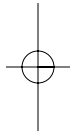
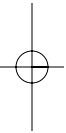


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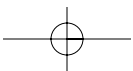
ONE

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?



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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."

Yaaa!

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