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STEPS TO CHOOSING THE RIGHT CONSULTANT FOR YOUR BUSINESS

STEP 1: *Before you begin searching for a consultant:*

Why Do You Require a Consultant & What Do You Want to Accomplish?

1. Clearly understand where you want help;
2. Define your project and have a clear understanding of your anticipated outcome;
3. Are you looking to review an existing process, begin a new process or set up new processes for your operations?
4. Understand that you may need to make changes to your company's practices in order to comply with regulations;
5. You may need to accept that there have been changes to regulations which you are not fully aware of.

STEP 2: *Finding a Suitable Consultant:*

Seek References:

1. Use your network of trusted friends, business partners, colleagues, vendors and customers to find out if they know someone who has either helped them or someone they know.
2. Ask the prospective consultant for a list of references;
3. Find an environmental consultant who has completed similar projects for other clients;
4. Contact a few of their previous clients:
5. Ask them about the scope of the project and whether they were satisfied with the consultant's work;
6. Was it completed on-time, and were there any unexpected fees or delays at the end?

The best form of referral is word of mouth – if a consulting firm is getting referrals they must be doing something right by their clients and have a proven track record of success.

Credentials:

1. Has the consultant ever worked in a conventional job? What are their academic degrees? Do their staff have "real world" experience.
2. Ask your contacts:
 - What did they do that was similar to what you want done?
 - How successful was the engagement?
 - How was the consultant to work with?
 - Would your contact have them back for another engagement?



3. Look for a consultant who has the credentials to suit your circumstances and:

- can add value to your business;
- has experience with a business of your size;
- focuses on your needs;
- understands your industry;
- has a high quality, loyal and dedicated staff base;
- has high standards;
- has experience with the particular issues you want to deal with;
- has a proven track record with stakeholders relevant to your project (Aboriginal Parties, Government Agencies, etc)
- holds any necessary qualifications;
- is a member of a professional body or association.

Insurance:

Within the consulting industry, there is the realisation that things can sometimes go wrong. A consultant should be prepared to protect both parties, to a degree, should their work prove faulty.

Professional Liability Insurance covers legal defence and settlement costs for unintentional mistakes or omissions, committed during the performance of services for a client, that lead the client or third party to sue for loss or damages.

Make sure the consultant is properly insured and ask to see a copy of the firm's insurance policy.

STEP 3: <i>Engaging a Consultant:</i>

Gut Feel: In deciding on a consultant to work in your team, ask yourself

1. Do you trust them?
2. Can you, and your organisation, work with that firm?
3. Do they “fit” your culture or work environment?
4. Are there potential conflicts of interest that you should be aware of?

Chemistry: Meet with the consultant and ask yourself if you see the other person as a peer and a potential partner. If you don't respect them, or see them as merely a vendor or subordinate, don't hire them. You don't need another employee; you need a business partner for a particular issue.

Proposal: The consultant should be able to provide you with a written proposal that is based on achieving clear outcomes and details the services they will provide. The proposal should include a timetable of when the various stages of the project will be completed, a list of all fees, costs and terms of trade.

A good consultant will not promise the moon and the stars. A good consultant is someone you'll hate to see go when the project ends on time, and who you'll want to invite back at the first appropriate new challenge.

When you compare prices of two or more consultants, be sure to scrutinize the services that are included for that price.



STEP 4: <i>Managing Your Relationship with Your Consultant:</i>

Communicate:

Your active involvement is crucial to the success of the relationship. Your chosen consultant should become an extension of your vision so:

1. Keep them “in the loop”;
2. Talk with them frequently throughout all phases of the project;
3. Measure their progress and performance on a regular basis;
4. Remain open and honest with each other;
5. If you have any questions concerning their direction or focus, get together with them and review the scope of the engagement;
6. Have regular meetings to allow you to monitor what progress the consultant is making, find out what problems they are encountering and discuss possible solutions. Your consultant should thrive on questions and feedback.

In most cases it is best if the consultant reports to only one person, either yourself or a person within your company nominated by you. However, you should keep your staff informed about what the consultant is doing, as their input may be valuable.

If Things Go Wrong:

There are a number of reasons why things could go wrong. A lack of effective communication about the direction of the project or setting expectations too high or too low may cause problems.

If you are not satisfied with the quality of the work you should communicate clearly to avoid misunderstandings and raise your concerns with the consultant at the earliest opportunity.

The following steps may help to resolve problems you may have with your consultant:

1. Raise concerns early and obtain the views of relevant colleagues and of the consultant;
2. Refer back to the contract and the proposal;
3. Be clear in what you need to remedy the problem;
4. Arrange a meeting of the group managing the contract to discuss the difficulty;
5. Consider whether the type of dissatisfaction is a pattern for you in your work with consultants, and if so, what causes it.