PART ONE

Marketing Challenges

My mantra to consultants has been, "You're really in the marketing business." A great many otherwise excellent consultants are starving because they don't know how to market and refuse to learn. A great many mediocre consultants are doing quite well because they've mastered marketing.

And some consultants, who are excellent at both consulting and marketing, are flourishing. Which group do you choose to be in?

CHAPTER 1

Lack of Industry Experience

Aren't You a Stranger in These Parts?

One of the most chilling challenges that consultants face at any stage in their careers is the high-potential, mouthwatering, fully funded prospect who says, "You know, I like you and we're ready to move, but we've decided that we must hire someone with experience in our industry."

Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

We all started somewhere. Many of us began our consulting careers in the industries from which we became refugees to join the consulting profession. Some of us had a fortunate first contact, a friend, or lucky timing to enter into another industry or market. The question is: How do we continually expand our industrial and business base?

My belief is that you specialize and die or you generalize and thrive. The world is too full of whirlpools and quicksand for the specialist. In the blink of an eye, for example:

- A new technology can render your niche obsolete (vacuum tubes)
- A larger competitor can establish a dominating brand (McKinsey and strategy work)

- The relatively few clients consolidate, grow old, or disappear, providing less opportunity (U.S. television production)
- An overabundance of competitors forces the small market into a price-sensitive, low-margin position (IT consulting)
- Government regulation and/or societal pressure collapse the industry (tobacco)

Only generalists have the opportunity to stay light on their feet, pursue the true targets of highest potential, and effectively deal with depressions and blight in some markets by shifting quickly to others. With rare exception, the wealthiest solo practitioners and most successful small firms I know have expanded out of narrow niches onto broad playing fields.

And that can be accomplished at any stage of your career (which helps many veterans escape the "success trap" that causes them to plateau with "no growth" strategies).

You are not a content consultant, but a *process* consultant.

Few consultants are what I call "content-based." That is, most of us are not automotive experts who help a company develop better brake linings, nor are we insurance experts who help determine risk ratings on policies.[1] Although we may be working predominantly in one or two industries, I submit to you that the expertise we are applying is far more widely applicable than we think.

We all have processes that we use to derive the results we promise to the client. Whether we are working on better teamwork, a future strategy, improved decision making, conflict resolution, faster time-to-market, enhanced knowledge management, or any number of other "routine" assignments, we are utilizing process skills that are immediately transferable to other environments, industries, and cultures.

1. To be sure, there are people who do these things, and the apotheosis of the art form might be the "expert witness" who testifies at a trial due to his or her expertise in a single field. But I've never considered people who derive their living from being expert witnesses as true consultants, and I can guarantee you that they are not making seven figures a year.

The examples of the processes I'm alluding to include

- problem solving
- decision making
- planning
- innovation
- priority setting
- focus groups
- workshops/seminars
- coaching
- trend evaluation
- surveys and instruments
- group communications
- strategy formulation
- risk and opportunity analysis
- organization and reorganization
- interviewing
- testing
- facilitation
- evaluations
- benchmarking/competitive analysis
- behavior modification

You get the idea. Take a pencil and underline the processes above in which you have been engaged at some time in your career. My guess is that you've selected at least half of my list, and those are simply twenty examples I'm using for my illustration. Are you skeptical?

Well, then here are twenty more:

- presentation skills
- running meetings
- customer service
- sales skills
- influencing others
- boards and governance
- public relations
- diversity
- ethics
- price setting and value
- listening skills
- anger management
- telephone techniques
- telemarketing
- entrepreneurship
- crisis management
- international marketing
- regulatory conformance
- leadership
- benefits and compensation

Take out your pencil again. Of these forty categories of process skills, how many have you engaged in? How many more would you feel perfectly comfortable undertaking?

Once you realize that you're a *process consultant* and not a content consultant, you've made the breakthrough that combats the horrifying objection at the opening of this chapter.

Challenges WON and LOST

A client from a former employer tracked me down not long after I had opened my own practice. In fact, he was only my second call.

He asked if I could come to his organization and talk to him and his boss about conducting focus groups throughout the company. I told him "Absolutely," and jumped in my car for the three-hour drive. I had never conducted a focus group in my life, but I had been a classroom trainer, knew how to form provocative questions, and could use the language well. I figured that was enough, and I'd learn the rest on the job.

My two buyers were impressed, and I was hired for $14,000 to conduct some of the earliest focus groups on diversity for Merck, just as it was about to be named "America's Most Admired Company" in the annual *Fortune* magazine poll for an unprecedented fifth consecutive year.

