Hire A Consultant Who Can Peel An Onion

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Corporate executives generally recognize that it’s time to call in a consultant when they identify some point of pain and realize that fixing it will require help from outside the organization. As the consultant begins problem-solving, the predicament is oftentimes recognized to be a symptom of one or a host of other issues.

The task of a consultant — to methodically pull back the layers and eventually reach the root where the problem can be objectively defined — is quite like peeling an onion. However, some consultants know how to “peel an onion” better than others. They know how to remove the layers with care instead of shredding them to bits; they know how to expedite the process so that it can be as painless as possible, without tearful weeping. How can you tell if a consultant will manage the job well?

As a consultant with 20 years of experience, delivering practical business solutions to companies in more than 20 different industries, including national and global food and beverage manufacturers, I’ve learned that when companies look to hire a consultant, it takes a professional with the following qualifications to get business cooking again:

Proven Experience

Any company — whether a giant multinational or a small startup — that seeks a consultant should hire an individual with real-world experience and a track record of successful problem-solving. It is certainly preferable that the consultant be knowledgeable about your industry, yet if a candidate doesn’t have direct knowledge of your industry, he or she needn’t be automatically dismissed from consideration.

Someone who has been exposed to a variety of sectors holds insights that may be valuable to your operation. As long as the consultant displays an ability to rapidly grasp the ins and outs of your industry, he or she should be able to apply his or her knowledge to your business situation. One way to ascertain whether the consultant is really the expert he or she claims to be is to check references of past projects.

Be Realistic

Pie-in-the sky promises can end up costing you precious time and money. Consultants should espouse a realistic mindset and work with your company to set practical, achievable goals. It’s OK for a consultant to generate big ideas and transform these concepts into actionable plans if they are deemed beneficial to your company. Just be sure that expectations and timelines for reaching those goals are feasible.

Be Assertive

A good consultant will provide honest feedback, not the answers he or she thinks that you want to hear. If your consultant never offers a contrarian view to test the soundness of your logic, you are not getting the value of the third-party opinion that you are paying for and which could be the difference in helping your company find the best solution. Moreover, a consultant who is worried about expressing an opinion for fear of losing you as a client clearly does not understand the role of a consultant. If you encounter a “yes” man, quickly say no.

Collaborate

While companies should hire a consultant who is not scared to voice an opinion that may challenge the company line, it is just as important that he or she know how to collaborate with others. Consultants who are skilled at interacting with others can oftentimes work with, and secure the support of, employees within the company better than upper managers.

Likewise, consultants may need to interact with your customers to understand how your business adds value to their operation or to gain an appreciation for the challenges that they face.

Stay Focused

A consultant should be able to guide the project, keeping everyone on task and moving toward a goal. Although there will likely be bumps along the way, your consultant should have the personality and adequate tools to help your company maintain focus. Timelines are a primary means for keeping a project on target. In my experience, a 90-day timeline that is broken down into 30-day periods is ideal because chunking executables and deliverables into smaller time blocks makes the big picture less daunting.

Moreover, when we observe that we have accomplished within that timeframe exactly what we planned, the timeline becomes tangible evidence of progress, which keeps the company’s stakeholders motivated to achieve the end goal.

Whether your company calls on a consultant to help develop a new product line or optimize an existing one, improve productivity or drive growth through smarter spending, the problem-solving approach is still simple and straightforward: Identify problems or opportunities, then develop and execute solutions.

If you hire a consultant who demonstrates the qualifications listed above — in short, someone adept at “peeling an onion” — then chances are high that your consultant can get business cooking again.

What’s your take? Please feel free to comment below! For more information, please visit www.upfrontmgmt.com *[1].*

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