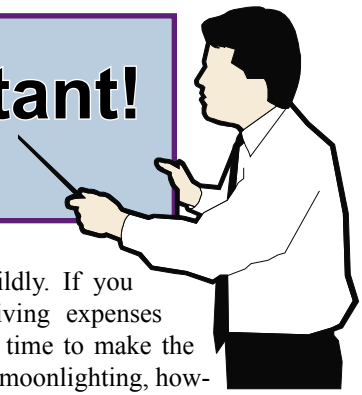


# Everyone Wants to Be a Consultant!

By Richard Dolewski



If you're ambitious and enjoy your work, but no job seems quite right in the corporate world, there just might be one employer you haven't considered. – **yourself!** I get asked all the time, "What is it like to be a consultant. It must be nice being a consultant. All the perks! etc., etc., etc." I write this column because life as a consultant is great, but it is not for everyone. Let's consider a few things...

There are all sorts of businesses you could start, of course, but being a consultant has become particularly popular for people in our industry – Information Technology. Many people get into consulting because they have been laid off, but the change can be difficult if you see consulting only as a resting place between jobs. You may have trouble landing clients if it's obvious this is just a phase you're going through. This cannot be a quick walk in the Park. You need to be in this business for the long haul. You also need to focus on exactly what services you want to provide. Just because you know how to do 100 different things and you're good at them, that does not mean you want to do all those things as a consultant! It's really good to get clear with yourself what you are comfortable with.

Here are some other factors worth considering (these come from me after attending workshops and living through 10 years of consulting):

**Are you a talented worker?** If you see consulting as a way of escaping a bad job or a string of incompetent bosses, you are likely to be disappointed. Even though technically you will be working for yourself, you'll still have to listen to and satisfy clients. If you have had trouble getting along with every boss you've ever had, working with clients might be more of an adventure than you've bargained for. Remember the customer is always right!

Successful consultants that have developed good reputations as workers, are self-starters and have an entrepreneurial nature. One question to ask yourself before making any leaps: **Do you consistently show initiative that goes beyond your basic job duties?** Do you find opportunity or does it have to find you? Good consultants offer companies alternatives that they hadn't considered. Those consultants will do far better than the ones who just go through the motions and don't offer any insight or pleasant surprises.

**How are your finances?** Consultants can earn great money – or **absolutely nothing.**

Your income is likely to vary wildly. If you don't have several months of living expenses saved up, this is probably not the time to make the leap. That shouldn't stop you from moonlighting, however. If your job is flexible enough to let you do some consulting on the side, that is probably the simplest and safest way to get started. And if you save the money from those early jobs, you'll soon have enough to make the leap.

**Will your network be helpful enough?** Do you already work with people who would be potential clients? If not, how do you expect to drum up business? Have you talked with people about a marketing plan to make sure there is a niche for you? Do people understand how your services would be different from the competition?

**Do you communicate well?** Consultants have to be good listeners to understand what their clients want. Most have to make their points well in meetings, handle a variety of one-on-one conversations and be decent public speakers. They normally have to write clearly so they can issue reports to management and make sure everyone is clear about their project's scope and deadlines. One client told me that consultants should be able to explain in 1 to 2 minutes how they can help him better his company. If you're not a decent office politician, you're likely to struggle as a consultant.

**After all this, can you sweat the details?** Consultants have a lot to do besides their technical roles or project management. They have to negotiate rates, write offers, contracts, handle billing, order supplies, manage their offices and hire professional services.

Don't ignore the other crucial piece of your network: your family. If your loved ones don't feel comfortable about you becoming a consultant, the move will be almost impossible. My wife struggled tremendously with the unknown. She would ask where are you working next week and I would reply: "Not sure, but I am sure I will be working somewhere." This unknown can KILL a relationship. Where is my next pay cheque coming from? Finally, don't lose sight of the commitment of hours that will take away from family life.

I would never go back to the regular grind. I enjoy the role of being a consultant and will never look back. Although it's not for everyone, it may be for you, too!



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