A couple of years later, Mercedes-Benz was interested in my working with their dealer network to improve service. The ultimate buyer was a German who was president of Mercedes-Benz North America. He imperiously announced at the outset of our first meeting together that "You have no background in the automotive industry!"

"That's true," I acknowledged, "and I had no knowledge of the pharmaceutical industry when Merck hired me, and no background in newspapers when the *New York Times* hired me. What would be your point?"

I got the job.

HOW TO APPLY PROCESS SKILLS IN A SALES SITUATION

Here's how to combat the "industry expertise" objection with process skills:

"You know, I like you and we're ready to move, but we've decided that we must hire someone with experience in our industry."

"Well, that could be adding fuel to the fire. You have industry experts falling from the rafters and tripping over each other in the halls. The last thing you need is another one adding to that cacophony.

"The challenge you're facing is overcoming sluggish product-to-market time, which is putting you at a competitive disadvantage and costing you money as we sit here. I can immediately bring to bear my expertise in cross-functional collaboration, team structure, knowledge utilization, and front-line empowerment to begin changing things tomorrow. And I can bring to you, uniquely, the experience of how that worked successfully at Boeing, Wal-Mart, and Microsoft. Who else can bring that power to bear for you immediately?"

The great power in a successful career—and, presumably, most of the readers of this series are already highly successful—is that you can leverage your past strengths and triumphs. *But that leverage is best utilized only when you mentally free yourself up to expand prior borders.* Most of those borders are our own, self-imposed restrictions, which have been formed by our success in a few industries, or our contacts in those industries, or our mistaken belief that we are actually content experts bound to those industries.

If you do nothing else as you read through the other thirty-nine challenges in this book, understand that your abilities transcend companies, industries, and markets, and that your basic process strengths are applicable in most environments. Whether you choose to broadly pursue those environments and prospective business is your decision.

But you should never again be in the position of squirming uncomfortably when the buyer says, "But you have no experience in our industry." Because then you can use my favorite line, supported by what you've read above:

"Ah, but that's *exactly* why you should hire me!"

CHAPTER 2

Too Narrow a Niche

Is It Me, or Are the Walls Getting Closer?

We are often done in by our own successes. Some of us, through good fortune or good planning, are able to penetrate a profitable industry or master a specialized technology. We become masters of the trade and quickly develop a brand without even trying (or realizing it, in many cases).

And so certain consultants become known and sought for their expertise in refinancing, telemarketing, expert witness testimony in automotive liability cases, insurance sales training, and pharmaceutical reimbursement strategies. They grow larger and larger in narrower and narrower niches until there is barely room to breathe deeply. (There is a BMW sporty car called a Z which is very small. When a large man drives the convertible, it looks more as if he's wearing it than driving it. This is the image I conjure up when I think about a consultant in a niche so small he carries it about with him around his waist.)

Breathing is an apt metaphor, because, ironically, the longer one is successful within a narrow niche, the higher the probability that the day will come when there is no more oxygen (potential income) because the environment has been strip-mined of life.

It's tough to take this seriously when the requests are rolling in, but the best time to plan to get out of the closed loop is exactly when the requests are rolling in and you have a solid financial base to use as a springboard.

THE SIGNS OF "NICHEDOM"

There are clear, ineffable signs of the road leading to the dead end. For example:

- *Same old clients:* The same small number of clients constitute the great preponderance or even lion's share[1] of your revenues. Your client base doesn't change by more than one or two clients from year to year, and is always within the same industry.
- *Same old methodology:* You've been doing the exact same thing almost forever. Your methodology is as intractable and predictable as tomorrow's sunset. No matter who hires you, you go through the same nine (or four or sixteen) steps without any variation at all. Your website, collateral materials, and even business conversations haven't been updated substantively in years.
- *Known/unknown duality:* Within your industry or specialty you are very well-known and perhaps even a minor celebrity. Your brand is strong and your repute enviable. Outside of your industry or specialty it's as if you're wearing a disguise. You are not known within the consulting profession as a whole, nor by organizations outside of your niche. Your brand is not recognized.
- *Exploring more about less:* When you do grow, engage in innovation, and/or improve your techniques, it's a case of drilling farther down to explore narrower and narrower passageways, rather than exploring new horizons. For example, you might attempt to add follow-up disciplines to your tele-

1. I'm using "lion's share" in its original meaning: the complete amount.

marketing approaches, but you're unlikely to expand your phone sales expertise to in-person sales or catalog sales.

ESCAPING THE NICHE WITHOUT DESTROYING IT

I've never been in favor of taking bread off the table, so there's no reason to abandon your specialty. The key is to use that success to leverage your business in other directions. The scope and range of those directions will depend on your flexibility, competencies, and willingness to accept risk.

