



First Things First: Why Consulting?

In this chapter you will

- Define consulting
- Identify the experiences, skills, knowledge, and attributes that will lead you to a successful consulting career
- Assess your consulting aptitude
- Identify your initial consulting focus
- Test your entrepreneurial attitude

Consulting: What Is It?

A consultant is someone who provides unique assistance or advice to someone else, usually known as “the client.” The work is defined by the consultant’s expertise, the structure in which the consultant works, and the process the consultant uses.

Expertise is based on what a consultant knows and has experienced. It can be anything from gardening to the stock market; from astral projection to pig farming; from organization development to preventing child abuse; from manufacturing to mining emeralds. In his book, *Going Solo*, William J. Bond (1997) identifies a list of 296 specialty consulting fields. And his list does not include the eight listed above.

The structure in which the consultant works can vary from working for a firm, for example, one of the big five accounting firms (all of whom have consulting branches), working for a small or medium size consulting firm, working with a partner in an office, working in a virtual organization with a loosely structured relationship with other consultants across states, working as a subcontractor to any of those listed, working by yourself from a home office, or any of a dozen other structures.

The process a consultant uses usually is within one of the steps of problem solving. A consultant might help a client identify the problem, identify the cause, identify the solution, implement the solution, or all four. For example, a consultant might help a client:

- *Identify the problem:* “Why aren’t our catalog sales growing the way we anticipated?” A consultant might identify the problem as wasteful use of resources or a lack of repeat business.
- *Identify the cause:* “What is causing limited repeat business?” A consultant might identify the cause as sales staff being rewarded more for new business or as employees with poor customer service skills.
- *Identify the solution:* “How do we ensure that our employees have the skills they need?” A consultant might identify solutions such as hiring more highly skilled employees, offering a higher compensation to attract and retain skilled employees, or improving the customer service skills of present employees.
- *Implement the solution:* “How can we improve our present employees’ customer service skills?” A consultant might help implement a solution by designing and delivering customer service skills training, creating a mentoring program that encourages on-the-job skill sharing, or establishing a monitored customer call center that provides feedback.

To summarize, the consultants’ expertise, the structure in which they work and the process they use define the work. And consultants’ experiences usually lead them naturally to each of these three elements. Experience and education provide the *expertise* that leads them to the field in which they specialize. Experience in other organizations as well as the lifestyle a consultant chooses lead to them using the right *structure*. And experience also provides the consultant with the *process*, usually based on what the consultant has used in past work or the process the consultant’s company uses.

Why a Consulting Career?

No one should have to get up in the morning and go to work. Instead we should all be able to get up and go to play. That is, we should enjoy our work so much that it seems like play. Most of us, however, distinguish work (“what we must do”) from play (“what we’d rather be doing”). Unfortunately, most of us get up and go to work every morning and save what we’d “rather be doing” for later in the day or later in the week. Consulting affords the opportunity for your work to be what you’d “rather be doing.” As a consultant, you have the flexibility to determine when you work, where you work, with whom you work, and what kind of work you do.

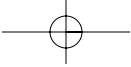
Even when people are given a chance to create the kind of work they wish to pursue, they are sometimes unable to do so because there are so many choices. You may begin to narrow those choices by identifying your *experiences* (opportunities for learning), your *competencies* (skills and knowledge), and your *aptitude* (natural talents and personal qualities).

So why are you interested in a consulting career? In the next sections you will explore the experiences, competencies, and attributes that will help define your consulting role. Let’s begin by identifying the experiences you have had that would lead you to pursue a consulting career.

Explore Your Experiences

To begin to narrow your consulting choices, examine the expertise you’ve gained over the years. Although it’s sometimes difficult to name your own expertise, you can easily identify experiences you’ve had. The expertise you’ve gained from your experiences helps define your consulting role. (We will further explore the structure you will consider in Chapter Four.)

Identify all the industries in which you have worked:

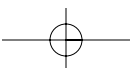


Identify all the volunteer experiences you've had:

Identify the organizational levels with which you have experience:

Rate your breadth and depth of experience:

Identify the experiences that were the most rewarding and enjoyable:



Identify the experiences that were the most negative and unpleasant and that you wish to avoid in the future:

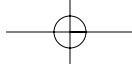
The experiences you've had provide you with a level of expertise for which a client will pay. Later in this chapter you will use the information you have filled in to begin to identify your consulting focus.

Inventory Your Competencies

Everyone is very skilled at doing (or very knowledgeable about) at least one thing. My plumber, Owen, for example, is the most knowledgeable person I know about anything that goes wrong with my plumbing. He can diagnose problems over the telephone and is highly skilled at making a quick repair.

