.
- **Revisit your Web site.** Is it time to refresh some or all of your Web site? Does your site reflect your current capabilities, differentiators and service offerings?
- **Contribute to your industry.** Whether you practice in financial services or information technology, find a way to contribute some of your time and consulting expertise to solving issues your industry is facing. Make a difference.
- **Market your practice daily.** Find a way to do one thing, even something small, each day to promote your practice. It will pay off.
- **Fill a gap.** Is there a gap in some part of your business or consulting knowledge? Devote time to identifying an area for professional development, and then head to that conference, or read a few books. Whatever gap you spot, plan a way to fill it in the coming year.

When to Fire a Client

It may seem crazy to “fire” a client, but it might be the best strategic move you can make. Few things damage the long-term vibrancy of your business more than an unproductive client relationship. Remember, sometimes the client-consultant relationship just doesn't work. Or maybe the effort to keep a client happy isn't worth it.

Here are five telltale signs that you might want to fire a client:

- You've stopped growing professionally from the client's projects
- The client has disengaged from your project, leaving decisions to others
- It's tough to get a meeting with your key client sponsor
- Your project profit margin is eroding
- The client nit-picks your invoices or payments are consistently late.

Disengaging from a client relationship is easier said than done, though, so expect it to take some time and courage. It's tough to drop a paying client, but the upside can be enormous. You'll likely replace that client with one or more projects that stretch you professionally, make positive changes in your new client's business, and boost your profitability.

Put Clients Second

It's axiomatic that your firm puts the client's needs first, right? Promotional material, Web sites, and mission statements certainly proclaim that clients are the highest priority. But the way to achieve consistently profitable results is to put your *consultants* first and clients second.

Whether your practice has two consultants or two hundred, their talents and skills are more critical to your long-term success than your roster of clients. It is, after all, great consultants who drive the profitability of your practice.

Consultants must be responsive to their client's needs, even to the point of working long, crazy hours. Realistically, though, good consultants are tougher to replace than clients.

If you lose a client, it may produce an immediate financial impact. If you lose a great consultant, you lose a lot more than money. You lose a portion of your ability to sell and deliver work; you lose your investment in training; and you lose the client relationships that the consultant built. And don't forget the high cost of recruiting and breaking in a replacement.

What is worse, a departing consultant can create a cascade effect that causes others to leave the firm, compounding your losses. Or your ex-colleague can become your competitor, and steal your secrets, clients, and staff.

Turnover is inevitable in professional services firms. Minimize the brain drain and take the sting out of a very demanding business by providing a collegial and supportive work environment, offering challenging opportunities, and paying people what they are worth.

Make sure your consultants know that they come first in the practice and they, in turn, will make sure clients are *their* first priority.

Should Consultants Blog?

Maybe it's beside the point to ask if consultants should blog given that so many already do—including this one. But when I recently read an article claiming that all professional service providers must have a blog, I was struck by the author's all-or-nothing tone.

Hundreds of thousands of blog posts have dissected the power and benefits of blogs, so no need to rehash that subject here. But should every professional service provider author a blog? I don't think so.

No offense, but some of the greatest consultants I've met are mediocre writers. They can work wonders with client executives, consulting teams, and even prepare snazzy PowerPoint presentations. But they shouldn't try to write blogs.

And some consultants already create a high level of client demand for their services using other channels. They don't need blogs to attract more clients.

In some industries, blogs just may not matter to clients. If the purpose of a business blog is to reach your targeted audience, it's best to know someone out there would want to read your stuff. Any one of us could rattle off a number of industries where blogs are still an oddity, not a fixture.

And finally, to paraphrase blogger Doc Searls, you need to be a good blog reader before you can be a good blogger. Even though anyone can have a blog running in minutes, that doesn't mean everyone should.

I'm a big fan of blogs. But I believe every business and individual is different, with unique strategies, tactics, customers, suppliers, and employees. Black and white advice glosses over important nuances that can make the difference between success and failure.

I believe consultants should blog, just not all of them.

All Work and No Play

Most of us know at least one "workaholic." Maybe it's the consultant who gets to work earlier than everyone else, toils until all hours of the night, and uses weekends to catch up on other work.

Over time, workaholics may experience depression, anxiety, anger, high blood pressure, and a rash (no pun intended) of other, nasty diseases.

No doubt, there's a fine line between managing the demands of a grueling profession and being a workaholic. So, just to be sure none of you are on the edge, here's a quick, unscientific test, courtesy of the *Wall Street Journal*, to help you understand if you're a workaholic—or becoming one.

Take the [Workaholic's Quiz](#).

Oh, and if you just told yourself you don't have time to complete the quiz, you may already be a workaholic. All work and no play can make you pretty dull.

The Consulting Process

**“You’ll never accomplish anything if you care who gets the credit.”
- Jerry Weinberg**

Enter with an Exit Strategy

Many clients' worst nightmare is consultants who just won't leave. Whether or not clients need the additional work, some consultants continue to unearth new opportunities to "help" clients.

That behavior gives consultants a black eye.

Recognizing that some consultants stay at a client long after they're welcome, one consulting firm promises that, "We do not want to be disruptive to our client's business, so our projects are focused and when our job is done, we leave."

Amen.

Next time you're creating a proposal or beginning a project, ask yourself, "What's our exit strategy?" Know at the outset what you must do to be sure the project wraps and the team goes home.

Being explicit about a team's departure date will reduce a client's anxiety. And if you stay focused on your completion date, the client will be much more likely to consider you for future projects.

Choose the "A" Team

Most of us remember from childhood the brutal playground ritual of choosing sides for kickball, dodge ball, or any other game. Two captains would stand before a line of kids and take turns selecting the ones they wanted until every kid was on a team. The scrawny kid who loved math and wasn't very good at sports was always the last to be picked.

Client/consulting team selection isn't quite as harsh, but few things impact the outcome of a project more than the quality of your team. For consulting projects, it's particularly important that *client* team members are selected with care because their contributions can mean the difference between a great outcome and a flame-out.

It can be difficult to achieve the results you want if the client has selected a team before you've had a chance to put in your two cents. So whenever possible, strive to be in a position to help decide the makeup of the client team. Here are few quick ideas for picking a productive group.

Begin with a skill requirements summary for each role on the team, and then use that summary to narrow down the number of candidates. But skills aren't enough. Ask the client to assess each person's capacity: to work collaboratively with outsiders; to be creative in ambiguous situations; and to commit to the project's outcome even if that means contributing beyond the normal job duties every now and then.

The final test is for that intangible quality called chemistry. You'll only know that when you see or feel it. You've got to pay attention to your instincts.

The best client people are usually busy on other projects. You may have to push to identify the A players and get them on your team. If it's uncomfortable to push, imagine how you'll feel if the project outcome isn't achieved because of a poorly performing team. You'll put your relationship, reputation, and fees on the line.

And remember, looks don't count. That scrawny math whiz who, years ago, was the last one the team captain picked may be just the person you're looking for now.

Ignore the Moose Head

At one point in my career, I was lucky enough to land an office with a jaw dropping view of Chicago and Lake Michigan. That view was stunning no matter what weather descended on the Windy City. Like most consultants, though, I didn't spend much time in the office.

When I did, that panoramic view was one of life's pleasures, but it was also a two-edged sword. Whenever I met with potential suppliers of products or services, I knew the first ten minutes would be consumed by a discussion of "the view." I could almost set my watch by how much time it would take before we started the meeting. Before long, I had an unconscious script for those first few minutes.

Don't get me wrong—I don't have anything against some small talk in a business meeting. But there's too much mindless chit-chat in first-time meetings.

Many consultants are trained to scan a client's office for some non-business, common ground to kick off a conversation with and build "rapport." If the consultant notices a moose head on the wall, or a framed picture of the client falling over the finish line at a marathon, that may seem like a great way to start the conversation. That's equivalent to the "view" conversation, and like me, the client will robotically retell the relevant story for the umpteenth time.

There's no need to be a killjoy. But I think it makes sense to get to the meeting topic quickly and save the banter for later. If you've got thirty minutes, why squander a third of that time? Get to the point, and save the small talk for the end of the meeting.

Most clients will appreciate that approach, and through the course of your meeting, it's likely you'll find other, more interesting topics for small talk than that tired old marathon story.

Stamp Out Deliverables

I recently read an RFP that began with a short description of the desired outcomes, and ended with an elaborate list of fifty-three "deliverables." The list included things like detailed project plans, communication strategies, and new organization charts. The RFP stipulated that firms failing to respond to each deliverable would be penalized.

The list was exhaustive (and exhausting). But when viewed as a whole, the deliverables themselves didn't move the client one inch toward the desired changes. It just generated a lot of...well...deliverables.

It's time for consultants to help clients focus on results rather than deliverables. I suspect consultants taught clients the word to begin with, but is that what they really need? Let's shift the client dialogue to benefits, outcomes, results—anything but deliverables.

When It All Hits the Fan

We've all experienced (or created) a customer service failure—a time when customer loyalty is stretched to the max. Few events are more stress-inducing than a service blowout, especially since it's never intentional.