For example, let's say that your niche is life insurance sales made by agents face-to-face with prospects. Here is one way to view expansion:

1. Closely related:
   - Other financial services, for example, securities or mortgage financing
   - Other personal life decisions, such as real estate sales
   - Other field force consumer sales, for instance, vacuum cleaners
2. Somewhat related:
   - Large-ticket sales, such as computer equipment
   - Telemarketing sales techniques, regardless of industry
   - In-house store sales, for example, retail or auto
3. Stretch:
   - Conflict resolution
   - Negotiation skills
   - Interpersonal communications

The true degree of "stretch" depends on your own proclivities, but the point is that sales techniques always involve negotiation, sometimes conflict, and always communications techniques. The degree to which you can isolate those competencies and introduce them in "new" environments will dictate the relative comfort you will have enlarging your current niche.

All of us tend to be more pessimistic about the transfer of our competencies than is actually the case, and this myopia is often exacerbated by our early success, which we mistaken associate strictly with our market or specialty and not with ourselves.

Challenges WON and LOST

Nowhere have I witnessed "niche myopia" to a more toxic degree than with public school teachers. Periodically over the years, I've been introduced to teachers who desperately want to change careers because of the need for better pay, to escape increasingly unruly classrooms, to get away from school board politics, and a host of other quite legitimate reasons.

"But I'm not really equipped to do anything else but teach," they usually begin.

"Describe your average day," I request.

Once they're through with a day that would intimidate the heck out of me, I provide this breakdown of skills:

- Planning and implementing learning designs
- Responding to spontaneous questions
- Managing group time and accomplishing priorities
- Resolving conflict
- Influencing colleagues and superiors over whom you have no direct control
- Operating within tight budgets
- Leading change and managing expectations
- Providing feedback, evaluation, critique, and developmental plans

You get the idea. The bolder teachers walk away with a renewed self-esteem. The meeker ones walk away as though shell-shocked.

Your own "inventory of skills" will show an analogous capacity to identify competencies that are immediately transferable to other environments—if you have the volition.

THE GENERALIZATION OF SPECIALIZATION

The trends I'm observing are clearly those leading to a more catholic and comprehensive form of consulting. Narrow niches are counterproductive for both client and consultant, so escaping them is simply good business in any case.

My rationale:

- Clients no longer tolerate legions of consultants. The client would rather place trust (and education about the business) in the hands of a few people who can help broadly rather than with a plethora of people who help narrowly. This is simply good business. There are fewer organizational disruptions, an economy of scale, fewer opportunities for inappropriate disclosures, and fewer chances of someone making a major error.
- The business world is so increasingly complex—technology affecting knowledge, customers talking to each other directly, job latitude influencing retention, and so on—that a narrow specialty ignores the very factors that tend to affect the specialist's issues. Try changing the compensation system, no matter how adept a compensation expert you are, without taking into account feedback, evaluation, hiring, retention, career development, and succession planning, just to name a few key interrelated elements. It can't be done effectively.
- High-level buyers are impressed by business acumen, not by technical prowess. You can still sell narrow expertise at purchasing manager and IT manager levels (where budgets are constrained), but not at executive levels. An executive wants to see a businessperson sitting across the desk, not someone who should be talking to a subordinate five levels or six floors below. Executives want to talk about business outcomes, not tasks and inputs.

The good news is that it's never too late to enlarge a niche. The competencies and potential business are omnipresent. The bad news is that we're often blinded to the need until our own volition to change is so weak that the move is impossible.

Look around you. Are you driving the car or wearing it?

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CHAPTER 3

Relative Lack of Resources

How Does a Lone Wolf Create Galloping Herds?

At this writing I have been working out of my home office for almost seventeen years. The homes have changed and the offices improved, but my commute is still only about twenty feet from the bedroom down the hall. Occasionally, I hit traffic.

I'm not talking about lack of financial, intellectual, or support resources, but rather the fact that even highly successful ultimate consultants have deliberately decided not to build staff, offices, technology, and other infrastructure components that, under most conditions, are overhead that burn money twenty-four hours a day. Early in my career, I feared that this would be seen as a weakness by prospects, and so I engaged in some creative fabrication. That is, I lied. I "built" a staff and office, and even, in one of the more embarrassing albeit brief ventures in my career, had a recording of a secretary answer my phone!

I found out later that most clients don't give a darn. This is a relationship business, not an appraisal of a physical plant or a head count.