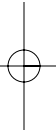
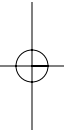
Identify the knowledge and information you have, for example, as a computer salesperson you would know about sales, but you may also have learned time management skills; as a nurse you may have taken workshops and read several books to improve your communication skills.

List the things you do better than most people:

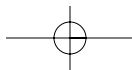


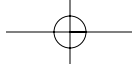
List the things that colleagues, employers, friends, and family say that you do better than most:

Identify any special classes, courses, or seminars you've taken:



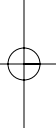
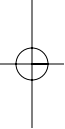
List any special certifications, licenses, credentials, or warrants you hold:





List the problem-solving processes in which you are competent, for example, team building, process improvement, root cause analysis, brainstorming, force field analysis, flow charting, dialogue facilitating.

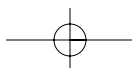
List things you know a lot about:



The skills and knowledge you already possess will help you define your consulting role later in this chapter.

Skills and Knowledge Required of Consultants

From the following list, identify the skills and knowledge for which you require the most improvement. Select the three or four that will make the greatest difference as you begin your consulting role.



- Prospecting and marketing
- Diagnosing client needs
- Identifying mutual expectations
- Pricing projects
- Dealing with paperwork
- Analyzing business data
- Designing materials
- Solving problems
- Building relationships
- Communicating with others
- Writing proposals, reports
- Conducting training
- Facilitating meetings
- Coaching managers
- Knowledge of intervention models
- Knowledge of processes

Identify how you might gain the skills and knowledge you need:

Continuing to gain skills and knowledge is an investment in yourself. Every time you enhance your knowledge base or increase your skills you become more valuable as a consultant.

Assess Your Consulting Aptitude

Malcolm Forbes has been credited with saying, “Too many people overvalue what they are not and undervalue what they are.” Consulting takes a certain aptitude—those natural talents and personal qualities we all have. It might be the ability to solve a problem methodically or the creative talent to see the problem as a solution. Don’t underestimate your natural talents and abilities. And if you know your weaknesses, also know that you can overcome them.

Are You a Match for the Profession?

Read the following statements. They identify the aptitude, natural talents, and personal qualities it takes to be a consultant. Check all with which you agree.

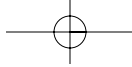
- I am a hard worker.
- I am in good health.
- I am a risk taker.
- I have a thick skin; being called a pest, “beltway bandit,” or con man does not bother me.
- I am persistent.
- I am a big picture person.
- I pay attention to details.
- I am an excellent communicator—oral and written.
- I am an independent self-starter.
- I can promote myself.
- I can balance logic and creativity, big picture and details.
- I know my limitations.

- I can say “no” easily.
- I am self-disciplined.
- I am confident.
- I am flexible.
- I am a goal setter.
- I complete tasks.
- I am trustworthy.
- I like to work with people.

Although the number of statements you checked will not guarantee success as a consultant, the statements you did not check point to challenges you will face as a consultant.

Which natural talents and abilities need the most improvement and attention?

How will you adapt or acquire talents and aptitudes that aren't natural for you?

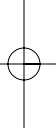
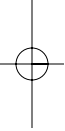


Pull It Together: Your Initial Consulting Focus

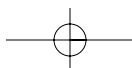
You spent some time examining your experiences, your competencies, and your natural aptitudes. Now translate that into what a client might buy.

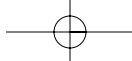
What experiences do you possess for which a client would be willing to pay?

What skills and knowledge do you possess for which a client would be willing to pay?



What natural talents and personal qualities do you possess for which a client would be willing to pay?





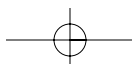
To what aspects of the problem-solving process would you be likely to contribute: identify the problem, identify the cause, identify the solution, or implement the solution?

What can you offer that will benefit clients? Select those items from the list below that are appropriate and then add several of your own.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diagnostic skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analytical skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational skill |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Objectivity | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexibility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity | <input type="checkbox"/> New ideas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fast turnaround | <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting deadlines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My publications | <input type="checkbox"/> My completed research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My contacts | <input type="checkbox"/> My patents |

Experience with _____

Expertise in _____



Now take a first cut at describing your consulting work by completing the statement below. Some examples follow.

I am a _____ consultant who helps
my clients to _____ .
This benefits them _____ .

Examples

“I am a process improvement consultant who helps my clients become more efficient. This benefits them by reducing redundancy, increasing quality, decreasing time spent, and reducing cost to the customer.”

