

Looking for a Management Consultant – Buyer Beware!

The consulting sector has in recent years increased drastically due to changes in our economy and to a fundamental ideological shift in the way people view work. At one time, employees boasted of their lengthy tenure with an organization, while in this day and age, it is rare to find employees remaining loyal to one employer for more than five years. Moreover, labour market trends seem to indicate that employers are recycling their workforces more frequently through downsizing, rightsizing and process reengineering. With these fundamental shifts in the permanency of work, it is easy to see why becoming a management consultant would seem attractive. The barriers to entry in the world of management consulting are not very prohibitive. Moreover, the management consulting sector is virtually unregulated. Considering the relative ease in entering the management consulting world, one can easily see why it has become a popular career choice for many individuals. The purpose of this article is to provide consumers of consulting services with some helpful tips on how to select a qualified consultant.

There are segments of the consulting population that are represented by associations, but belonging to these professional bodies is not required in order to commence a management consulting practice. Additionally, anyone can profess to be a management consultant regardless of whether they possess the necessary credentials or qualifications. This is in stark contrast to professional colleges, such as the College of Nurses or the College of Social Workers and Socials Service Workers, where membership is a requirement in order to practice professionally. This lack of regulation or standardization in management consulting should concern any organization that is either considering hiring a management consultant or has already contracted the services of a consultant.

Ask what the consultant's educational credentials or qualifications are. Credentials are not the sole determinant in the selection of a superior consultant; however, they definitely play a big part in the decision to select one consultant over another. One could generally expect that someone with a higher post-secondary education would possess the type of critical problem-solving and higher level reasoning skills typically required from a management consultant.

Once you've verified the consultant's educational credentials, the other important qualification is the individual's experiential background. Experience is definitely an important criterion in the selection of a consultant. In the case of a novice consultant, the buyer should absolutely request references and insist on reviewing samples of his/her work (i.e., reports, research papers, etc.). References, coupled with samples of their previous work, provide good indicators as to the consultant's capacity to undertake work with varying degrees of complexity and variety. The same scrutiny should also apply when selecting a seasoned consultant. It's simply a sound and prudent idea to verify this information in order to ultimately feel comfortable with your decision to hire one consultant over another.

The consumer of management consultancy services should exercise the same care and due diligence as it would when deciding to make any other substantial purchases. A potential client should check, check and check again – the firm's credentials by virtue of the consultant's educational achievement(s), work and consulting experience, quality of past projects as reflected in sample reports – with confirmation by reliable references. The old adage of "Buyer Beware" is very pertinent in the selection of a truly qualified and capable consultant.