We should consider ourselves lucky when a client calls us on the carpet for such a failure. Customer loyalty researchers say that 70 percent of disgruntled buyers take immediate, punitive action against a company without any formal complaint. Some business owners never know what hit them.

What's worse is that you're likely to lose some, if not all, future revenue from 20 percent of complaining clients.

There's some good news when a client complains, though. If you can successfully resolve a complaint, that client is more likely to be loyal to your business than one who never had a problem.

You don't build loyalty by creating grumpy clients. When a client is miffed, get on it fast and you may have a client for life.

Solve the Right Problem

Almost forty years ago, Warren J. Wittreich wrote in the *Harvard Business Review* that “often a client who wishes to purchase a professional service senses that he has a problem, but is uncertain as to what the *specific* nature of his problem really is. *The responsibility of the service firm is to identify that problem and define it in meaningful terms.*”

Twenty years later in *The Secrets of Consulting*, Gerry Weinberg recalls the first law of consulting taught to him by a colleague, Roger House: “In spite of what the client may tell you, there’s always a problem.”

If the first law of consulting is that there’s always a problem, the second—which is trickier—is to be sure you’re solving the *right* problem. Otherwise, you’re just covering symptoms with a flimsy band-aid that will surely fail—more likely sooner than later. That’s the stuff that gives consultants a bad rep.

It’s easy to get sucked into “how we’ll deal with this problem” too quickly. With competition breathing down our necks, it’s tempting to conjure up a solution before the problem is truly understood by the client and the consultant.

The result is often a misguided and a potentially failed project. Most clients are facing issues of such complexity that off-the-shelf solutions can easily be a recipe for disaster. Now more than ever, we need to be guided by Wittreich’s wisdom and remember our responsibility to identify and define client problems in a meaningful way.

Endure Consultant Bashing

Here we go again.

Nick Cohen's article "[Natural born billers](#)" in the *Guardian Unlimited* reviews *Rip-Off: The Scandalous Story of the Management Consulting Money Machine*, which is the latest entry in a long string of books slamming professional consultants. I've lost count of how many such books are on the market.

Rip-Off is a self-published book by an anonymous, twenty-year consulting veteran who alleges unspeakable behavior by management consultants. The book paints a dreadful portrait of the industry.

But the story has all of the elements of a good smear piece—money, power, and greed. So there was some piling on.

Another highly critical article in *The Independent* accused consultants of providing "solutions we may not need, systems that may not work, at a price we shouldn't pay, in a language we don't understand."

One UK-based consultant decided to fire back by posing the question in his own article, "How much longer do consultants have to keep justifying their very existence?"

Uh, try forever.

Every industry has problems, and opportunistic people will write about them. It's noteworthy that the anonymous author spent twenty years in the muck before seeing the light and confessing to the world.

Face it, consultants and consulting firms are easy targets. Outside of professional sports, consulting is one of the highest paid professions, and the private firms aren't exactly forthcoming about the details of their operations.

My advice: Get over it.

As long as consultants are serving clients, there will continue to be tell-all books. No need to justify your existence. Just make sure your clients understand your value. Everything else will take care of itself.

The Secret to Consulting Success

Don't worry—I'm not hawking an amateurish program on how to create an Internet money-making machine in your spare time. Here's a question: What separates the top performing consultant, or firm, from the rest of the pack?

Before jumping in with an answer, let's start with an assumption or two. Assume that your firm already has paying clients, the talent to serve those clients, and an effective method of business development and service delivery.

Given those assumptions, I believe the great firms separate themselves from everyone else based on the passion of their people. You may think of it as "fire in the belly," excitement, enthusiasm, or zeal for your life's work. Whatever you call it, passion is the emotion that makes you jump out of bed in the morning, itching to get at it.

Passion drives the discipline you need to accomplish the big goals you set for your life, career, and relationships. Passion is an impatient state of mind. Nothing moves as fast as you'd like when you have a burning desire to convert your vision into reality.

But if you can harness and apply your passion with rigor and discipline, it will lead you to discovery, then mastery and, finally, to success. Without passion, you can muddle through, but greatness will allude you. If you're not passionate about what you're doing, sooner or later that will become apparent to your colleagues and your clients.

In the 1991 movie, *Thelma and Louise*, Louise (Geena Davis) captures the essence of passion when she reminds her fellow fugitive, "You get what you settle for."

Never settle. If you can't keep your internal fire burning, you are in the wrong business.

Mediocrity is the Kiss of Death

As I was paging through my email, I found an audio clip message that claimed to be "the most important audio program I'd ever listen to." I almost deleted it on the spot just on principle, but decided to give it a listen.

The question posed at the beginning of the clip/advertisement was, why is it that some consultants have all the clients they can handle, while others limp along? The short answer was great marketing.

The speaker said good marketing covers up many sins, and that even mediocre consultants could have thriving practices—if they were great marketers. The speaker supported this perspective by pointing to the launch of Microsoft's early products, which included software with bugs and gaps in features. After all, the logic went, if Microsoft used marketing to recover from early product flaws, why can't you too?

Putting that dubious logic aside, the speaker probably didn't really mean to encourage you to settle for mediocrity. The point was that you don't need to be good at what you do to make money.

I'd contend that bad news—and mediocre performance *is* bad news—spreads like wildfire. And a great marketing program will *accelerate* the demise of a mediocre business, not lead to a thriving one.

Granted, great marketing will open client doors for lots of people, including lousy consultants. But once clients see what those consultants can't do, they won't go back for more—they'll find someone better. In consulting, mediocrity is the kiss of death.

Send a Lumpy Package

In the professional services business, small gestures have a big impact. When you land a new client, send a welcome package to your sponsor. Include a personalized letter in the package, along with other items such as firm contact information, a list of upcoming events, relevant articles, or an appropriate book.

Use the opportunity to express your gratitude to the client for engaging you, and to let her know how important the project is to you and your firm.

Send welcome packages by postal mail, not e-mail. You'll be amazed at the strong and positive impression you'll make with this one simple gesture.

Learn to Recognize Big Ideas

Toward the end of 1990 in a lab in Switzerland, British physicist Tim Berners-Lee brought to life his creation—the World Wide Web. At the time, his colleagues admired his ingenuity, but most people simply could not envision practical uses for his invention.

So, Berners-Lee used his creation to speed up access to the lab's telephone directory. Some of his colleagues resisted even that use, arguing that what they had was just fine.

Who knew that the tools Berners-Lee had created to define the basic structure of the Web—tools he gave away for free, by the way—would spawn a revolution in how we all work and live?

Ten years later, at the end of 2000, Berners-Lee's lone Web site had a lot of company: over 25 million Web sites around the world.

Time magazine named Berners-Lee one of the top thinkers of the 20th century. Berners-Lee recently told the BBC that his invention was "just another program." Right. Queen Elizabeth II knighted Berners-Lee for his pioneering work. He's also received Finland's Millennium Technology Prize.

Berners-Lee is a modest guy, but he clearly sees beyond what most of us see, and he thinks BIG. In an interview in the October 2004 issue of *Technology Review*, Sir Tim points out that, "Early on, people really didn't understand why the Web was interesting. They saw it in the smaller scale, and it's not interesting in the smaller scale."

Sir Tim currently heads up the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) at MIT in Boston, where he is working on his next big idea, the Semantic Web. The world, of course will be paying attention to whatever Berners-Lee comes up with in the future.

But the story of the Web's creation points out the need to challenge ourselves to stretch our thinking to recognize big ideas.

What's the Best Advice You Ever Got?

The editors at *Fortune* magazine posed that question to twenty-eight business “superstars” in the March 21, 2005 issue. For me, a handful of the responses stood out from the others.

Andy Grove, Chairman of Intel: “When 'everyone knows' something to be true, nobody knows nothin'.”

Peter Drucker: “Get good—or get out.”

Dick Parsons, Chairman and CEO of Time Warner: “When you negotiate, leave a little something on the table.”

Jack Welch, Former Chairman and CEO of General Electric: “Be yourself.”

Doling out wisdom by sound bite is always perilous. But with a great idea, the right skills, and a little luck, you could run a business using these timeless principles.

How to Get Unstuck

Trapped.

The clock had just struck 2:00 am. Our consulting team, jammed into a windowless conference room, was working on a short-burn strategic alignment project for a client suffering from sagging performance and dim prospects.

The deadline loomed for our recommendations, and we were dead in the water. The table was piled high with reams of head count analyses, interview notes, and the opinions of a huge team of outside experts. After spending countless hours wading through the material, the team came to a bleak realization:

We didn't know what to do. We were stuck.

You haven't truly lived the life of a consultant until you experience the sheer terror of being hopelessly stuck. After all, we're the ones with all the solutions, right?

Now when you're not sure how to get out of the muck, there's help. Get your hands on a copy of *Unstuck* by consultants Keith Yamashita and Sandra Spataro. The book is a practical, accessible toolkit that will help any project team break through mental gridlock and get back on track.

Everything starts with an admission: I'm stuck. Once you admit that, you can probably find the root of your problem in what the authors call the Serious Seven—overwhelmed, exhausted, directionless, hopeless, battle-torn, worthless, alone. From that point, you're well on your way to becoming unstuck, once and for all.