Nonetheless, you might be bidding on that magical seven-figure contract and be somewhat concerned that the buyer might, justifiably, inquire about how you intend to carry this off. There are two approaches that I've found highly effective: virtual infrastructure and client preparation.

VIRTUAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Simply because you're a lone wolf doesn't mean that you can't occasionally create a pack. (A better analogy is a dog, which can get along fine by itself but is essentially a social animal.) As you progress in the profession, you ought to be creating a support system you can access as needed. Here are some examples.

Create Long-Term Relationships with the Key Professional Help You Need

I define these people as a bookkeeper, financial advisor, attorney, and graphics designer. The bookkeeper does the monthly books, the financial advisor creates long-term savings and tax strategies. A law *firm* with differing specialists is best, but separate attorneys will also do. The lawyer who is adept at contract work will not be the person to use if you have to litigate, for example. The graphics person should be able to both create and execute booklet, brochure, and web design on a short-term basis.

With these essential people in place, you have the foundation for the virtual infrastructure.

Find Reliable "Legwork" People

These are the people who can quickly put together mailings, answer phones, file, research, run errands, and so on. They may be neighborhood students, stay-at-home parents, relatives, or even your kids.

There are times when a contract will not call for special expertise but will demand simultaneous and concurrent mundane work. You can't afford to try to find this help on the fly. You ought to have a relatively large group of people (since you'll never be sure who's available on inevitable short notice) whom you use on an irregular basis.

Challenges WON and LOST

While I was working at Calgon in the fifth year of a retainer, the CEO abruptly called me to his office and said the company was being sold by Merck, the parent. A firm had been hired to handle the sale and seek bids. The president asked how to handle the inevitable employee angst, keep productivity high, and retain core talent, which would all be important for the sale price.

I told him candidly that, besides the normal announcements and reassurances, an employee "hot line" worked very well, with questions submitted to an outside source anonymously, patterns of concern analyzed, and the CEO responding weekly to those concerns via company email and presentations. The CEO said, "Great, we need someone we can trust and who can start next week. Can you do it for us?"

I said, "Of course." This was Thursday, and the hot line was to begin on Monday. Yet I already had an extra toll-free number installed in my home, which cost about $100 per month and could accommodate "jumps" to three lines. From the airport on the way home, I called three women, highly talented, energetic homemakers who were available during the day. I created a template for the calls and trained them in twenty minutes over the weekend.

The hot line was up and running on Monday, from 9 to 5 Eastern time, and ran for three weeks. The pay was $100 a day for each woman, or $4,500 for the duration. The phone lines were $1,200 for the entire year, or about $75 for the project.

My fee was $13,000 per week.

Establish Connections with Specialty Expertise

Although I don't think that most alliances make much sense, since there's seldom the self-interest involved to create exponential business for the tentative alliance partners, there is great value in maintaining relationships with people who can provide help situationally on guaranteed business. (Actual business has a funny way of galvanizing self-interest.)

I've used college professors, for example, who can create psychometric tests and scientific surveys (my own surveys are anecdotal). I've used people adept at running consumer "fishbowl" focus groups (observed through hidden means). I would never attempt to fix my own car or my own computer, so I utilize help when computer software must enhance a process we're installing at a client.

All of this help, as opposed to the more rudimentary "legwork" help above, is available, *but it's most reliable when you know the people in advance and don't have to qualify them or, worse, simply hope that their quality and ethics will represent you well.* It's also important to know their fee structure (which will almost always be hourly) so that you can build it into your project and not allow your own margins to erode.

Merely creating a network of professional, "legwork," and specialty support will enable you to respond instantly to needs that require additional people and expertise.

CLIENT PREPARATION

Having said all that, the most critical factor in overcoming the "lone wolf" threat is in how you educate the client. That's because, often, a lone wolf is not only sufficient but exactly what the project requires.

I stopped lying to clients long ago about the size of my business, but then again, the topic never comes up in early conversations. That's because I'm building a relationship, not conforming to the buyer's predisposed biases about what's needed.

Establish a Trusting Relationship

Whenever you sprint immediately to the buyer's "wants," you're setting yourself up as a commodity the buyer can readily compare to others (numbers of people, years in the business, work in that industry, location of offices, and so forth). The good news is that you arrived there quickly; the bad news is that you're not going to look very good standing there. (I don't compare well against Accenture's strengths but, then again, they don't compare well to mine, which are at the end of a different road.)

If you take the time to develop trust and a solid relationship, the buyer will rely on you to determine whether or not you're appropriate for the assignment.

Without trust, the buyer must be a tough judge. But with trust, *the buyer will enter into a collaborative decision as to whether you are well-suited or not.* This may sound counterintuitive, but if you avoid building this connection, then you probably will be seen as having inferior resources.

