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HOW TO CHOSE YOUR CONSULTANT



WITHOUT THE AID OF DIVINATOR TOOLS



Consultants, cross and delight of companies!

I have long been on the other side of the barricade, that is, on the side of the companies and today that I am on this side, as a consultant, I have often found myself wondering the reasons for so much distrust in the counters of this professional figure, especially by small and medium-sized enterprises.

Having worked mainly for large and complex companies, it was almost normal to see consultants of various kinds with different objectives wandering between offices and departments.

When I moved on to this side, I got to know the world of SMEs and I sadly discovered that the approach to counselling was decidedly different: mistrust and sometimes declared hostility were the welcoming committee.

Those who have read my book "Business: a question of frequencies and numbers" know that for me there is only one magic word to understand the things of life: that word is "why". It would have been easy to express a judgment *tout-court*, but I preferred, as usual, to face the hard path of the examination.

Deepening the issue, I realized that the distrust was due to a sort of lese majesty felt by the small entrepreneur in asking for help. This entrepreneur wants to take charge of all the activities and decisions, thinking that he can always do it alone. You are not going anywhere alone, and this principle applies to everyone.

When it came to understanding what fed the hostility, I found only cases of bad previous experiences. The faults, you know, are never on one side alone: on the one hand there was an inability to choose the right consultant and on the other hand the consultants that I call "the loose dogs", those who present themselves in the belief of being what they are not.

Since it is difficult to get a consultant to admit that he is not adequate to the circumstances, I said to myself, why not offer SMEs a guide that allows them to intercept the right professional for their needs?

WHY DO YOU NEED A CONSULTANT?

A consultant is called when the human resources within the organization do not have the necessary skills to grow, change, solve specific problems.

Growth and change are planned.

Problems can be prevented or solved, but the degree of solvability depends on the timeliness with which they are submitted to the professional.

How many times are you asked when the oxen are outside the stable... It is true that the SME is not always aware that it has embarked on a mined road, but it is also true that all too often pride causes dust to be swept under the carpet and help is sought from the outside when the disaster is of exceptional magnitude! Even the super mega extraordinary consultants, you know, for miracles are still organizing!!

In any case, a breath of fresh air can only come from the outside, because in interventions with a positive and creative background, the consultant is not asleep by the uses and customs of the company, while for the healing interventions, he does not carry the weight of suffering inflicted day after day on those who work in the company in crisis.

CONSULTANTS DO NOT FIT EVERYTHING

The consultant can present himself as a single individual or in a team.

His team can be internal to his organization or composed tailored to the customer.

Personally, I have constant points of reference, but I love to compose a mixed team that also includes the direct involvement of specific human resources operating in the client company.

There are professional figures who always support me, without exception: they are corporate lawyers, that is, specialized in business and business matters, we also call them business lawyers. As for accounting and taxes, I put the customer's accountant in the team.

You will have understood that, as lawyers are not all the same, even accountants are not all experts and even less your managers. Companies still have very little understanding about the role of these professionals, entrusting them with any task.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OPERATIONS CONSULTANT AND STRATEGIC CONSULTANT

In principle, the consultant can be of two types:

1. STRATEGIC CONSULTANT

He comes from large companies, having held managerial or middle management positions: if he approaches an SME, he must be able to deconstruct the mental approach and language; therefore, it must propose suitable programs to the customer. If this does not happen, he turns into the Saint Bernard who wants to slip into the Chihuahua's kennel, doing damage.

2. OPERATING CONSULTANT

He may come from large companies, but he has held purely operational roles. He tends to remain a consultant who knows how to do, but not plan, because he lacks a competence of general business management. Great for practical tasks, bad for strategy or critical situations. To the hen, not being an eagle, you can not ask to fly over the branch of a tree.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GOOD CONSULTANT

1) Must be able to say no.

You can't take everything home thinking about fixing things in progress.

When should you be able to say no?

- when you're already too busy
- when the assignment is greater than one's previous experience
- when you are not structured enough
- when you do not feel empathy with the customer, with the sector, with the assignment.