Oh, and this isn't a run-of-the-mill business tome. Its compact size and modular design encourage you to dip in where you need the most help. With a heavy dose of cross-referencing to other tools in the book, exercises and thought-provoking ideas, you don't read the book as much as interact with it.

I wish this book had been available when I struggled through that dreary night, stuck in project quagmire.

Be Accessible

It would be easy to conclude that being accessible to clients is a simple, universal truth in the consulting business. After all, a consultant can't be helpful without being available when a client calls.

But place a call to any consultant and test the result. Often, you receive a cryptic voicemail greeting that encourages you to leave a message and expect a return call "at my earliest possible convenience."

Granted, the consultant may return the call in a short time, but the client doesn't know what to expect. You might as well say you'll call "whenever." A simple change in your voicemail greeting, indicating when you will return calls, would clear up that uncertainty.

It's not unusual for consultants to attend day-long events that make it tough to remain accessible to clients. But don't let an assistant or answering service tell a client that you're "out of the office all day and can't be reached." Remember, your client really doesn't care what you're doing. The caller wants to hear from you.

Rather than telling a client that you're out of the office, in a meeting, or nursing a cold at home, just tell the client when to expect a return call. Forget about the extra information—it doesn't help.

What's the Brain Got to Do with Business?

Well, everything.

To say that the pace of business is fast is like saying Michael Jordan knows basketball. In our “got to have it now” world, I sometimes find it challenging to tap my own creative abilities and those of my colleagues. Often, the pressure of the moment just overtakes you.

Here are five books I've used to train myself to hatch creative ideas no matter the constraints.

- Tony Buzan, Barry Buzan: [*The Mind Map Book*](#)
- Jordan Ayan: [*Aha! 10 Ways to Free Your Creative Spirit and Find Your Great Ideas*](#)
- Julia Cameron: [*The Artist's Way*](#)
- Barry Nalebuff, Ian Ayres: [*Why Not?*](#)
- Michael Michalko: [*Cracking Creativity*](#)
- Jerry Wind, Colin Crook: [*The Power of Impossible Thinking*](#)

When I asked Jordan Ayan, the creativity whiz, what he did when he faced a tough problem that had no apparent answer, he said, “I take a shower...I have my best ideas in the shower. Matter of fact, I had a second water heater installed in my house so I could take longer showers.”

Whatever works.

Marketing

“Throwing dollars at the marketplace doesn't get the attention you need to bring clients to your firm.” – Mark Stevens

Avoiding Marketing Pitfalls

Many competent consultants risk their own success, and their bank balances, by driving straight into the same old marketing potholes again and again.

Take action to avoid these ten common traps:

1. **The curse of experience.** Many consultants believe that their deep understanding of clients and their businesses translates into an understanding of the nuances of marketing. That assumption can cost you clients and money.
2. **Go it alone.** Consulting is a collaborative business. Whether it's Web design, writing marketing copy, or launching a survey, you should always be on the lookout for talented people to partner with in marketing. Focus your efforts on what you do best—deliver value to clients. Let the pros cover your weak spots in their areas of expertise.
3. **Overestimate clients' interest in you.** Clients care about their own problems and how to solve them, not about your business. They'll engage you to help and express polite interest in you, but keep the focus on them, not you.
4. **Believe your services are top-notch just as they are.** Clients' needs are always changing, so your service strategy must always be evolving too. It's never good enough.
5. **Sell too hard.** Don't think clients are ready to be sold by you right off the bat. Clients buy, they're not sold. Give them something to buy that they really need.
6. **Dabble in marketing.** You can't just throw an article or two out there and expect clients to take notice of you. Successful marketing requires sustained, consistent, and coordinated effort.
7. **Focus on your "accounts," not your clients.** Learn as much about the people as you do about each client's company. Plan and market in a client-centered manner—at the individual executive level.
8. **Take the one-size-fits-all approach.** Each client and project is different. Your previously winning formula can easily backfire unless it's tailored for each individual situation.
9. **Be impatient.** Instant gratification and marketing rarely go together. Be patient. Your marketing investments will pay off, but it almost always takes longer than you think.
10. **Dread marketing.** Consulting is a marketing business. If you don't enjoy marketing, the road will seem like—and be—one pothole after another.

Think Guarantees

Consultants shudder at the thought of offering any type of guarantee for their work, even if it's just an assurance that the client will be satisfied with the team's effort. Consultants believe that external factors could wreak havoc with a project's projected results, so it's necessary to be absolved of any responsibility for the outcome.

It's time for a change, and winning firms know it. Among the top criteria clients use to select professional service providers is a guarantee of promised results. What many consultants don't realize is that a guarantee can be a good thing: it can prevent misunderstandings because the client and consultant must nail down the expected results before a guarantee can be defined.

Also, a guarantee should be a two-way street. A consultant who exceeds the client's performance expectations is justified in expecting to share in the added value.

The Myth of the Generalist

In an interview I did with Jack Trout for *Management Consulting News*, his advice to consultants was “To thrive, specialize.” I think he’s right.

Some consultants believe that to fill the sales pipeline with prospective clients, they must position themselves as generalists. To cast a wide net and be as many things as possible to clients, they try to sell the notion that they can solve any problem that arises.

It’s easy to see why this strategy seems logical, at least on the surface. Many firms have made their mark by offering a general set of high-priced services to willing clients. The mega-firms are called “one-stop shops” for just about anything clients need.

But under that generalist veneer in most firms are groups of highly specialized consultants, focused on what they do best.

Of course, these specialists can expand their scope to help clients solve other business problems—and they do once they’ve struck up a client relationship. But they open the client’s door *and* mind by demonstrating undisputed expertise on the issue facing the client, not by emphasizing a “jack of all trades” strategy.

As Trout pointed out, “Clients are looking for the best of breed when choosing consultants. They’ll pick one consultant for creative work, one for strategy work, and another for change management projects. Clients will use consultants they perceive to be specialists in a coordinated way to achieve the total result they’re after.”

How Not to Write a Press Release

Score another one for corporate babble. My e-mailbox contained a press release announcing that two companies—which will remain nameless—were joining forces to offer something “special” to the market.

The press release headline jumped from the page:

"Proven Identity Management Experience Combined With Context-Based Identity Services
Unlock the Value of Existing Information Assets for Fine-Grained Security, User Administration,
and Federated Identity."

Huh?

Granted, I'm no expert on writing press releases, and some aspects of technology, while important, are bound to be incomprehensible to the layperson.

But no press announcement about a product or service should be so opaque. After all, if you want media coverage, you need to present a compelling story in your press release that is newsworthy *and* understandable.

It's a waste of time and money to throw a generic, jargon-laden press release into the ether. And the PR people producing such drivel should be sent back to “Value Proposition 101” before being allowed to write for another client.

Before you begin to write a press release, ask and answer at least these basic questions: What's really different about the offering? How would a media person use this information? How might your story benefit the media person's readers? Is a press release the best way to communicate what you have to say? What do you want the press release to accomplish?

With those answers in mind, you'll be able to craft a communication that has a much better chance of grabbing coverage than if you send out the typical buzzword-based press release.

Are Your Client References an Asset?

Every night, as the well-worn saying goes, a consulting firm's primary asset—its people—walk out the door. The rest of a consulting firm's assets, including its intellectual property, are largely intangible.

One powerful, but often neglected intangible asset is a firm's list of client references. When consultants toot their own horn, clients usually ignore the noise. They have become immune to the typical marketing puffery served up by many consultants. But it's a different case if the superlatives flow from your clients.

During the proposal process, consultants typically pick a handful of past clients who will "give us great references." Many consultants settle for clients simply vouching for their qualifications. But that's just not enough.

Let's say a client responds to a reference call with "Oh sure, I remember that team. They did a great job on our sales force reorganization project." That's a decent reference.

When that same client says, "Oh yeah, they helped us improve sales force productivity, and that led to a 3 percent increase in quarterly sales," now that's a winning reference.

The difference between a good reference and a winning one is determined by how you actively manage your client relationships—during *and* after projects. You need to develop the kind of relationships that allow you to ask clients to substantiate, in a quantifiable way, the results you helped them achieve.

That means you have to work with your clients to measure the long-term impact of your efforts, so they have a specific outcome to report. You also have to stay in touch to obtain a reference that makes you stand out in the crowd. Let your relationship fade into the woodwork and you'll have to settle for what you can get.

At a reasonable interval after a project, ask your client to put in writing the kind of reference you want so you can include it in future proposals.

Keep the balance sheet for your intangible assets strong by managing client references. Your ongoing investment in this overlooked asset will often make the difference between winning and losing.

Write Case Studies That Sell

Case studies, those illustrative examples of consultants' past work, have long been a staple of their proposals and Web sites. Unfortunately, many clients breeze right by them, expecting them to be the me-too, self-serving promotions of consultants' accomplishments they have seen before.

But case studies don't have to be lifeless. Put your case studies to work for you—make them a definitive factor in the client's decision to hire you.