“I am a web design consultant who helps my client define and design websites. This benefits them by creating a professional-looking website in one-tenth the time and at half the cost.”

Entrepreneur Attitude: Do You Have What It Takes?

In addition to the experience, competencies, and aptitudes that make up your expertise, you must realize that becoming a consultant means that you are joining the entrepreneurial ranks. The Entrepreneur Attitude Survey that follows will tell you whether you have what it takes to become an entrepreneur.

The Entrepreneur Attitude Survey

Instructions: Rate yourself on the following qualities. They represent the thinking of several authors about the requirements of a successful business owner. Spend ample time pondering these questions and answer honestly. Rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 4 as follows:

1 = strongly disagree 3 = agree
2 = disagree 4 = strongly agree

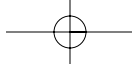
Circle your answers

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I usually try to take charge when I'm with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I can do anything I set my mind to. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I have a high tolerance for difficult situations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I believe I can always influence results. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I am complimented on my ability to quickly analyze complex situations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I prefer working with a difficult but highly competent person rather than a friendly, less competent one. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. I can fire employees who are not producing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I'm willing to leave a high-paying, secure job to start my own business. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I push myself to complete tasks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. I can work long hard hours when necessary. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. I need to be the best at whatever I do. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. I do not become frustrated easily. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. I thrive on challenges. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. I become bored easily with routine tasks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

- | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| 15. I dislike being told what to do. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. I have a higher energy level than most people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. I have held numerous leadership positions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. I have the skills and enjoy accomplishing a complex task by myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. I can change my course of action if something is not working. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 20. I am seen as a creative problem solver. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. I can balance the big picture and details of a business at the same time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 22. I can predict how actions today will affect business tomorrow and in the future. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 23. I need at least ____ hours of sleep to function effectively. | 1 = 8 hrs
3 = 6 hrs | 2 = 7 hrs
4 = 5 or fewer hrs | | |
| 24. I have at least ____ years of experience in the business I will start. | 1 = 1 yr
3 = 3 yrs | 2 = 2 yrs
4 = 4 yrs | | |
| 25. Over the past three years I have missed a total of ____ days of work due to illness. | 1 = 1–6 or more days
3 = 6–10 days | 2 = 11–15 days
4 = 0–5 days | | |

Scoring: Total the numbers you circled.

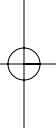
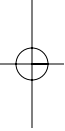
90 to 100	Go for it!
82 to 89	Good chance of success
74 to 81	Pretty risky
73 and below	Better continue to collect a paycheck



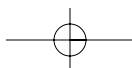
Although this survey can give you a general picture of what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur, only you can decide whether the move is right for you.

What did you learn about yourself?

What concerns you the most about being an entrepreneur?



What obstacles might you need to overcome? How will you do that?



What strengths will you parlay to your benefit? How will you do that?

Quick TIP

If your score was not as high as you would have liked it to be, call your local university or technical college to learn whether they offer classes in entrepreneurship. Ask for the reading list and syllabus. If you decide you do not wish to take such a course, you may at least want to read some of the books from their reading list to bolster your knowledge about what to expect.

Quick Start Action

A Dozen Questions to Ask a Consultant

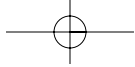
Before you begin the next chapter, interview a consultant. Consider it your take-a-consultant-to-lunch assignment. Gain as much information as you can about what it's like to be a consultant. Use the following list of questions to start (and I'm certain you will come up with many others).

- How long have you been a consultant?
- How did you get started?
- Why did you decide to become a consultant?
- How would you describe your consulting practice?
- How have you structured your business and what are the advantages and drawbacks of that structure?
- What do you do for clients?
- What's a typical project like?
- What's a typical day like?
- What marketing activities do you conduct?
- What's the greatest challenge for you as a consultant?
- What would you miss the most if you quit consulting?
- What should I have asked about that I didn't?

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After your interview, think about what you learned about consulting. How has it reinforced or changed your thoughts about consulting?

Now that you have defined consulting and identified the experience, skills, knowledge, and attributes that you have that will lead you to a successful consulting career, you are ready to plan that career. Use the Quick Start Lists on the next page to capture your thoughts before moving on to Chapter Two. You will find Quick Start Lists at the end of each chapter. As you read future chapters and identify items you wish to remember, turn to the back of that chapter and record the actions you want to take, the ideas you think of, and the questions for which you want answers.



Quick Start **LISTS**

Actions I Will Take

Ideas I Have

Questions I Have

