

## Improve your value as a Consultant

Consulting is not an easy career. You're exposed to all sorts of pressures and potential criticism - much of which can be self-perpetuating. Take time to recharge your abilities as William Benn offers insight on...

Whether you are a full-time consultant, a team leader, or an HR professional - large amounts of your time are devoted to helping others to achieve their goals. The process of consulting to internal or external clients is pretty similar: you need to diagnose what could be better, work out what needs doing to improve things, and then go ahead and facilitate the implementation of the solution.

Top consultants are in demand, authorities in their field, and usually manage a good balance between personal and professional life goals. Yet it is hard for consultants to learn what makes for greatness because consultants are very jealous of their success secrets. Why would anyone want to give away the powerful techniques that have been so hard won?

Now, after many years of analysing the behaviour and attributes of top consultants we would like to share some suggestions to help you become and stay ahead of the consulting pack. Over the next 3 months, we'll outline the principles of highly effective consulting. All of these principles can be learnt and developed to help you succeed in the competitive world of consulting.

There are 3 main themes that top consultants excel in:

- **Capability** – they have highly developed ability
- **Character** – they have strong positive personal attributes
- **Contact management** – they manage their clients and their networks

This month let's explore the first theme – capability. Consulting capability is comprised of six elements. Take each in turn, and reflect on your level of attainment in each. Why not seek feedback from your mentor – or a trusted colleague – to help you grow and excel in each element?

- **Competence** : being skilled and knowledgeable in your chosen field. Are you an expert in the topics that you consult on? Would you feel comfortable being interviewed about the topic? Would you feel comfortable debating the topic with world-class experts?

- **Confidence** : feeling secure and relaxed in your abilities. Would you enjoy debating your topic with a world-class expert? Do you try and minimise questions and objections, or do you see them as a mental workout? Do you feel tense and nervous before a presentation, or excited and energised?

- **Capacity** : being on top of your workload, and able to give your best to the client. Do you sometimes rush assignments with too little preparation? Do you follow up on completed projects to help improve your techniques and complete the learning

loop? Do you have a healthy balance between professional and personal life?  
Commercial awareness: finding solutions that are best value for the client. Can you help the client to improve even on a very limited budget? Can you ensure that your solutions are cumulative and sequential, so future investments can build on current initiatives? Even in not-for-profit organisations, do you aim to improve efficiency and competitiveness so that organizational resources go further?

**Comparison** : showing clients how they stack up in their sector. Do you benchmark your clients against the best in class? Do you gather and utilise data  
- about trends and innovations relating to your chosen field of expertise? Do you borrow insights and analogies from other professions, from arts and sciences?

**Consequences** : being mindful of the implications of options and outcomes. Do you make the potential risks clear to clients? Do you set out contingency plans, and build in review processes to ensure that desired goals are being attained? Are you willing and able to adapt your approach to suit the changing nature of the  
- client environment?

As a consultant, you are only as good as you make yourself. So, set aside some time to develop your range and depth of capability. Discuss your plans with your mentor, and look onward to enjoying the benefits of being a truly capable consultant.

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