Seven Elements of a Killer Case Study

1. Tell a story. Don't just list facts. Describe the problem and its impact on the client's customers, suppliers, employees, and shareholders.
2. Place the client's success, not yours, at the center of the story.
3. Describe how you worked *with* the client to solve the problem.
4. Be specific. Don't rely on generalities. Include the details of what you did.
5. Don't overstate results, but clearly document the value the client received.
6. Provide access to references whenever possible.
7. Keep it short.

A well-written case study should answer the number one question clients ask consultants: How will your team work with our team to achieve the results we need? Case studies also clarify approaches, strategies, and resources that you have successfully used on other projects.

For each case study, name the client company, if possible. Some clients prefer confidentiality, and you must honor that trust. But case studies have more punch if the company is named, instead of being referred to as a "global provider of medical supplies."

Rethinking Logos

The Nike swoosh was designed in the early 1970s by a graphic design student for \$35.00. Phil Knight, Nike's founder, wasn't particularly fond of the logo but he needed something fast, so he went with it.

In the thirty-plus years since, the company has spent unimaginable amounts of money drilling it into our heads that the now-famous swoosh stands for Nike.

The Nike swoosh, the stylized Coca-Cola signature, and the ubiquitous UPS logo have meaning for consumers because those companies have spent a fortune getting us to associate specific symbols with their enterprises.

While a logo may look cool on a Web site, it won't help get your company's message through to the customer. Why? Because most logos are designed to look good, not communicate an entire idea about your organization.

In 1976, Oxford University biologist Richard Dawkins proposed an antidote for the shortcomings of logos. Dawkins coined the term meme, which he defined as a basic unit of cultural transmission that passes from one mind to another and instantly communicates an entire idea.

For example, the skull-and-crossbones symbol is a meme that conveys "dangerous to life." Other well-known memes are the hitchhiker's thumb, the Red Cross, and the nuclear mushroom cloud. With their power to communicate a complete thought in a flash, memes have the potential to revolutionize your marketing—without spending a king's ransom.

A well-conceived meme can cut through the marketing clutter and instantly inform clients what your practice does.

One consultant, who serves as an executive coach, uses this meme: the image of an individual wearing a baseball cap and the ubiquitous headset worn by professional football coaches. One look at this meme and you know the consultant is a coach.

The concept of memes is relatively new to marketing, and many will shrug it off as a fad. That's a mistake. The potential power of a meme makes it worth adding to any marketing strategy.

Patience

Noun: *the capacity to tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without becoming angry or upset.*

Most consultants would love to see a faster return on their marketing investments. Even the purveyors of those "get-clients-quick" systems face the same dilemma: building client relationships, creating a market position for your practice, and becoming a visible expert take time and patience.

No doubt, marketing can be the most maddening of undertakings. Sometimes results pour in, while other times nothing seems to happen. It's often tough to know what's working and what's not.

Yet how you react to the inevitable fits and starts of marketing drives your success in the long run. Once you've developed a marketing approach and introduced it to the world, be patient. Remember the world doesn't automatically care about your business just because you do. You've got to *make* people care, and that takes consistent, long-term investment of your time and energy.

I'm not suggesting that a marketing plan shouldn't be revised over time, or thrown out entirely if it doesn't work. But making sudden shifts in your marketing approach because of short-term blips in your results can unwind the momentum you've created and lead to less business down the road.

Patience is a personal quality of calmness, self-control, and confidence. Is patience part of your marketing strategy?

What's Your 100-Pound Advantage?

When Danica Patrick, 22, qualified this year for the 89th Indianapolis 500 race, she became just the fourth woman to ever do so.

Fellow NASCAR driver, Robby Gordon, was up in arms before the race complaining that Patrick had an unfair advantage. At 5'2" and 100 pounds, Patrick is almost 100 pounds lighter than her beefier, male competitors, which some claim could lead to a one mph difference in speed over the course of the race.

"I won't race against her until the IRL [Indy Racing League] does something to take that advantage away" said Gordon. Of all the factors contributing to winning a race, a driver's weight was enough to cause one of America's most successful racers to wave the yellow flag at Patrick, an Indy 500 rookie.

I'm not a race car fan, but I know that winning the Indy 500, in which cars careen around the brickyard oval at speeds approaching 225 mph, requires more than a good driver and a souped up car—experience, a great pit crew, a flawless driving strategy, and a favorable pole position also matter a lot.

Sports analogies are so overused in business that I was tempted to let this one go, but it's just too good. Imagine what you could accomplish if you could find one differentiator, like Patrick's weight, that gave your business such an edge that your competitors cried uncle before the client got serious about choosing a consultant.

Every consultant and firm has the equivalent of the 100-pound advantage. It may be hidden in your ideas, insights, or innovative approach. But it's there, and clients want it. Combine that 100-pound advantage with the right experience, team, and strategy, and you'll be a surefire winner.

Oh, due to some bad luck, and a driving error or two, Danica Patrick finished fourth behind Dan Wheldon, the 157-pound winner.

How Much Does “Free” Cost Clients?

As I was reading one of my favorite e-newsletters, I came across a sponsored offer to download a “free” whitepaper on a subject that interested me.

I clicked through to a Web page describing the company, its offerings, and the whitepaper I was about to download. When I saw how much personal information the company required in exchange for a ten-page whitepaper, I should have trusted my instincts and bolted from the site.

Reluctantly, I provided the details the company requested, including my phone number. I know—it was dumb.

I hit submit and landed on another page with instructions for downloading the whitepaper and a sentence informing me that a sales rep would call me to discuss the company’s products and services.

They got me. Now I’m waiting for that sales rep to call—no doubt during dinner.

What are two fast ways to alienate prospective clients on the Web? Ask for too much personal information and conceal how you’ll use it. Steve Krug, author and Web usability expert, calls this practice “a very bad idea.”

In this case, the company in question shot itself in both feet. If you’re offering something to prospective clients, ask only for the details you need to get that information into their hands as quickly as possible. Let clients check you out and voluntarily contact you if they want to know more.

And if you’re directing your readers to organizations that behave this way, beware of collateral damage. Align your site with those who are willing to intrude and mislead, and you risk ending up with the same black eye.

The Aim of Marketing

The number of business books that hit the shelves every month is staggering. If you want to pick one gem, try *The Daily Drucker: 366 Days of Insight and Motivation for Getting the Right Things Done*.

If anything, the book is like a hardcover blog containing easy-to-read insights from Drucker's decades of work.

In one excerpt on marketing, Drucker reminds us that, "The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well that the product or service fits her and sells itself. Ideally, marketing should result in a customer who is ready to buy. We may be a long way from this ideal. But consumerism is a clear indication that the right motto for business management should increasingly be, "From selling to marketing"."

Pricing Your Services

“The consulting firm's challenge is to constantly figure out how to generate more client value per dollar of cost, and to demonstrate this.” – Philip Kotler

When Price Matters Most

I met a consultant who described her team's first meetings with a prospective client: "The client executives spent four hours taking us through a long, consulting to-do list. They told us that solving those problems was far more important than price. We were thrilled with the opportunity, and quickly completed a proposal.

"But the client literally showed us the door when they read the proposal and the price. I haven't been able to get a return call from any of the executives since that fateful day."

It's common for clients to experience sticker shock when they see the price tag of a consulting project. With a little work, you can soften the blow.

In initial meetings, clients often say price isn't important. They are focused on getting the problem handled—now. So, clients begin by evaluating a consultant's expertise and ability to get the job done, and they push the issue of price to the back burner, at least temporarily.

Once the client gets close to making a decision, though, a subtle shift takes place. The price and risk of the project take center stage, and the consultant's expertise becomes part of the background.

It makes sense. Once a client is close to a decision, the field of contenders has been winnowed to the firms most capable of handling the work, so attention naturally moves to other factors.

You need to plan for this shift by staying close to your client, particularly at the end of the sales cycle. Tweak your message to stress the value-to-cost ratio of your proposal and show how you will manage every element of project risk. Fail to shift gears with the client, and you too will be shown the door.

Hourly Rates—Confusing Effort with Results

On one of my very first consulting assignments, I neglected to regularly back up data on my computer and lost an elaborate analysis in a sudden power failure. I bemoaned my lost hours and valuable work to the project manager but, as you might expect, got little sympathy. I did get some good advice though: Never confuse effort with results.

I flashed on that advice recently as I was sitting across the table from a client who asked the inevitable question, “What’s the hourly rate for the people you are proposing for this project?” That led us to discuss if the proposed consultants were “worth” their hourly rate. Sound familiar?

Way too often, such conversations degenerate into how the client can monitor and limit hours—all in an effort to keep costs down—not on how to achieve results.

You can’t blame clients. The hourly rate is the gold standard for pricing in the industry. For decades, professional service providers have trained clients to expect it, and it’s now used extensively to compare consultants.

It’s time to dump the hourly rate.

To begin with, the hourly rate is a totally bogus number. It’s computed using very broad (and sometimes flawed) assumptions about a firm’s costs, volume and profit. And, many consultants toss those assumptions out the window and discount their hourly rates when they believe doing so will improve their chances of winning a project.