2) Must know how to be supported.

The consultant who has to deal with a complex issue such as, for example, the relaunch of a company in crisis, a general reorganization of processes, the sale of the activity, the restructuring of a crisis unit, cannot act alone, must involve complementary professionals. Two eyes see for two eyes, no more.

It should also be added that ordinary consultants often do not agree to share their fees with other colleagues, especially when the client is represented by an SME that tends not to be able to bear too expensive fees. Personally I believe that this attitude represents a

big mistake, because in the team the consultant has enormous chances of success in his assignment and this can only lead to the disclosure of his success in the business world, with consequent obtaining of new customers and assignments.

3) Does not have to apply a standard cliché

The client can intercept this limit only through the analysis of the intervention program proposed by the consultant. If the program is disproportionate to the strengths of the company, then it unequivocally means that the consultant has not analyzed the company and therefore is applying a standard method, which is independent of the real strengths of the structure of the client company.

4) Must provide experience and not pure theory

You have to ask the consultant to talk about his escursus, the type of serious clients and the type of operations to his credit. There are areas to which you arrive only with gray hair. Of course, the consultant could boast of experiences he never had, but he will be denied soon.

5) He doesn't have to put himself in the chair

The consultant shares, not teaches. On the contrary, the consultant learns from the client himself.

Often in SMEs it is not possible to understand how a professional can operate in the most disparate sectors. You can do it, as long as you work alongside the customer who has a deep knowledge of his sector and can transmit the information that will complete the tools to carry out the intervention.

6) Must be empathetic

You can't like everyone, just as you can't be in tune with everyone. But the gift of empathy is fundamental to creating a climate of teamwork at high frequencies. One must not be experienced as someone who plunges into an organization and makes their performance fall from above. So, an attitude at the same time determined and jovial is an indication of adaptability to new environments.

7) He must be able to make himself understood.

It is the task of the consultant to be understood by the customer, so the language will be technical if necessary. Knowing how to deconstruct concepts and know how to convey them to anyone in front of you, is the main sign of dominance of matter.

Those who do not know how to do this, are often characterized by mental rigidity and a rigid mind can not know how to identify with such different realities, such as those that the various customers represent.

Although the basic ingredients of our recipes are always the same, in thirty years I have never found a case equal to the other!

8) Must defend the customer like a tiger.

Yes, the consultant protects you, even when you called him in the middle of the storm, when you really made an imperial mess. He defends you even when he would like to cover you with insults. Sometimes you have to let him vent, so that he can recharge and get to work to unravel the skein.

The consultant must feel his all the companies he serves.

9) Listen, question and do not judge

The consultant listens patiently to everything that the client exposes, especially at the beginning of the relationship. The consultant asks questions, many questions and listens carefully to all the answers.

The consultant who enters a company and stuns the client by talking about himself, is not your consultant.

10) Not addictive

The consultant must know when he will leave, even before signing the contract that kicks off the collaboration.

Our task is to achieve a goal and leave the customer in a condition that he no longer needs us. At the end of an assignment we must have left behind solutions, goals achieved, growth and maturation, in short, a good memory!

11) Does not submit inaccurate and superficial contracts

No, the consultant with the contract copy-paste from the internet, we just do not want it.

A good contract protects the parties and does so with balance. How will a trained consultant who does not know how to protect himself with an adequate contract protect his client?

12) It's not free

Sore key? We address this topic specifically in the next section.

HOW MUCH DOES A CONSULTANT COST?

A consultant does not have to and cannot be free. A consultant can't come cheap. Who costs little, is worth little. The consultant who offers himself for little is the first to not believe in the value of his work. The consultant who offers himself for a short time often does not know the logic of the consulting market, the one that counts.

The consultant who offers himself for a short time is enchanting you with the price; So, he has nothing more to offer you and wants to convince you at all costs. If you fall into the trap, you don't know how much it will cost you to recover the damage this individual might leave you.

