

Straight Talk Book No.1

# Your secret weapon

(How to get the most  
out of your consultant)



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out of your consultant)

“There is no such thing as a  
project without bad hair days.”

Richard H. Murray,  
General Counsel, Deloitte Consulting LLP

Consider this book a comb.

# Contents

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<b>When not to hire a consultant</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The perfect consultant is schizophrenic</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Marriage is never better than the courtship</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Killer questions</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Don't forget to floss</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Danger signals</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Your speech on day one</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Cowardice vs. Courage</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The other guy's shoes</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>The ultimate secret weapon</b>	<b>14</b>

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# When not to hire a consultant

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## If you don't know where you're going, any path will take you there.

You know when you need a consultant. Objectivity. Fresh ideas. Skills and experience you don't have.

Yes, at the right time and for the right reasons, a consultant's contributions are invaluable. But too often, consultants are brought in at the wrong time for the wrong reasons.

So. Before you bring in a consultant, ask yourself these three questions:

### *1. Do we know where we are headed?*

There are times when major consulting projects are kicked off with only a vague sense of their intended destination. Or, when they are doggedly continued long after the original destination no longer applies – and well before a new destination has been determined.

It's okay to bring consultants in to help figure out where you need to go. It's not okay to have them take you there before you have figured out just where there is.

### *2. Should our own people be doing the job?*

Okay, this seems obvious, but it is amazing how often consultants get asked to do things clients are perfectly capable of doing on their own.

Clients offer plenty of excuses for this:

- It's easier getting money for consultants than for headcount.
- My people don't have the time to get it done.
- Using consultants is more convenient than pulling together an internal team.
- It's how we've always gotten things done.

Don't mistake habits for reasons.

### *3. Did consultants fail the last three times we brought them in on a project?*

A consultant will only be as good as your organization will allow them to be. If it never seems to work out with consultants, it might be that the root causes are a little closer to home. Best to try and figure those out and make the necessary changes before taking the plunge again.

# The perfect consultant is schizophrenic

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## The attached – detached paradox.

What do you really want in a consultant?

The most important requirement, aside from all the obvious attributes you'd ask for in any professional collaboration, is balance.

You want a balance between business opposites.

On one side, you need a consultant who is the sympathetic collaborative teammate, who would do anything to make you and the team successful. Think of this as the *attached* side of the consultant. Trouble is, it's likely he or she will care more about your feelings than results.

On the other side, you need an objective, *detached* consultant. The brutally, ruthlessly honest teammate who demands that you make hard decisions on difficult issues despite uncertain consequences. Trouble is, this type of person is difficult to stomach on any but the toughest of teams.

One holds you together, the other tears you apart.

You need both.  
Embrace schizophrenia.



# Marriage is never better than the courtship

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## Court with your eyes wide open.

Pay attention to the way consultants talk.  
Pay attention to the way consultants listen.

They will want to impress you with all the great things they have done for all their great clients.

But they're sitting there because you already know all that.

You need them to talk about their understanding of your problem and your project.

Ask yourself: From what they are saying, is it clear that they have:

- Learned about our customers?
- Studied our competition?
- Analyzed our web site?
- Called our customer-service line?
- Spoken with experts in our industry?
- Visited places where we sell our products?

Why?

Because having done at least some of this homework demonstrates their active interest in understanding your business and its problems. It shows they're prepared.

Of course consultants will also want to impress you with all their great answers to all your great problems.

But they should listen to your explanation of your problems before giving you their answers. This could cause them to change their minds about what they think they already know. Such openmindedness is another very good sign.

You're the client. Consultants should talk about you, and listen to you.

You may not be the center of the universe, but you ought to be the center of theirs.

“A marriage without conflicts is almost as inconceivable as a nation without crises.”

Andre Maurois, French Writer (1885-1967)

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# Killer questions

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## Make them squirm.

They've finished the pitch. You've asked all your questions. You've been through the long list and the short list, and you're convinced the people across the table from you should do the work. They hand you their proposal and a pen.

Not so fast.

There are some things you really need to know. And they're things most people don't think to ask.

*What don't you do well?*

Any consultant who tells you they do it all is really telling you they don't mind putting your organization's success at risk. A good consultant confesses their limitations. A great consultant understands that limitations create focus, and focus creates value.

*Name a client that you wouldn't give as a reference. Why?*

Remember that admitting mistakes and demonstrating the ability to learn from them is a healthy sign of honesty, integrity, and intelligence.

*How do you plan to leave?*

Good consultants are always working themselves out of a job. More than anything, it's an attitude. Look for it.

*If we don't hire you, which of your competitors should we hire and why?*

Think of this as the consultant character test. They will do one of two things: Evade the question or give you a direct answer. Either way, you will have learned something important that you need to know before you sign on the dotted line.

# Don't forget to floss

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## Calling references is a lot like flossing.

It's annoying. It's uncomfortable. And it's something you're supposed to do that's very easy to put off and not think about.

Don't.

This task is one that you absolutely must do, and must not delegate.

You must actually call the references of the people you'll actually be working with.