And then there’s the matter of results. You probably know the urban legend about the consultant who was asked to help a client restart a machine that had died and caused a halt in production for a manufacturing plant. The consultant eyed the machine from all angles, circled it twice, and whacked it three times with the client’s rubber hammer. The machine sprang back to life, and the consultant left after fifteen minutes of work.

But, the client was outraged with the consultant’s high-priced invoice. “We could have swatted that machine three times without you.” he yelled. The consultant’s predictable reply was, “Yes, but you didn’t know *where* to swat it, and that’s why you called me.”

By charging a client for time alone, you completely undermine the expertise you’ve spent years building, and you limit the profit you can justifiably earn. Dozens of pricing alternatives exist that don’t rely on the hourly rate. Look for alternatives that lead to discussions with clients about the outcomes they want to achieve.

When pricing your next project, think results, not effort.

Get Paid What You're Worth

Want to know the fastest way to earn *less* than an entry-level consultant in a medium to large consulting firm?

Start your own consulting business and charge by the hour.

According to a study by Kennedy Information, the average salary offered to consultants from top business schools was expected to be \$109,000 in 2005, accompanied by five-figure signing bonuses and annual bonuses ranging from \$5,000 to \$30,000. The total, first year compensation package for a newly-minted consultant could thus be over \$150,000.

An independent practitioner charging an hourly rate would have to work awfully hard to match that newbie's salary.

Not to be tedious, but do the math: There are 261 days in a year—once you subtract the weekends. If you take a month off for vacations, holidays, and the like, you're starting from a base of 230 billable days, give or take a few.

Research shows that firm owners will burn about 110 days a year on non-billable activities like marketing, administration, education, and traveling, leaving about 120 days of billable time.

Assuming you're able to bill for 70 percent of those 120 days at \$2,000 a day, and your overhead is a measly 20 percent of revenue, your annual, pre-tax earnings would be roughly \$135,000. Not a bad day's pay, but you're carrying all of the business risk, and making less than an inexperienced consultant.

Most books on the subject of starting a consulting business take you through a detailed exercise on establishing your billing rate. Unless you're running a large practice with many consultants, ignore this advice.

Instead, free your practice from the tyranny and limitations of the billable hour: base pricing on value delivered, not hours worked. Once you've broken the rate-per-hour syndrome, you'll get paid what you're worth.

How to Dump Hourly Rates

Consultants and clients are trained to believe that the hourly rate is the only way to price services. But one collective tug by consultants in the industry and the hourly rate would be a legacy of a bygone era. How can that be done?

Dumping hourly rates is about reaching agreement with clients on value. If, for instance, you propose to help a client reduce indirect expenses by 2 percent, then you must quantify that cost reduction and provide a way to measure it.

Some consultants argue that it's too difficult to quantify the value of a consulting project in advance. But those who take the time to nail down that value will encounter less price resistance from clients, especially if the value-to-fee ratio is high.

Every project has potential, measurable benefits or value. Of course, some are easier to measure than others. To orient clients in the discussion of what your services are worth, consider the possible drivers of consulting value below.

Drivers of Consulting Value

Consultants Can Help Clients...

Increase	Reduce	Improve	Create
Revenue	Costs	Productivity	Strategy
Profit	Time/effort	Processes	Systems
Growth	Complaints	Service	Processes
Value	Risk	Information	Business
Retention	Turnover	Morale	Products
ROI or ROA	Conflict	Reputation	Services
Efficiency	Paperwork	Skills	Brand
Visibility		Loyalty	
		Quality	

Once you have articulated project benefits, figure out, in conjunction with your client, what the proposed changes are worth. That becomes the basis for your fee. For example, reducing employee turnover by 20 percent might reduce recruiting, hiring, and training costs by a similar percentage. Find out what that would be.

You might help clients improve the quality of their products, which should result in fewer complaints and returns and a lower cost of stocking merchandise. If you improve morale among a client's staff, managers could spend less time in meetings and more time running the business. What is it worth to have motivated workers instead of absences, or to improve poor work habits that are due to low morale?

Quantify all benefits that are relevant to a project, and confirm those numbers with the client. That information provides the crucial context for you and your client to assess your proposed fees.

Then, you can use any number of pricing methods, from contingency billing to fixed fee to pure value-based billing. But most importantly, you'll have an opportunity to shake off the shackles of the hourly rate.

Proposal Writing

“First, you need to know your own stuff, to be a real expert, to write a good proposal.” – Tom Sant

People, People, People

Admittedly, this is a pet peeve.

Recently, I sat through a presentation given by a graphics design expert on the subject of “designing the perfect proposal.” I learned a lot during that hour, but I just couldn’t get behind one of the presenter’s key recommendations for designing a perfect proposal: include pictures of people, even if they are anonymous, in every proposal document.

“People *love* to see people in proposals.” He probably told us that five times.

I’d agree that it can be helpful to include photographs of the project team to breathe life into a proposal, especially if the client doesn’t know the individuals. But that use of images is not what the presenter was talking about.

He was referring to the stock images that already litter too many documents and Web sites. We’ve all seen these photos: a group of people huddled around a computer screen in a conference room, or two business people in suits and hard hats pointing at an unfinished building.

To me, that always seems fake and a waste of precious space. Now, I’m not saying there is no place for images in documents or on Web sites. But if an image doesn’t help clarify the value you’re providing, it’s an unnecessary distraction.

I routinely beat gratuitous images out of any document I create. Of course, I could be totally missing the boat—it wouldn’t be the first time.

Words to Avoid in Proposals

Proposals brimming with consultant-speak drive clients to the competition faster than you can say "paradigm shift."

Scrutinize every word in a proposal and strip out empty phrases like "seamless connectivity," "strategic convergence," or "we deliver unparalleled solutions that create leverage for the enterprise." In the war of words, your most potent weapon is your computer's delete key.

Of the three ailments likely to infect a proposal—tired superlatives, buzzwords, and the plague of pronouns—superlatives are the most insidious.

Superlatives are like weeds in a lawn: Unless checked, they tend to take over. Avoid prose such as "Our unsurpassed commitment to client service ensures your needs will be our highest priority." Does that mean the needs of other clients are a lower priority for you?

Consultants hope to get an edge by claiming to be the fastest, best, or most experienced. Clients routinely ignore such claims as unproven hype. Unless you can quantify your claims beyond a doubt, dump superlatives from your proposal.

Tired superlatives to delete or justify in every proposal include: Most, Superior, Best, Maximum, Optimal, Minimum, Fastest, Unsurpassed, Shortest, Unrivaled, Easiest, Highest, Least, Unique.

Nothing is intrinsically wrong with any of the preceding words, and we all use them in spoken and written communication (for example, "This is the fastest way to do that.") But in proposals, they are suspect, and you should use them sparingly, if at all.

Instead of promising an "optimal solution for reducing customer complaints," say, "We will reduce customer complaints by 9 percent in 90 days." Then amplify in the proposal exactly how you will achieve that reduction.

Since proposals are often used to justify unspoken decisions made earlier in the sales process, include in your proposal facts that validate your supporters' desire to hire you. Give them powerful ammunition to advance your firm's credibility and convince others in the organization that you are the right choice.

Resisting the RFP

It's tempting to respond to any Request for Proposal (RFP) you receive. After all, the project is neatly described, desired outcomes are clear, and the consultant process is objective.

Not.

Responding to an RFP that comes in over the transom can be a costly proposition that results in a nice proposal but no project. Before investing your precious resources in responding to the RFP, ask yourself two questions:

Why Me/Us?

Did you receive the RFP because you have an existing relationship with the client? If not, why would the client seek you out?

If the RFP is from an unknown client, your chances of winning the project are very low, although many consultants could probably point to an exception to that rule.

Some consultants are simply added to a list of "contenders" with little hope of winning the project. Don't squander your valuable time competing in a beauty contest you have little hope of winning.

Whether the RFP comes from a past client or one you've never worked with before, objectively assess your chances of being selected before you respond to an RFP.

What Will It Cost?

These days, more consulting selection processes are run by procurement managers, not the actual client buyer. Having an intermediary between you and the buyer raises the cost of RFP compliance, reduces the quality of your response, and slows the selection process—sometimes to a crawl.

There's also no evidence suggesting that the process results in a better decision for the client.

Create an estimate of your out-of-pocket expenses, time, and the lost-opportunity costs of responding to the RFP. When you use these costs to calculate a project ROI, the results can be eye-opening. Some RFP responses result in a win, but an unprofitable project.

If You Do Respond

Some RFPs are tailor-made for the recipient. If so, work with the client to make it a success by supporting the buying process as it's been established. Comply with all of the terms of the RFP, and craft a customized response every time.

Some industries, like the public sector, rely on RFPs as a standard method of buying professional services. Others use RFPs less frequently. You may find that responding to an RFP is like fishing without bait.

Win—Don't Just Answer—Every RFP Question

Although it may seem like a medieval approach to selecting professional service providers, unfortunately, few clients will abandon the ubiquitous RFP process.