The key is to make the decision about relationships, not resources.

Turn Your Status into an Advantage

When you deal with me, you'll never be turned over to junior people once the project begins. I will return your calls within ninety minutes during the business day, and I provide my home number for emergencies. All email will be answered within a day. I'll sign nondisclosure agreements on the spot without the need for attorney approvals. You're not paying for the support of a vast office network and attendant infrastructure. I'll bring resources on only on an "as needed" basis. Confidentiality and non-compete are clean and easy.

You get the idea. For most key management projects that don't involve outsourcing and other large unit moves, you're better off using me than a large firm. I absolutely believe that and, hence, I can absolutely convince a buyer. You must become comfortable at making these comparisons and, most importantly, believe them yourself.

Utilize What's Available

When my client, a board chairman, listened to my assessment of the organization, he agreed with my conclusion that the CEO had to be terminated. He and the head of the executive committee wondered aloud where to do it gracefully but forcefully, somewhere offsite. The three other parties lived at separate places on the East Coast.

We settled on my home, and the four of us met there to conclude the difficult deed. It was neutral turf, the CEO never suspected so didn't attempt to avoid the meeting, and the setting was conducive to civility and focusing on the future and not recriminations.

Stress to your prospects those advantages you already possess that can be of immense help. There are more of them than you think, but we are far too accustomed to believing ourselves disadvantaged by being lone wolves. It ain't necessarily so.

REAL-WORLD CHALLENGES[1]

The biggest challenge I think Astron Solutions has faced is making the company turn a profit despite traditional notions of when a new company "should" be profitable and despite my partner's expectations.

I have always been a "Type A," high achieving person, so when we started Astron three years ago, I did not understand why we could not make money, or at least break even, during our first year of operation. My partner, however, read a number of articles that said most companies are not profitable in the first three to five years of existence. This became for him a carte blanche to spend, under the guise of "this is what all new companies go through. We can't expect to be profitable right away. It just doesn't happen."

Our first year Astron was basically break even. Our second year we had approximately $110,000 in profit. Our third year looks like we will end up with over $250,000 in profit. How did we do it?

First, I ignored what my partner and the business "experts" said. I believed it was possible to turn a profit and set my frame of mind to do so.

Second, I looked at how we divided our duties when we first started the company. My partner had been in charge of the finances. I took over this

Being a sole practitioner (or principal of a small firm) is a noble calling. There is no need to make excuses for it. The great challenge here, ironically enough, is not so much in convincing the buyer—and I've provided techniques above to do just that—but rather in convincing ourselves.

1. These challenges, which appear periodically throughout the book, are actual problems faced by successful practitioners who have been kind enough to provide them for the edification of their colleagues reading this book. They have been edited only for grammar.

aspect of the company. This is where one of my strengths lies. My partner, on the other hand, is excellent at sales. Duties relating to sales fall primarily in his area now. We went with our strengths when reallocating duties.

Third, we changed our vendors to more ethical, customer-service focused, and cost-effective ones. Our initial accountant and graphic design firm were selected primarily because we couldn't find anyone else and didn't know better. For our second accountant and graphic design firm, I took my time to find them and made sure they met the three criteria listed above.

Fourth, we implemented systems of checks and balances between the two of us and our accountant. ("Why do you want to sponsor that activity? What ROI will there be?")

Fifth, and probably the most difficult, has been keeping sales in the pipeline. When we are flush with business and cash, it is difficult to focus on selling more. However, without those sales and proposals that may come to fruition in a few months, income can dry up quickly when current projects are completed.

—Jennifer C. Loftus, PHR, CCP, National Director, Astron Solutions

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CHAPTER 4

The Cost of Distant Marketing

Where, Exactly, Is Lower Kumquat?

Ironically, perhaps, the costs of marketing are serious challenges for both newcomer and veteran. The novice, with little money, can sometimes ill-afford to travel overnight without some guarantee from the potential client. The successful pro, however, might find a prospect who's very interested and who also happens to be a four-hour flight away, or in an obscure and hard to reach location, or even in another country.

A few of those trips a quarter with no solid business resulting can hurt the bank accounts of the tyro or the veteran. When do you engage in distant, face-to-face marketing? And when do you attempt to get paid for the attempt? That is, when is marketing a pure cost of doing business, and when, if ever, is it reimbursable by the prospect, whether a project results or not?

One of our great challenges (and risk/reward assessments) is when to get on the plane without a guarantee, and when to demand some protection before we pack our bags.

