

HRD Consulting: Facts and Follies

By Barbara Carnes

Ah, the consulting life! Independence, high income, glamor, travel, no boss, setting your own hours, people listening to your wisdom . . . it sounds wonderful, doesn't it? Whether "going out on your own" as a consultant is just a pipedream or a definite plan for the future, here are some facts about the consulting business you should know.

First, the opportunities for independent consultants are growing. According to *Training/HRD*, the human resource development industry is the fourth fastest growing industry in the 1980s and is expected to continue to grow through the year 2000. John Naisbitt and Patricia Auburdene in *Reinventing the Corporation* mention that as organizations change, they will abandon some of their hired labor in favor of contract labor. This appears to be holding true for the training industry, where it is often more cost effective to hire a consultant for a specific project than it is to hire a trainer who may not be needed afterwards. Opportunities are increasing for independent consultants.

Consulting can be very lucrative. Noted consulting authority Howard Shenson quotes six-figure incomes for many consultants. However, other consultants go broke. In addition to practicing his/her craft, the successful consultant must also be able to run the business, which includes managing cash flow, understanding profit/loss statements, developing banking rela-

tionships, complying with government regulations, and last but not least, marketing and selling. Being a good trainer is a start, but business management skills are also important to sustain a successful consulting practice.

The freedom to make your own schedule, to come and go as you please, to knock off early on Friday afternoon, may look pretty good, and it is nice . . . once in awhile. But most consultants soon realize that they don't receive a paycheck unless they work. Polls indicate that the average consultant works an average of 40 to 50 hours per week or more. Although consultants do have some freedom to make their own work schedule, much of their work time is dictated by the needs of their clients, as well as economic necessity.

Consultants travel and go glamorous places, if they choose. They are also able to confine their work closer to home. Anyone who has traveled much can tell you that spending a lot of evenings alone in a strange city is usually not all that glamorous. And the rigors of negotiating airports and enduring crowded airline flights can be wearing. It is fun, though, to see the frequent flier miles add up to another free ticket, and to have the opportunity to combine pleasure with business travel, whether that means visiting seldom-seen relatives or spending a luxurious weekend in a resort. The point is that by deciding

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where and to whom he/she markets, a consultant chooses how much he/she travels.

Consultants are their own bosses. Sort of. Actually, a consultant has as many bosses as he has clients, each with his or her own expectations, requirements, personal style, and idiosyncrasies. The consultant's sense of independence is retained, however, because client relationships are generally less intense than boss relationships, and also because the consultant plays the role of expert. Because he has no boss to help him, the consultant had better be able to set priorities and discipline himself to get work done on time, in an acceptable form.

Is consulting for you? If your expectations are realistic, consulting can be a very rewarding, exciting profession.

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