

Why Hire a Consultant?

By Ann Latham

When does it make sense to hire a consultant? How could you possibly justify such a move, especially when times are tough?

Think about the total amount of money your business is spending each month. All of that money is being invested in one or more of the following:

- Maintaining the status quo, even the wasteful and ineffective elements
- Improving how you do things
- Identifying and developing new opportunities


If you are not comfortable with the distribution of your investments across these categories, the long-term value of the status quo, the speed and quality of your improvements, and the potential of your pursuits, then how can you afford to keep doing what you are doing?

And if you are "comfortable," would you rather be thrilled?

A consultant may be the best investment you could make now or any time!


Specifically, what can a consultant bring to the table?

1. An outside perspective able to see things that are tough to discern from inside
When you are caught up in the daily grind, it is hard to step back and see your company objectively and clearly. A consultant will bring a different perspective which may change your thinking or provide the confirmation you need to confidently take important steps.
2. Honest feedback and tough questions that challenge assumptions
Few owners and executives can get truly honest feedback from those who work for them. Furthermore, employees at all levels are often unwilling to challenge sacred cows, core beliefs, and long-standing habits. A good consultant won't shy away from critical issues and behaviors.
3. Best practices and new techniques to help you achieve better results faster
A good consultant brings a full toolkit of methods, models, tools, and techniques to shift perspectives, leverage talent, improve analysis, identify opportunities, extract ideas, build



skills, elevate thinking, and more. Furthermore, a good consultant selects and adapts those tools to fit your circumstances.

4. Diagnostic capabilities to separate what you want from what you need
Owners and executives don't always know what they and their company need. The diagnostic capabilities of a good consultant can eliminate unfruitful initiatives before they get off the ground.
5. An eye for the process while you concentrate on the content
It is hard enough to debate tough issues without also worrying about the clock, whether all are contributing, and how you will ever get to the bottom of the issue at hand. A good consultant takes on responsibility for the process leaving you and your employees to focus on the issues.
6. The expertise to help you determine what will and what won't work well in your company
It is one thing to know what you would like to accomplish and another to know how to make it work for your company. A good consultant brings a wealth of experience in managing people, processes, and change that can be adapted to your situation.
7. Timely pushback to prevent unintended consequences
As excitement builds around an initiative, the consultant often serves to slow things down at just the right time. Too often, people leap to solutions or hatch plans without first assessing potential risks. A good consultant pushes back to prevent premature, half-baked plans.
8. An objective voice that can communicate above the bias and baggage
Bias and baggage are common and often impede communication and commitment. A trusted third-party can elevate the conversation by finding common ground and can also help pinpoint and address beliefs and behaviors which are the root cause of the difficulties.
9. The ability to defuse emotion around sensitive topics so real communication can occur
Sensitive topics and employee fears can make it extremely difficult to elicit opinions and ideas, to openly discuss objectives and risks, and to generate creative responses to challenges. A good consultant can defuse the situation and open up the channels of communication.
10. Techniques that level the playing field so all employees can contribute effectively
Even in well-functioning companies, the group dynamic tends to be controlled by the most powerful players whether the power stems from authority or personality. A good consultant can level the playing field and change the dynamic. Those rarely heard acquire a voice and



those disinclined to listen finally listen. The result is greater understanding, collaboration, and commitment to high-quality decisions in less time.

In addition to the above, the simple presence of a consultant can be valuable by reflecting your commitment to improving results. There is nothing like putting your money where your mouth is and hiring a consultant to convince people that you are serious and determined to get results. It is like shining a bright light on your objectives and down the path to action. Furthermore, people working with a consultant start trying to see things through the consultant's eyes and that tends to improve their vision.

In short, a consultant can help you set reasonably ambitious goals and achieve them faster than by yourself.

Is a consultant always a good idea? No, not if you are happy with the results you are getting, confident in your ability to improve those results, or unwilling to change!

One final question: If you can do it yourself, why haven't you?

Ann Latham creates the clarity that produces better result in half the time. She does it as a consultant, speaker, master facilitator, author, and president of Uncommon Clarity. For more information or to subscribe to her free newsletter, please visit www.uncommonclarity.com.

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