TEN REASONS TO GO NO MATTER WHAT

No risk, no reward (or, as William Penn said eloquently, "No cross, no crown"). There are clearly times when distant marketing[1] makes eminent sense. You can't expect every lead to be in your backyard, nor come to your door from afar. Simply stated: If you're not willing to invest money in travel to obtain business, then you're not serious about the business.

Particularly for highly successful consultants seeking the next level, it's important to go see the prospects who can propel you on that journey. And at that stage of success, I don't believe the journey need involve discount, red-eye flights; el-cheapo motels; or fast food breakfasts. (The prospect will expect you to be staying at the Ritz, not the Repulse.)

In my experience, here are the criteria to determine when you invest the money to go see a prospect. *Note that you can use these to manage the meeting so that it meets your needs. The farther you are being asked to travel, the more leverage you have on the requisites.*

1. *You will see the economic buyer.* Never, ever travel more than a brief car ride to see a non-buyer. Ask a few questions over the phone or by email, ascertain whose project this is, and simply state that you must meet that person (even if you're also meeting others).
2. *You need a minimum of ninety minutes.* Since the prospect is remote, ideally you'd like to build a relationship to the extent that you can gain conceptual agreement (objectives/measures/value to the client) while you're onsite. It's still tough, but it's possible if you can get ninety minutes or more. It's impossible in a twenty-minute meeting, though.
3. *You will need advance information about the organization and the people you are meeting.* Request an annual report, biographies, summation of the problem or initiative you're being asked to consider, relevant documentation, website information, and so forth. You don't want to waste your time onsite being educated in the fundamentals, and you want to be an informed peer of the buyer.
4. *There must be short-term business possible.* I tend not to go when the prospect says, "We've decided to begin early to consider help for next year's plan-

1. You can term these "sales calls" if you like, but in fact they are sometimes quite preliminary to actually attempting to close business. They are early relationship builders.

ning," when next year is still six months away. I tell them that I'm happy to arrange a date when we get closer to their actual need, but too much can change in the interim if we meet right now.

5. *There must be long-term potential.* Even if the initial project is relatively modest, that's acceptable if you're dealing with Siemens, or Mercedes, or Boeing. But it's not promising if you're talking to a start-up operation that may not be with us in eighteen months.
6. *Ideally, you can use the trip for other business or interests.* You may have other prospects to see in the area; there is a client you can visit in the general area; there's a hobby convention you'd love to attend; or the general geographic area holds interest (and may be suitable for a vacation).
7. *Given your knowledge of the client's business, industry, and/or market, there is a strong reason to believe that you are unequivocally the best alternative and can easily close the business.* For example, if you've worked extensively in the pharmaceutical industry, it may be a great investment to fly to see Bristol-Myers/Squibb in Canada.
8. *You have been trying to break into the industry and the reference will be important.* If you see this as an opportunity to break into a growing, high-potential market that you've been unsuccessful in penetrating before, then the trip may well be worth it. Even if you don't get the business, you'll have the visit under your belt and may even be able to secure some referrals or references if your meetings go well.
9. *You have frequent flyer points to use for the air fare, hotel, and/or rental car.* In other words, you can make the trip for free. Nevertheless, don't do this unless you're meeting with a buyer.
10. *Business is dead in the water.* If you desperately need to get some revenue in the door, and the above conditions are met—especially the first two—then you have no choice: you have a qualified lead and the promise of an extensive meeting with a buyer. You're not going to do much better than that, so it's time to make the investment.

WHEN CAN YOU CHARGE FOR THE PRIVILEGE?

There are times when you can charge not only for expenses, but also a fee for a "marketing call." And if you manage the early communications well, you can often achieve this rather salutary result.

Challenges WON and LOST

Years ago I received a high-quality lead from the American Press Institute, which was a longstanding client of mine. A director there introduced me in name to the executive vice president of human resources at Gannett, the huge newspaper chain.

My immediate error was not reaching her, personally. An assistant fobbed me off on an aide, who agreed to a meeting at her office in Washington, D.C. On the assigned date I boarded a 7 a.m. flight for our 10 a.m. meeting. The entire day trip would probably cost me $1,000.

When I arrived, a stunned assistant told me the aide had decided not to come in that day and had left a message for me at my office—at which time I was already 35,000 feet in the air. I was then doled out to an even lower level assistant, who had no interest in spending anything beyond twenty minutes with me.

The aide who never showed also never apologized, of course, because that's not what amateurs do. But the fault was mine. I should have stuck to my guns until the executive vice president agreed to meet with me. Simply showing up is not good enough, because we don't establish relationships with buildings.