Assuming you've decided to respond to an RFP, here are four quick tips to help you pull together an effective response.

- **Start with a Winning Strategy.** Before diving into the writing process, develop your story. What's the compelling story that knits together your understanding of what the client needs and your ability to get there? How will you help achieve the results, and where's the proof that you can get the job done?
- **Don't Just Answer Each Question, Win It.** Often the work of responding to an RFP is daunting, but the key is to focus on small victories—like winning *every* answer. Think hard about each response and focus on how each answer supports your story and contributes to winning the project, rather than simply answering the question.
- **Avoid the Battle of the Boilerplate.** Lots of RFPs are littered with reusable elements. Just because you receive boilerplate from prospective clients, doesn't mean you should send yours back to them.

It's tempting to cut and paste your own boilerplate into a proposal for something like qualifications. Remember, your client will recognize that boilerplate from a mile away and ignore it. Resist the urge and customize every answer. Sure, use previous work as a starting point, but don't over do it.

- **Create a High Value-to-Cost Ratio.** Some argue that it's nearly impossible to quantify the results of consulting projects. Use that myth to your advantage by placing a dollar value on the benefits the client can expect from engaging you. Let the client see the ratio of projected benefits to consulting fees.

When Words Get in the Way

There's something I've been trying to say to you/But the words get in the way" - [Gloria Estefan](#)

When a client offered me a peek at a competitor's proposal, I couldn't resist. Anticipating a fine piece of competitive intelligence, I spread the proposal across the desk, adjusted the light and began to plow through it.

I lost track of the proposal's thread on the first page when I read that the project would result in a "5 percent positive revenue increase." Well, a negative increase would sure defy the odds.

The proposal went on to describe that the team would work on "two parallel paths." I was confused. Would that be two concurrent activities, or four? Okay, so maybe I was being hypercritical because it was a competitor's work, but two parallel paths?

The rest of the proposal was more of the same—littered with phrases that, while not incorrect, drained the life out of its ideas.

Here are four other clumsy bits:

- Based on our short, five-minute conversation
- The newly created process
- Funds will be specially earmarked
- Your satisfaction is our main priority

Over the next few days, I went back through some of my own writing and was humbled to find similar gems. So, I cracked open and reread my copy of William Zinsser's classic, *On Writing Well*. In the book, Zinsser calls clutter "the disease of American writing" and says that we are "strangling in unnecessary words."

Redundant words creep into consulting prose like vines in the rainforest. Be vigilant or they will take root. With a fresh eye and Zinsser's book at your side, you could get the words out of the way and realize a 'positive increase' in the impact of what you write.

The Seven Deadly Sins of Proposal Writing

The proposal is one of the most powerful, but misused tool, in a consultant's marketing arsenal. Look at your last proposal and see if you spot any of these seven deadly sins.

1. Lack of focus on the client's business problem and industry dynamics.
2. The "we, us, and our" syndrome. Does your proposal talk more about your firm than about the client's business?
3. No basis of differentiation. Focus is on weak differentiators such as quality service, price, responsiveness, and your firm's pedigree.
4. The expected value of the project isn't quantified so you can't use it as a baseline for justifying the proposed fee.
5. The proposal is laced with jargon, difficult to read, and doesn't include an issue-focused executive summary.
6. Reliance on a boilerplate resume.
7. Errors: misspellings, poor grammar, wrong client name, or inconsistent formats.

Keep Proposals Short

Researchers laid a stack of proposals on a table to observe how people would behave when given the task of reviewing proposals. The stack included proposals of different page lengths, from very short to encyclopedic.

The individuals in the study reached for the smallest proposals first, in almost every case.

Clients resent proposals stuffed with unnecessary information, so stick to what's essential. If you feel you've just got to include extra information about your practice, create a separate appendix and include it with your proposal. That will help keep your proposal concise and reader-friendly.

Obviously, your proposals must provide all the facts clients need. But keep your proposals as short as possible, and you'll have better odds of having them read by prospective clients.

The Language of Consulting

“Stop talking about yourself!” - Peter Bowerman

The Consultant's Jargon Generator

"Our holistic approach enables vertical connectivity between the field operations team and the quality assurance technicians to optimize consumer impact points."

Ever been in a meeting with one or more consultants and heard phrases like the above? Makes you wonder how consultants have mastered such a low ratio of meaning to word count.

Of course, consultants aren't the only ones who can talk a lot without saying anything. Others in the business world are equally guilty, including me at times. But I am trying to mend my ways.

For those who can't let go, here's a tool just for you: The Consultant's Jargon Generator. Use it to spice up your meetings with clients and colleagues, your proposals, or final "deliverables." Find just the right words to describe one of your consulting capabilities or your methodology, or to make a client recommendation.

From the table below, choose any word from the left-hand column, then add a word from the middle column plus any word from the final column. Ta da—instant consultant-speak.

Give it a shot.

The Consultant's Jargon Generator		
Deliver	Seamless	Thoughtware
Ramp up	Scalable	Value chain
Empower	Bleeding-edge	Paradigm
Configure	Mission-critical	Synergy
Leverage	Granular	Connectivity
Strategize	Frictionless	Ecosystem
Operationalize	Holistic	Convergence
Reengineer	Value-added	Transformation
Globalize	Cross-platform	Capability transfer
Optimize	Enterprise-wide	Market space

Has Your Paradigm Shifted Today?

If you've ever caught yourself uttering phrases like "I'll keep you in the loop", or "Let's run it up the flagpole and see who salutes," you need to put your use of buzzwords on a low-carb diet.

In a poll of senior executives from the nation's 1,000 largest companies, executives were asked, "What is the most annoying or overused phrase or buzzword in the workplace today?" Here are their responses.

- At the end of the day
- Solution
- Thinking outside the box
- Synergy
- Paradigm
- Metrics"
- Take it offline
- Redeployed people
- On the runway
- Win-win
- Value-added
- Get on the same page
- Customer centric
- Generation X
- Accountability management
- Core competency
- Alignment
- Incremental

Here are a few more that make me run for the exit:

- Best-in-class
- Best of Breed
- Offload
- Seamless
- Ramp up
- Mission-critical
- Scalable
- Bleeding edge
- Frictionless
- World Class (fill in the blank)

If you need a dictionary to decipher the jargon in your work, click over to John Walston's site, [BuzzWhack](#). The site uses good-natured humor to skewer the "companies and individuals who use buzzwords to 'impress' and befuddle the rest of us."

Poll source: [accountemps.com](#).

What Do *You* Do?

Every day, people ask each other, “How are you?” The questioner, not really wanting to know the details of your sore back or other troubles, expects to hear, “I’m fine, and how are you?”

Almost as frequent is the question, “What do you do?” If you work as a police officer, firefighter, nurse, or carpenter, it’s pretty clear what you do. For those of us in the consulting business, it’s harder to give people a true picture of what we do.

I recently introduced a colleague to a friend. Once we established that everyone was fine, the friend asked:

“So, what do you do?”

“I’m a consultant”

“Cool, what kind of consultant are you?”

“An IT consultant”

“What type of IT consulting do you do?”

“I mostly manage large IT projects”

“What types of IT projects do you manage?”

“I help clients design and implement new software”

“Do you work in any particular industry?”

“Yes, I work for telecommunications companies, usually.”

“I see.”

Did that friend—who, by the way, might be a potential client—really learn what the consultant does to help clients?

My colleague would have done better to answer the what-do-you-do question by saying, “I manage projects that help clients reduce the time between customer billing and collections, which improves their profitability.”

When someone says I’m a plumber, the benefit is obvious. When someone asks what do you do, is it equally obvious?

On Bullsh*t

Harry G. Frankfurt, an emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Princeton, has penned a short book entitled *On Bullshit*. The book shot up the Amazon popularity chart.

Frankfurt begins by noting that "One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit." In the businesses of consulting, law, PR, and other professional services, clients accuse service providers of slinging the bull, sometimes with abandon.

The fastest way to alienate clients is to try to bullsh*t them. And, according to Frankfurt, that happens "whenever circumstances require someone to talk without knowing what he is talking about."

Anyone can reduce the level of BS in client conversations by saying "I don't know" or "Let me get back to you on that."

Look through your Web site, marketing materials, and proposals. Is BS buried in your words? Everyone knows when they're listening to BS and nobody likes it. Has any of it slipped inadvertently into your work?

Just when I thought I understood Frankfurt's perspective on bullsh*t, he ends his book with this comment:

"Facts about ourselves are not peculiarly solid and resistant to skeptical dissolution. Our natures are, indeed, elusively insubstantial—notoriously less stable and less inherent than the natures of other things. And insofar as this is the case, sincerity itself is bullshit."

That's an uplifting thought, professor.

The PowerPoint Blues

The presentation sounded promising, and I was looking forward to it. The speaker approached the podium, greeted the audience and fiddled with the computer to bring up the first slide. I swear there was a collective groan in the audience.

The first slide was so dense with text even those in the first row had no hope of reading it. The rest of the slides were more of the same. The audience started heading to the exits after less than five minutes.