THE COMPOSITION OF THE PRICE OF A CONSULTATION:

1. A consultant has market value
2. The assignment, due to its specific characteristics, has its own intrinsic value.
3. So, the mix of the two makes up the value of the estimate: from here the consultant can choose whether to adjust the fee to the real strength of the client company, or not. It is right that the consultant acts according to his own policy.

There are no discounts, there are adjustments to facilitate a collaboration. Adjustments may relate to both monetary values and payment deadlines. The consultant can decide whether to support start-up activities or activities in a state of crisis, postponing his remuneration or downsizing it: this is a consultant who has decided to invest in the start-up or to risk in the recovery mission of a company that deserves a second *chance*.

The consultant does not work only at *success fees*, i.e. fees paid only in case of achievement objective! Those who propose only to *success fee*, in reality are depriving themselves of responsibility: they mistakenly think that in case of failure to achieve the goal, not having asked anything to the customer, they will not have caused him any damage.

On the contrary, the damage of a missed target due to incompetence is not measured based on unpaid compensation, but in the time that has been lost to the company, time that may no longer be recoverable, even with an emergency program.

The trained consultant wants and must be remunerated for all those complex phases of analysis and planning that precede the actual operational activity. They are essential activities because they are preparatory to planning and finally to operation. This part of the fee is called *retainer fee* and the client must only be happy to recognize this compensation to the consultant, because – however things go – he will get in return an important amount of new information about his organization, together with important suggestions and new ideas.

COST OR INVESTMENT?

The eternal dilemma, but here is the answer:

paying a consultant is

a cost

when you chose wrong

an investment

when you've chosen well

YOU HAVE FINALLY FOUND YOUR DREAM ADVISOR:

PRACTICAL TIPS TO MAKE GOOD USE OF IT

1. Tell him the whole truth

Do not hide behind a finger: if there are problems, explain them all the way. The consultant is your doctor, and you need to put him in a position to start from the right point.

2. When you are not convinced of something, the consultant needs to know.

You may be right, and the consultant will be grateful. In small businesses I often see an attitude of subjection: a very serious mistake. First, client and consultant are side by side, finally the lack of expression of a poor conviction or some doubt, only feeds negative feelings, magnifying them over time. This is the case in which one fine day, for an injection, you will explode and interrupt the relationship with the consultant, who will fall from the clouds wondering what happened to justify such a disproportionate reaction.

Always sharing your feelings strengthens collaboration and supports results.

3. Get the program explained well

From the program you understand what will happen in your company and you will become the main promoter.

A program includes activities, necessary resources (human, material and financial) and finally the timing.

In the cognitive phase, the consultant must be able to anticipate in broad terms a highly probable program but of a generic nature; Moreover, having not yet received the assignment, he has not yet analyzed your company so that he can draw up the detailed tailor-made program.

4. Let the consultant work

The consultant is not infallible, but it is true that he works to the extent that the client allows him to do so.

If you continue to interfere in his work, his engagement loses its meaning. Often the lack of sharing of the intervention plan, involves the gradual loss of trust in the work of the consultant, with consequent collision between the parties.

CONCLUSION

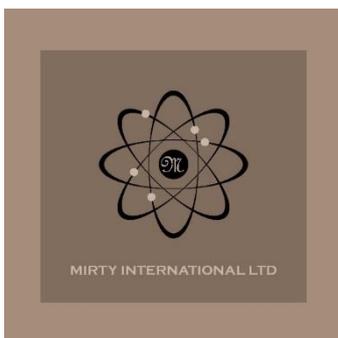
In SMEs, I hear too often that consultants do not understand anything. With this guide I have highlighted that entrepreneurs who do not know how to choose and incompetent consultants coexist.

Even if you have lived a satisfactory experience, that good consultant will stay in touch with you over time, because a beautiful complicity will have been born. However, in the future he may no longer be the right advisor for your new needs.

You will choose new consultants without guilt and that consultant, precisely because he was a good professional, will understand it!



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