First, offer some consulting work while you're there. I often make the point that, as long as I'm coming such a distance, why not take advantage of my help? I offer to

- Interview key subordinates
- Observe the operation
- Review, analyze, and comment on current initiatives
- Audit a function (e.g., human resources or sales)
- Recommend process improvements (e.g., performance evaluation)
- Act as an objective sounding board for the buyer
- Attend meetings

Depending on your areas of focus, the list is almost endless. I stress that there will be a fee and expense reimbursement involved, but that the commensurate value will greatly offset them. *NOTE:* These value-added consulting options may have nothing at all to do with the actual project you are there to discuss. Don't make the mistake of "solving" the prospect's problem in one visit! (You probably can't, in any case, so don't give the appearance inadvertently.) Be prepared, of course, to spend much longer onsite, perhaps even a second day. It's more than worth it.

Second, you can offer to rebate the fee and expenses against any project that commences within the next six months (three months if you're aggressive, a year if you're conservative, but you get the idea). That provides the buyer with a "bargain" and you with some leverage.

Third, if you have a strong brand and repute, and you're fearless (like me), many of you are in a position to say, "This is my policy. I'm happy to visit and of course help in any way I can, or simply respond to your questions and concerns. I will stay for as much as six hours. My fee is $7,500, plus actual expenses. If we agree to work on a project together, the entire fee is applied against that project. My clients and I have found this a good deal for both of us, and I'm sure you'll agree."

This last one almost always works if you're dealing with an economic buyer. The trouble is, if you're refused, then it's tough to say that you'll come on your own dime anyway! So you can be cautious or be daring, but just be sure that you either have money coming or the strong prospect that you can make that happen.

CHAPTER 5

Poor Name Recognition

If You're So Good, How Come I Never Heard of You?

I was introduced to a horribly obnoxious guy at a party by an overly fawning hostess. "Alan," she said with embarrassing pride, "has written sixteen books!"

"Well," sneered the guy, "I've never heard of any of them."

"That says more about you than it does about him," she cooed. At that point I reminded myself that no hostess should ever be underestimated.

The "how come I never heard of you" (HCINHOY) issue is a legitimate problem when starting one's career and, ironically, we're often more prepared to deal with it at that point, expecting its ugly head to pop up as frequently as those rodents do in my favorite arcade game, Whack-A-Mole.[1]

1. Particularly popular at the Jersey shore ("beach" to those of you in California), the player takes a rubber mallet tethered to the machine and has to whack every mole that randomly pops its head up from a variety of apertures. The machine keeps score of hits and misses. You can't win anything, but there is a mysteriously satisfying afterglow to a few good games of Whack-A-Mole.

But later in an increasingly successful career, we begin to believe our own press releases, tend to gain more and more business from a few excellent clients, and forget the fact that we've probably not become a household name. I've worked with scores of consultants who possess tremendous credentials but who keep them locked in the safety deposit box. Some of them have even tossed away the key.

WHAT IS NAME RECOGNITION?

Name recognition is a form of branding, and perhaps the ultimate form. It means that your name is associated with something of value (or, with adverse recognition, something of danger) to potential buyers and customers—simple as that.

Homeowners know that Roto-Rooter™ means that their pipes will be cleaned; businesspeople that FedEx™ reliably delivers packages the next day; taxpayers that the IRS is never contacting you with good news. At concerts during his later career, no one introduced Frank Sinatra, who merely walked on stage, the very emblem of adult, popular music. Both McKinsey and Andersen built entire consulting monoliths around their individual name recognition. (And isn't Accenture, once lamenting the loss of the "Andersen" brand, now jubilant about not being burdened with it?!)

Name recognition means that HCINHOY is never applicable, nor is credential building, nor a hard "sell," nor even relationship building in many cases (which is why so many clients are disappointed when a "name" organization is sold by a senior officer but then junior people take over the work and their performance isn't up to the repute).

"We are the Mercedes-Benz of our industry" is a powerful statement, in that it immediately invokes quality while continually reinforcing Mercedes' position at the top of the automotive heap.

WHY BOTHER WITH NAME RECOGNITION?

As you progress in this profession, one would think that you would choose to maximize the good stuff—fee levels, interesting work, low cost of acquisition, clients approaching you—and minimize the ugly stuff—excessive travel, making competing sales pitches, investing heavily in marketing to new prospects. Name recognition is the most powerful magnet there is to attract business.

At the height of their respective careers, Peter Drucker, W. Edwards Deming, and Malcolm Baldrige were sought on the strength of their names and the reputes those names represented. No one said, "Let's talk to Deming and see if he's appropriate for our needs." The same phenomenon has helped more temporary flashes in the pan such as Michael Hammer, Ken Blanchard, and others who have benefited from a temporary but screamingly popular fad, be it reengineering, one-minute anything, or downsizing.