The misuse of PowerPoint is rampant in the business world. In the wrong hands, this tool can be disastrous. But it doesn't have to be that way. If we all adhered to eight simple rules, PowerPoint could, once again, be an aid to communication, rather than a barrier.

Eight PowerPoint Rules:

- Create your slides *after* you've developed your speech
- Use slides sparingly, and only if necessary to make a point
- Audience members must be able to read every word on a slide, no matter where they're seated
- Slides are *not* speaker notes
- Aim for no more than three words or a single image per slide
- Every slide must be clear and coordinated with your presentation
- Dump the animation
- Rehearse *with* your slides.

Words Are Worth a Thousand Pictures

Whether it's a Web site, advertisement, or other marketing collateral, we've heard that a picture is worth a thousand words. Having a visual of the product enhances marketing communication, we're told, because people don't have time to read.

I don't doubt that people fail to read most of the advertising copy they come across. But I think that's because of the hype that's part of most ad copy, not people's lack of time or willingness to read.

In a study of 3,600 consumers, researchers concluded that to get people to notice an ad, text was *twice* as important as pictures. Your clients are interested in reading about your services, but you must grab their attention. What's new about your offering? What's your story? Is there news?

What's most important is that the fluff be ruthlessly eliminated from your ad copy, Web page or other marketing communication. If you include hype and half-truths, you make it nearly impossible for clients to separate the wheat from the chaff. The result: a lost client. Ten different studies have shown that when the bull is stripped from ads, consumer interest skyrockets.

Of course, other studies have shown that long ad copy does work when selling products and services. When it comes to marketing consulting services, though, to improve your client's rate of interest, make every word count. And remember that the "right" words, not just any words, are the ones that sell.

Data source: *Jump Start Your Marketing Brain*, by Doug Hall, pg. 84.

Selling Your Services

“The personal interaction between the consultant and the client during the initial contracting meetings is an accurate predictor of how the project itself will proceed.” – Peter Block

Ten Realities of Complex Sales

- 1. Brands are in a coma.** A blue-chip business card may open the door. But by itself, it won't move the sale forward.
- 2. Client loyalty is an oxymoron.** Research tells us that client loyalty is on the decline. Don't take it personally, but many clients are spreading around how they spend money on professional services.
- 3. Strong relationships won't overcome poor performance.** If your track record is poor, having friends in high places won't save you.
- 4. Value and track record trump relationships.** Superior value will give you an edge, even over competitors with strong client executive relationships.
- 5. Single decision makers are rare.** Projects often impact many parts of an organization, so multiple decision makers get into the act. Add the bevy of gatekeepers, influencers, and technical evaluators, and it becomes harder and more imperative to figure out who will make the decision.
- 6. Referrals work, but new clients are very cautious.** Word of mouth is a potent marketing tool, but keep in mind that 70 percent of referrals will check your reputation and your Web site before contacting you.
- 7. "Free" consulting is often expected.** Clients often expect some aspect of the project, like preliminary recommendations, to be developed during the sales cycle. Be careful to walk that fine line between demonstrating qualifications and providing free work.
- 8. Price matters.** Early in the sales cycle, it's typical for clients to say their focus is on results, not price. As the decision gets closer, clients will pay much more attention to price. The lesson: clarify scope early, so you don't have a jaw-dropping price when decision time arrives.
- 9. Scope evolves unpredictably.** As the client discusses the project with multiple consultants, subtle shifts in project scope and objectives can occur as the client reacts to consultants' ideas. Be sure to re-clarify scope once the client has finished preliminary conversations with consultants.
- 10. Sometimes the game is rigged.** It's not uncommon for a client to bring competitors into a proposal effort even though a consultant has already been selected. Use your sales qualification process to assess your probability of winning before writing a proposal.

What Clients Want

When clients evaluate consultants, they review qualifications, references, and the consultant's case studies. But they also need answers to specific questions. Meet these five questions head-on and you'll be a step ahead of your competitors:

- 1. Can you deliver the promised results?**
It's not enough to assert your ability to deliver. You must *prove* it.
- 2. Who will actually do the work?**
Consultants are notorious for changing the players on their teams, and clients are rightly concerned about this. Be completely forthcoming with the details of your staffing plan, especially if the plan changes.
- 3. What are the risks of the project?**
Some consultants downplay a discussion of risk for fear of jeopardizing the sale. Risk is always on the client's mind, so get the subject on the table as early as possible.
- 4. How will the consultants interact with us?**
Client decision makers want to know how you will work with their people. Clarify the roles, expectations, and time commitments for the client's team members and your own team. And explain your working style.
- 5. Can the consultant keep fees under control?**
Every client's nightmare is a consulting project that runs amok. Whatever fee arrangement you've made, the client wants assurance that you will meet the project goals within the budget.

Even if a prospective client doesn't articulate these questions outright, you still need to answer them. And it's best to be as explicit as possible with your responses. That's what clients want.

Clients Buy, They're Not "Sold"

Walk into most auto showrooms and you'll know what it feels like to be sold to. The salesperson and the general manager will work hard to get you into a car before you leave the showroom. So you head into the showroom ready for battle and armed with as much information as possible.

Like car buyers, clients resist hard sell tactics. In fact, three out of four buyers of services hire consultants as a result of their own research, rather than from consultants' solicitations.

Remember, clients turn first to their internal networks of colleagues and friends to find a consultant, and they know a lot more about you than you think before they contact you.

Think of exploratory client meetings as test drives. Don't waste time telling clients how great you are. Get to the heart of the issue they face, and be prepared to prove how you can help them.

Clients are braced for consultants to launch into the hard sell, so surprise your prospective client. Don't tell them about the great services you offer, but show them how you can help by suggesting ideas about project objectives, how to organize the project, and how to get it done.

You'll sell more work by letting clients buy from you, rather than trying to sell to them.

The Consultant Is a Buyer Too

It's easy to forget that, while in the process of selling, the consultant is simultaneously a "buyer." You are buying from the client a set of facts and circumstances about the project, the barriers to completion, and the definition of success.

Get this wrong, and you'll likely end up with an unhappy client and an unprofitable project. I'm not suggesting that you be overbearing, but your process of discovery must pass the test: do you really "buy" what you've heard from the client?

Three questions can help you assess if you know enough:

- **Is there consensus among key decision makers that the project scope is well-defined?** It's a rare project that doesn't have detractors and shifting scope, so be sure you've got a general consensus, particularly on the geographical and organizational components of scope.
- **What level of commitment is the client making to the project?** Consultants and clients usually work together to determine their respective roles and responsibilities. But it's always good to know that clients have given their level of participation serious thought before bringing in consultants.
- **Has success been defined?** While clients and consultants should collaborate to figure out what outcome defines success, it helps if clients are focused on the result they'd like to achieve, rather than on treating symptoms.

A good consulting sales process includes many other qualifying questions, but the three above will get you started.

Share Your Stuff

Some consultants resist sharing their ideas and the products of those ideas (aka intellectual capital) with clients before they're hired to do a project. They fear that clients will take their work and try to complete the project on their own, or worse, give it to another consultant.

The world is awash in information and ideas. If you're stingy with yours, it will show. Besides, clients aren't buying your methodology, tools, or your point of view. They're buying your expertise, and that can't be pilfered by poring over proposed work plans, preliminary recommendations, or your perspectives on how to solve a problem.

It's true that clients have been known to hijack work product consultants develop during the sales process so they can try to complete the project without consultants. But that's the exception, not the rule.

Be generous with your knowledge, not foolish. Qualify every opportunity before bringing forward your best ideas. But don't hesitate once you believe you've got a serious opportunity.

Consulting is an ideas business. Keeping your best ones locked in your head, brief case, or computer will leave a door open for your competitors to walk through.

Are You Really Listening?

Researchers at RainToday.com published “How Clients Buy,” a benchmark report on professional services marketing and selling from the *client* perspective. One of the most widely reported complaints clients have about their professional service providers, according to the study, is that they don’t listen.

Often, consultants are so enamored with their own solutions that they miss the client’s subtle cues on what they’re really looking for. The result: the consultant doesn’t understand what the client needs and can’t craft a compelling solution.

Clients recognize when consultants are waiting to talk, instead of listening. That difference shows up in the quality of the consultant’s questions and observations. Before your next client meeting, remind yourself to really listen. And remember, many clients already suspect that you won’t.

Forget Getting Your Foot in the Door

To establish a relationship with a new client, some consultants offer to do a free or reduced-fee project, often as some sort of diagnostic. Consultants cooked up this strategy to endear themselves to prospective clients in the hopes that future work could be billed at higher rates.

If you get your foot in the door that way, your next step is likely to be on a booby trap. Once you've set a low fee precedent, you'll fight to get fees to a profitable level. Your client will know there's wiggle room in your fee structure, so expect a request for lower fees each time you propose new work.

Your objective should be to provide value—in excess of the client's cost—regardless of the state of the relationship. Demonstrating that value early in the relationship should forestall a request for a reduced fee, even for the first project.

If your value is apparent, and the client still wants a reduced fee, you're better served by walking away. It's tough to walk away from new work, but it could be one of the most profitable moves you ever make.