The good news is that you'll be the one-in-ten client who performs this very necessary piece of homework.

The bad news is that you'll most likely be calling someone who has been prepared by those very consultants to say exactly what you want to hear.

The best way to do this is to do a little research to find your counterparts, whose names aren't on your reference list, at the companies where the consultants have done work before.\*

Throw them a few curve balls.

Ask them the usual questions.

Then throw in these three:

- If you hired these consultants again, what would you do differently?
- What is the one thing I should be most concerned about?
- What went wrong?

If they tell you nothing went wrong, it's time to hang up.

And to make some more calls.

Check references yourself. And don't forget to floss.

\* Message boards can provide unfiltered access to consultants, clients, and observers. You get an insider's view of consulting; however, you must sort fact from fiction. They can also be a source of information about your consultant – their strengths, values, and philosophies. One of the most popular is [www.vault.com](http://www.vault.com).

## Danger signals

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Your lead consultant is never on site, and you think that's a good thing.

Your lead consultant is never on site, and you think that's a bad thing.

All they do is argue with you.

They never argue with you.

The consultants make all the presentations.

You spend more time arguing about project invoices than talking about project status.

The people who show up are never around long enough for you to learn their names.

There are more workplans than work done.

Your go-live date has more moves than Madonna.

# Your speech on day one

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It will pay to memorize this.

1. I want ultimate candor. This means that we are on the same team. We will act that way and share information. There is no problem you can bring to me that will get you fired.
2. If we have a problem, and you believe that I am the source of that problem, you will and you must tell me. Not my team, not my boss. Me.
3. In the event that we have a problem and you go over my head without bringing it to my attention and telling me that you feel I am not responding, I will fire you. Period.

## Cowardice vs. Courage

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### The difference between arrogant consultants and assertive consultants.

Some consultants have huge egos, which makes it tempting to forget that they're people.

Highly educated, highly trained, problem-solving people.

Remember, you didn't hire them to be your friends.

Or to make you happy.

You hired them to solve your problem.

So you expect them to be smart.

And though it may be upsetting, you want them to challenge your ideas and assumptions.

Trouble is, things often get confused, and consultants end up thinking that because they are in business to solve problems and produce results, their job is to be right.

This isn't so. Their job is to help you find the right solution to your set of problems.

Arrogance is a symptom of a lack of willingness to uncover and explore options. It slams doors in your face.

What you want is assertiveness.

Assertiveness is the gumption that allows you to keep challenging yourself and your team after you come up with the first good idea. It is the persistence that keeps opening doors and new possibilities.

Arrogance is a form of cowardice. Assertiveness requires courage.

## The other guy's shoes

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### How you might feel as a consultant.

You can't remember much about your best friends. Your social life is nonexistent.

Every morning you go to a job where quite a few people act as though they hate you.

You have no office of your own to hang your diploma, or your pictures, or your books, or your files.

You moved to the big city, got a big job, got chosen for a big assignment, and now you spend your life in the smallest town in the world.

Planes, trains, automobiles, hotels.

Repeat.

Can't keep a cat, much less a spouse, with this lifestyle.

You are treated with the kind of disdain normally accorded to lawyers and thieves.

*How 'bout them loafers?*

### How you might feel when you're surrounded by consultants.

You can't remember much about your own company's culture. The consultants have changed it so much you don't recognize it.

Every morning you go to a place that's overrun by 23-year-olds who seem to think they know more about your business than you do.

You have none of your own staff anymore. They were laid off and replaced by consultants.

The company initiated a big cost-cutting initiative, but every penny you save is spent on consultants.

They make more in an hour than most people make in a day.

You have very little influence over them, but your CEO listens to them very carefully.

*Try them shoes on for size.*

Before you criticize a man, walk a mile in his shoes. That way, when you do criticize him, you'll be a mile away and have his shoes.

Chelsea Hardaway.

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## The ultimate secret weapon

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### Use only as necessary.

Be careful.

This is your secret weapon when you suspect that your consultant is not working in your best interests.

If you believe you must use your secret weapon, this is exactly what you must do.\*

Schedule a private meeting, in a small room with a small table, with just you and your consultant.

Close the door.

Clear the table.

Sit quietly and look into your consultant's eyes.

Tell them that you will ask only one question.

Lean across the table, and put your hand firmly on their arm.

Continue to look directly into their eyes, and watch carefully as you ask the only question that matters.

"Are you proud of your work?"

The consultant will answer yes.

But you will know if the answer is no.

\* Of course, you can never use this more than once with the same firm, because the next consultant will have a well-prepared response.





## **About this book**

No doubt about it, consulting is a big, big business.

Some people look at the annual \$100 billion spend on consulting as the telling measure of the industry's success.

At Deloitte Consulting we believe that the only measure that matters is the quality of the client-consultant relationship and the value it creates.

All this leaves us asking ourselves, why aren't there more people talking about how to get more from consultants?

This book is our contribution to starting that conversation. It is the first in a series of books dedicated to making your experience with consultants more positive and productive.

The Consultants of Deloitte

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