

WHY CONSULTANTS ARE GOOD FOR BUSINESS

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The latest South African economics news indicates unemployment at an incredibly high 26.4 percent. With these levels of unemployment on the rise, and the damaging effect that load-shedding and other price hikes are having on businesses in all industries, the effective management and operational running of organisations are crucial to success.

Time is money. For this reason, time is the greatest reason why businesses should consider hiring a consultant. If there is a critical need in the business, the faster it can be measured and effectively dealt with, the better. Growing people within the organisation takes time and workforce-wide buy-in; which isn't always possible to do within the time available to solve a crisis. Bringing in a consultant is a strategic move to get the work done, sans politics, in a professional and expert manner.

The value that consultants can bring to the business largely depends on the accuracy with which gaps and needs have been identified, as well as the budget available. While organisations must always consider value versus spend on a cost-to-benefit scale, management should be weary of short sightedness. If it would cost the company R100 000 to hire an employee to do the job, that's what the consultant should be paid – even if the time in which the consultant completes the job in is far less than the term and employee would have worked for. Remember that the consultant is being paid for his/her expertise, not for the time taken to complete the project.

When selecting a consultant, the following process can be followed to ensure the right person is contracted for the job. Look for professional designations, although not all industries offer designations, so consider associations or connections and the consultant's public reputation too. Consider what the need is in the company and then find a consultant that is an expert in that field, *and* that is willing to design a customised model for your business needs. Always choose a consultant to fit the businesses' processes, not the other way around.

What makes a good consultant? Real consultants have an enormous sense of *ethics*. They hear and see things that most people in the organisation don't have access to, so their ability to keep information confidential is paramount. They must be an *expert* in terms of what they are consulting in, and they must be able to communicate and transfer this *expertise*, building a bridge between technical expertise and implementation, while obtaining stakeholder buy-in. Good consultants take a *constructive approach* to things,

filling the gap, enabling the business to function in the right manner and leaving when the job is done, without fabricating additional needs to maintain an income. Consultants must be *critical and creative thinkers*, creating new solutions to ensure business growth.

In an effort to ensure that the consultant is giving the correct advice, it is important that management is aware of the specific outcomes that are required, so that there are criteria against which you can measure their success. Timelines must be developed and the business should be measuring performance on a continuous basis. While it is important to measure a consultant's results, micro-managing or clock-watching an expert will likely not achieve the desired results; base the evaluation on whether or not the targets have been reached, through real performance measurements. Obtaining a written report from the consultant doesn't indicate whether the job has been done.

When a good consultant is found, they can be an asset to any organisation going forward. Keep them happy by sticking to agreed payment terms and acknowledging the work they have done for the company. Although, in most cases, consultants will decline an invitation to join the company on a social excursion, they still appreciate the sentiment of being invited in recognition of the impact they have had on the team or business.

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Boilerplate:

Founded in 1999, Workplace Skills Solutions t/a The Institute of People Development (IPD) strives to equip, prepare and certify practitioners to serve South Africa's skills development strategy and facilitate the transformation of education and training. Over the years, IPD has become the preferred people development partner to most state owned and private enterprises in Southern Africa. For more information, please contact IPD at trainingenquiries@peopledev.co.za, on (011) 315 2913 or visit www.peopledevelopment.co.za