The Myth of Client Pain

Sales literature is full of advice to find a client's "pain" as the first step to sales success. We're advised to ask prospective clients inane questions like: What keeps you awake at night? What are your pain points? And, if you had a magic wand, what problem would you solve?

Please, spare me.

Not only do they make a client's eyes cross, such questions also expose two fatal flaws. First, they proclaim that the consultant is fishing for answers, rather than pursuing a substantive discussion. That demonstrates a lack of preparation, to say the least.

And second, not all clients are looking for "pain" remedies. Maybe they want to raise the bar on overall company performance, or they just need to improve some aspect of the business.

Assuming a client is in pain is dangerous and shows you are not focused on reality. Forget this myth and turn the conversation to the client's real needs.

Five Mistakes Every Consultant Should Avoid

When a client asks for a meeting to discuss services, it's common for consultants to make five avoidable mistakes. I know because I've made all of them at one time or another.

1. **Rely on your pedigree.** Academic credentials, a blue chip business card, or a flashy brochure rarely win over a client. Sure, you need this stuff somewhere in your briefcase, but clients want to know how you work and how you'll fit with their culture.
2. **Ask rinky-dink questions.** Preparation is the key to a successful first meeting with a prospective client. If you're winging it on that first call by asking how many employees a company has, or what lines of business a client is in, you're already toast. Take the time to fully prepare before the meeting. Create ten insightful, open-ended questions that you can't find answers for on the client's Web site.
3. **Talk more than you listen.** In your first meetings, be sure to give the client plenty of chances to fully describe what needs to be done. Don't even think about selling until you're sure what problem you're trying to solve. If you find yourself talking more than half the time during a meeting, shut up and let the client speak.
4. **Agree to a proposal before qualifying the opportunity.** Some clients will ask for a proposal simply to get you out of their office. Don't agree to write a proposal until you're convinced you've got a qualified lead with at least a 40 percent chance of winning the work.
5. **Talk about price in the first meeting.** Most clients will ask for a price, even if it's just an estimate. Resist the temptation. Politely ask clients to allow you time to absorb the information provided, and set a firm date to get a price back to them. If you quote a price too early, you'll be stuck with it, or you'll have some explaining to do later on if your actual price is higher than your initial estimate.

Take a Deep Breath before You Answer These Questions

As you go through the sales process with a client, you'll face an endless stream of questions about your background, experiences, and project approach.

The client is simply trying to decide whether or not to hand you the keys to the project. You'll handle most questions with ease, but seemingly innocent questions can trip you up if you wing it.

Try to hold back on answering some questions until you're sure you know what you're getting into. You will hear these, or related questions, on almost every sales call:

- How much will the project cost?
- What is your rate?
- Will you send us a proposal?
- How long will the project take to complete?

You will answer all these questions eventually. To avoid a potentially unprofitable project or an unhappy client, first get a complete picture of the situation. For example, you shouldn't crank out a proposal unless you believe there's a good chance of winning.

And, until you understand the client's real problem (not just the stated objectives), the complexity of the project, and something about the company's culture, it's tough to say how long it will take to complete a project.

Many clients will push you to answer these questions before you should, and you'll be tempted. It's up to you to make clients recognize that it's in their best interests to wait for informed answers. Plus, taking the time to do it right also protects *your* interests. If the client balks, you should rethink whether or not this is the right client for you.

Your New Buyer

What follows may not be earth shattering news, but it could change how you think about your prospective clients.

In a study done by the Wharton School's Peter Cappelli and Monika Hamori for the National Bureau of Economic Research, the authors found that in *Fortune* 100 companies, corporate executives are more likely to be younger and female, and less likely to be educated at Ivy League schools than was the case twenty years ago.

The trip to the executive suite is now faster and has fewer stops along the way than in years past. And *Fortune* 100 companies are more inclined to hire externally rather than automatically promoting from within, which means many new executives gained their breadth of experience in other organizations before landing that top job. These trends are likely to be even more prevalent in organizations that are less conservative than the *Fortune* 100.

So, what does this mean for consultants?

- Keep an open mind about who might be the rising stars in your clients' organizations. They might not come from where you expect. Remember—they're more likely to be women, relatively new to the company, and responsible for strategic initiatives.
- Forge relationships with new executives as they're likely to be tapped for bigger and better things down the road.
- Be aware that merit and accomplishment, not title or where they went to school, will push your prospective clients into positions of influence.

Your Toughest Competitor

It's easy to forget that the toughest competitor in a consulting sales process may not be another consulting firm, but the *client*. In every opportunity, you have two invisible competitors. The first is the client who chooses a "do nothing" strategy and abandons the project; the second is the client who decides to do the project without a consultant.

Competing against an undeclared rival is the most complicated selling situation you face because it involves so much uncertainty. You rarely know what will kill the project or what will keep it alive. You also don't know what will motivate the client's team to take the project on without you.

Your best approach is to explicitly ask the client. You *may* get a clue about what you're up against. After discussion, you may conclude the project isn't a good idea, or that the client *should* go it alone. If so, talk straight, stay objective, and don't try to force the sale. Suggest innovative ideas on how the client can solve the problem that led to calling a consultant in the first place, and stress your firm's specific ability to help.

If the client decides to go it alone, position yourself for the future. Offer to provide advice, guidance, or assistance during the project if needed. Clients often reverse themselves or change direction in midstream, especially if they encounter roadblocks. When and if they do, you want to be the first one they remember and turn to for help.

When to Give Up on a Sale

Many consultants know intuitively when they've hit the wall and a prospective client isn't going to buy. Others give up too early, while still others keep hitting their heads against that wall. So when do you stop trying to convert a prospect into a client?

At a minimum, you should plan three to five sales discussions with a prospective client before throwing in the towel. Research shows that a prospective client's first opinion is often incomplete or incorrect, and that it's not until the *third* exposure that the client can fairly evaluate proposed benefits. Assuming you've made the value of your offering clear, that's when the client's positive thoughts are most likely to outnumber the negatives.

The key is to keep the door open so you get to the third presentation, whether that's in person, by phone, e-mail, or other mode. Consider staging how you communicate your marketing and sales messages to your prospective clients. Use the first interaction to spark interest, the second to clarify value, and the third to respond to concerns and ask for the sale. That sequence isn't set in stone—your client's needs must dictate how you proceed.

Of course, you won't always need three meetings—sometimes once is enough for a client to buy. But even if a client says yes in the first meeting, don't assume it's a done deal. There's always a chance that client will do an about-face after the initial decision.

At some point, though, it's best to call it a day. If you've given four or five sales presentations, you may still win the project but, by then, the odds are working against you.

The Next Competitive Advantage

A client I know hired a consulting firm to develop a pilot training program and facilitate a series of workshops for one of the client's divisions. The project was completed in about three months, and the client raved about the results.

The educational materials were top-notch, the consultant's facilitation skills were praised by all, and the work was done on time—and on budget. From every angle, the project looked like a winner.

It wasn't.

After the client team huddled in a closed conference room to debrief, they agreed that the project was actually more like a train wreck. They also decided to award the remaining work to another consulting firm. The client was willing to throw away a three-month investment to start over with a new firm.

The reason the consultants got the boot is simple: they created a great outcome, but a miserable day-to-day work experience for the client. They lost sight of the reality that the journey is often more important than the destination. The consultants created a toxic working environment for the client, and it cost them the job.

In an interview in *Management Consulting News*, marketing consultant Suzanne Lowe advised that consultants "should intentionally provide a uniquely favorable emotional experience" for clients. And that doesn't mean just being respectful, punctual, and providing great results. It's also means understanding how the client feels about working with you.

Most consulting assignments have aggressive timelines and sky high expectations. In such a pressure cooker, it's easy for consultants to lose sight of the personal impact they have on clients. Every consultant knows results matter, but don't neglect the importance of the client's experience with you.

About

Michael W. McLaughlin



Before founding MindShare Consulting LLC, Michael W. McLaughlin was a partner with Deloitte Consulting, where he spent more than two decades managing consulting projects, developing long-term client relationships, and building profitable consulting practices.

He has successfully built consulting practices from the ground up, and also led a practice of more than 800 consultants as a Managing Partner for Deloitte.

Over the years, he has coached hundreds of experienced and new professionals on how to create a market presence, deliver profitable work, and build the foundation for an extraordinary career.

His book, *Guerrilla Marketing for Consultants*, which he wrote with Jay Conrad Levinson, is the first application of Guerrilla Marketing to the business of consulting and professional services, and it offers a fresh—and profitable—approach to marketing, selling, pricing, proposal writing, and client relationship management.

As a result of his work with hundreds of clients and consultants, McLaughlin developed *The Path to Profit*, a framework for helping professionals and firm owners accelerate their success in the professional services business.

McLaughlin is the publisher of two Web sites, www.GuerrillaConsulting.com and www.ManagementConsultingNews.com, which offer e-newsletters and resources for professional service providers.

Contact

MindShare Consulting, LLC
10292 SW Taylor Street
Portland, OR 97225
USA
(503) 841 6047
E-mail: Michael@MindShareConsulting.com