



A Consultant's Creed

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A few years ago I interviewed a very successful consultant in order to obtain some insight into the HIT consulting business. He told me that his bill rate was over \$300.00 an hour. I asked him, in his own words, to define a great consultant. With tongue in cheek, he told this story. "When a client asks a great consultant 'What time is it?' the consultant will ask to see the client's watch and ask 'What time do you want it to be?'" When I asked, "Did the consultant give the watch back to the client?" He smiled and said "That depends!"

He explained that the lesson is, of course, you must really understand who your client is and what it is they really want.

1. Validation

Some clients want validation of their already pre-conceived notions. In this case, they may want a name brand company or person; such as Deloitte, Accenture, or CSC. They are willing to pay the extra 30 to 200% in order to ensure this intended or expected credibility.

2. History/Credibility

Some clients need credibility. Boards or higher level executives believe they get that with big name companies; years ago it was IBM. Interestingly, many of these firms then sub-contract to 2nd or 3rd level tier firms to get knowledgeable consultants, builders, and educators needed to do the job.

3. Single Firm

Some clients only want to deal with a single firm, or in some cases, the HIT vendor whom they believe will deliver or could be forced to deliver (the old 'one throat to choke' theory). This may or may not work depending on your contract or resolve. In actuality, most HIT vendors use 3rd party consulting firms to augment their services.

4. Best Solution

Some clients want the very best solution for the job. They want not only certification or credentials but also experience, validated success stories, and references. The "been there, done that, succeeded" scenario.

Vitalize Consulting Solutions, Inc. (VCS) fits best into the fourth category. We pick team members that hold themselves to the highest standards. We would be hard-pressed to succeed without their experience, their dedication, and their enthusiasm. Without having to be told, they all follow some basic rules, a "consultant's creed" if you will, that allows them to deliver solutions on time and on budget:

1. Consultants must work to build mutual respect and trust between themselves, their clients, and the firms they represent. Successful outcomes are built on trust and respect built over time; often through difficult circumstances. In the end, trust and respect come out of the successes defined by the client, the system users, and the consultant.
2. Consultants are often paid more than the average analyst or the builder permanently on staff. Many reasons attribute to this: lots of time away from home, long plane rides, lonely hotels, and the lack of security of not being permanently on the payroll of the client or the uncertain length of the engagement. In addition, there are certain expectations by the client: a wealth of experience, having seen it done more than one way, and being faster and more efficient. Sometimes the client genuinely expects miracles out of them. Whatever the expectation, consultants must always rise to the occasion.
3. Good consultants always tell the truth — no matter what — especially if the answer is, “I don’t know but I will find out” or “I made a mistake.” Internal staff employees are expected to be right 51% of the time. If you’re a consultant, the expectations are much greater; try 80% or 90% of the time. Sorry Charlie, no one is right 100% of the time!
4. Documentation of the entire engagement, including all promises, interactions, hours worked, and meetings is a necessary part of the job. Often this takes a generous portion of time and contributes to a consultant’s very long day.
5. Communication is the very foundation of consulting, building, and training. The process of change is complicated and the issues are important to so many people. Consultants cannot sit on information or take ownership of it (treat it as if it is was theirs and theirs alone). If it is relevant to the engagement many people will need to know about it, and more often than not, they will need to relay this information more than once.
6. Consultants need to be politically correct without compromising their integrity and honesty. Provider organizations are often very politically charged entities; consultants need to understand this when communicating within the organization. As an example, many decisions can benefit just one group, while placing added effort, or taking away perceived and real power that another group currently enjoys. It is always best to let internal staff “own” these types of decisions.
7. Consultants must stay current with product and process knowledge. Clients pay consultants for what they know, the experience they have, the information they transfer, and the references they get.
8. Consultants must always be courteous. Implementations are difficult at best, and with long meetings, changes in direction, and long hours there will be trying times for everyone. But as my Grandma always said, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going. And the tough are always kind and courteous.”

9. Any consulting firm (large or small) is only as good as the consultant who is on the engagement. Consulting firms are always judged by the single or multiple consultants on site and not by the sales person who sold the engagement.
10. Consultants must be mindful of what they share and what is best left unsaid. As an example, more often than not, other consultants and other friendly internal employees will sometimes ask about a consultant's billing rate. This often leads to comparisons being made of salary rates to billing rates of the consultant. Explosive situations occur when this happens. Misinterpreted information can also lead to internal employees abandoning their work place for the consulting world. In the past, consultants have been fired for disclosing company defined confidential information. Billing rate and your salary information are considered confidential and should not be shared with colleagues.
11. Finally, consultants must be goal oriented. Whose goal? The person they are reporting to. What happens when the goals change? The person in charge needs to politely be informed of the ramifications in writing. Implementations often drag on and on, and management sometimes forgets the reasons why a change was made that increased the effort or invalidated some significant previous effort. Decision makers need to understand the consequences of change. This can be difficult because many times management doesn't want to hear the reasons for slipped or missed schedules; they just want to have the darn thing done and completed.

A long time ago, when I was responsible for implementations, I had a sign on my desk that was copied from the one on Harry Truman's desk. It read "The Buck Stops Here." Implementations are never easy because they are viewed as mimicking or changing processes that have been in place for years. The key is to make the processes easier, better, and to get buy in from the users. The users are often many, and because of this, their needs and expectations vary on any given day.

Good building and teaching my friend.

For more information about Vitalize Consulting Solutions and joining our team, contact us at 610.444.1233 or vcs@getvitalized.com. You can also visit our website at www.getvitalized.com.

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