

HOW TO HIRE A CONSULTANT

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Over the past several years, numerous physicians, mid-level practitioners, and spa owners have approached me for guidance and direction on the operational, administrative, and financial health of their practices. As practice management consultants, we specialize in a core specialty, and the request for our assistance comes from hearing our lectures at major conferences and reading our articles. Naturally, we lecture and write on true-to-life, compelling events that all practices encounter, in order to share how we have solved many of these concerns in the past.

It certainly is not a “one size fits all” introduction. All consultants are not alike, just as not all physicians in the same specialty provide identical results. There are inefficient consultants in the industry, just like there are lesser quality practitioners in the medical community. That’s why it is important to do your homework prior to hiring a consultant or consulting company.

FINDING THE RIGHT CONSULTANT FOR YOUR PRACTICE

When it comes to consultants, you want a fresh pair of eyes to share an unbiased opinion of what you are looking to achieve. As practitioners, it’s easy to look at things with blinders on and never see the forest through the trees. It’s difficult to see varying perspectives that a consulting company will already have seen, and more importantly, know the successes or lack thereof. Don’t let the same mistakes others have made happen to you.

A consulting company gathers data from many sources without having to disclose how or where the information came from. The anonymity protects you by ethical boundaries, since you were not the one that had to disclose the end use of your results.

A consulting company should have vast experience in the interpretation of the results that you may not have otherwise seen, previously encountered, or know what to do with, saving you hundreds of hours of wasted time only to come up with poor decisions.

A consulting company will work on a specific project they are assigned to and not be interrupted with other interfering projects during the normal course of the day. (We all know how other emergencies fall in your lap while trying to complete a project.) You should design your contract so that

your desired result is spelled out from the very beginning.

If you want to start, complete and introduce a new project, product line of procedures or skincare services into your practice, research increased profitability by purchasing power, credit cards cost reduction, etc., a consulting company may be your answer, especially if you don’t need a full time employee or higher paid manager to be responsible for the project. The contractual agreement spells out the terms of the project, and upon completion, the contract either ends or is terminated. During the project or due diligence stages in your practice, your staff can become engaged in the process, and they feel part of the improvement.

Not all consultants are for you (the client), and not all clients are for the right consultant. Everyone has an opinion of how and why they run their businesses the way they do. There is no right or wrong, and many profitable and successful ideas can be more profitable and successful if a different twist is placed on it. Don’t be stuck on an idea because it was your idea. We often get caught up in this quandary and we need to realize there are multiple alternatives to explore. As a consultant, I have seen projects I recommended perform extremely successfully in one practice, and another physician was not interested in having the identical process done in his/her practice.

BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF CONSULTANTS

So what are the drawbacks of hiring a consultant?

1. Higher fees charged than an employee
2. The project can run over budget
3. It can take a lot of your time to gather information
4. The consultant knows too much about you
5. You may be unhappy with the results

The benefits are:

1. You set a defined price on the project so you know exactly what the cost will be
2. You don’t have to pay employee benefits
3. You can focus on other core sectors of your business
4. You can benchmark your practice against others the consultant may have experience with
5. The project gets done much quicker due to fewer interruptions

Now if it’s time to hire a consultant, you need to ensure

all of your bases are covered. Here are several things you must have in place to protect you from future heartache.

1. Ask for a legal contract that describes price, term, project being consulted, and expected results.
2. Sign a non-disclosure agreement keeping your trade secrets from being shared outside of your practice.
3. Perform a background check of the anticipated consultant. This can include financial, criminal, prior employment, social media/search engine and results.
4. References are extremely important. These can come from fellow consultants and current and past clients.
5. Ask how many other clients are they working with at the same time, and ask if the consulting company can dedicate enough time to your project.
6. Interview several consultants before you make your decision. It's not much different than prospective patients getting second and third opinions.
7. Ensure you have access to your consultants when you need them. Having a one-on-one link to your consultant means everything.
8. Ask what the consultant's largest successes and failures were. Try not to hire a "one-trick pony" where all they can do is one thing they can hand their hat on.
9. Make sure the consultant has various approaches to the same task or a protocol in place. This is impor-

tant because if their only approach doesn't work, you want to know there is a backup plan in place.

10. Lastly, the concluding question must be, "How can you help me become more successful, profitable, and eliminate stress in the process?"

A MATTER OF TRUST

After going through all of the research, interviews, contracts and disclosures, you have to ask yourself, "Will I be able to get along with this person?" The answer must be an immediate YES. If not, you are wasting your time and must seek out the next qualified candidate who will represent you with the most comfort. After all, the consultant can possibly end up knowing a lot about your personal and professional life, and you better trust them. ■



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