People entering this business ask me all the time if it's okay to name their company after themselves, or should they have something sexier, like Cosmic Consulting Results, LLC. I don't think that matters much at all, and I tell them to take ninety seconds to decide and then move on. But I think it does matter, regardless of your corporate entity's name, to establish your personal name amidst the ranks of consulting leaders as your career successfully progresses.

In essence, you bother with name recognition because it generates business that is capable of generating very high fees at a very low cost of acquisition. Now, what could be better than that?

FIVE TECHNIQUES TO ACHIEVE NAME RECOGNITION

If you find yourself advanced in your career (or early in your career and eager to get ahead of the curve) with insufficient name recognition—in other words, you too often encounter HCINHOY—it's not too late. Here's what to do to support your name as a reputable brand.

1. Attach Your Name to Everything. In your press releases, articles, position papers, interviews, and other public image documents, use your name often. Put it in bold as the author. Make the copyright yours, not your company's.

2. Make Your Name Part of the Title. I once knew a guy named Steve Becker who conducted public seminars. He would run ads in magazines that said, "Steve Becker personally presents. . . ," which I thought was fabulous. No one had heard of him, but the very title implied that you should have! Don't write an

Challenges WON and LOST

Early in my career I conducted two-week train-the-trainer programs at the Valley Forge Sheraton Hotel in Pennsylvania. There were two lavish, bi-level suites in the penthouse, and one would be assigned to me.

During one such assignment, several mistaken phone calls and deliveries told me that Jerry Lewis was staying in the other suite, since he was appearing at a regional theater nearby. When I inquired, the hotel staff—whom I knew well—told me stories about his huge ego and demands on the staff (e.g., a $6,000 set of golf clubs that he would use for the week and discard). There were also security problems with fans trying to get to his suite.

One day I posted several large signs around the hotel which stated, "It is true that Alan Weiss is staying at the Hilton. Please respect his privacy and do not disturb him.—The Management." (I was in my twenties and actually thought this was hysterical. My training group helped post them.)

A few days later I was having dinner in the hotel's best restaurant when a waiter came by. "I just thought you'd like to know," he smiled, "that Jerry Lewis is sitting over there and just asked two of us who Alan Weiss is and whether we could point you out."

That was my earliest training about form and substance being two different things.

article entitled, "Ten Ways to Master Time Management," but rather, "Constance Jones' Guaranteed Time Management Techniques." On your website, replace "The weekly sales boost" with "Tom Rogers' Weekly Sales Boost."

3. Begin a Newsletter with Your Name. Even if you already have one, for example, "The Strategist," change it to "Robin Riley's Strategist." You can start a one-screen electronic newsletter tomorrow, which you can send to the media as well as to prospects[2] and keep your name visible on a weekly basis.

2. Especially if you use a service such as *The Yearbook of Spokespersons, Leading Authorities, and Experts* (http://www.yearbook.com).

4. Alert the Media. When you do a print or broadcast interview, request that your interviewer primarily use your name, not your company's name. You can even work it in yourself: "I'm quite proud to say that General Electric and William Johnson have had a long and positive relationship in team building and executive development."

5. Create Products. Place your name on products, be they print, audio, or video. *The most influential and powerful product for your name is a commercially published book.* Anyone with years of success in consulting has the material for a book. No one says, "Get me that book." They say, "Get me this guy."

There are other, traditional ways to establish name recognition and combat HCINHOY. A publicist will gladly take on that job, usually for a hefty retainer. Some firms will charge only for performance, for example, articles published and interviews gained. You can also advertise, from the modest (consulting directories), to the intermediate (trade and specialized press), to the expensive (national business publications). You'll see firms such as Accenture or Boston Consulting Group in all three areas.

How powerful is name recognition? Tom Clancy emerged from the obscurity of the insurance industry to write a single book, *The Hunt for Red October,* which Ronald Reagan cited in public, and that made his career. In my opinion, no other book he has written has ever matched it, and he went on to merely lend his name, not his talent, to other ventures for which he was paid lucratively. People purchased books and attended movies based purely on the allure and strength of Tom Clancy's name, established with a single book.

In a more modest business environment, Hammer, Champy, Peters, and others have achieved the same kind of "blind" purchasing appeal. All I'm suggesting is that we can all use the same types of allure.

Substance and results build names, and then the names draw people who will benefit from further substance and results. Not a bad cycle to enter, and certainly a whole lot better than HCINHOY.