



Building your consulting practice in 12 steps

"The major benefit of not planning is that failure comes as a complete surprise, rather than preceded by a period of worry and depression." Those are the words of consultant Sir John Harvey-Jones.

I'm asked, "What should I do?" very often by people who want to launch a full-time or part-time consulting practice. Since many of you who read *The Greentree Gazette* provide professional consulting services, it seems a good idea to share 12 key steps that I have learned from successful consultants.

Your brand is a basic

In my own practice I brand myself as a "solutions architect." I solve education, media, business and personnel problems. I also help with turn-arounds and acquisitions. I conduct searches and do executive coaching. Each of these specialties has application in higher education. "Solutions Architect" works well for me.

The objective is to get the phone to ring. How? Jack Schaffer, a former FBI agent, consults with organizations to help determine whether someone is lying or telling the truth. Jack says, "The phone rings because of reputation. In a consulting practice, reputation and brand name are synonymous and necessary for your success."

Larry Holmes, a successful consultant in higher education, told me, "Your brand is an intangible asset for your consulting practice in much the same way as a physician in his or her specialty."

Now, the twelve steps to consulting success

1. **Listen.** Identify the needs felt throughout the industry you will serve.

2. **Specialize.** Develop an acknowledged specialty to serve those needs.
3. **Get to the point.** Establish and present *clear* goals.
4. **Talk the talk.** Speak the language of your clients.
5. **Do your homework.** Demonstrate a solid research capability.
6. **Show up.** Engage in activity related to your specialty at every opportunity.
7. **Shoot straight.** Become known for ethical behavior and trust.
8. **Be enthusiastic.** Demonstrate your passion for the work. People gravitate to enthusiastic individuals.
9. **Walk the walk.** Demonstrate consistency.
10. **Do something.** Don't procrastinate. Be active, and demonstrate initiative, critical thinking and creativity.
11. **Think big.** Display a global outlook. Opportunity abounds in today's truly flat world.
12. **It's all about you.** Eliminate "I" and accentuate "You." The more you use "you" in your communications, the more effective your communications will be.

Back to your brand

Develop a personal brand that shows that you can be expected to accomplish a *specific, measurable* goal. Casey Green, director of the Campus Computing Project, provides consulting services all over the world. Green says, "Those who use my services know I have the data they need and that I have given help to many of their colleague institutions. That is why they call me for help and insight, and I am careful to maintain that image."

Bruce LeWolt is president of BrainX Inc. in Camarillo, CA. He told me, "In a new world bursting with the internet, blogging, web sites and e-communication of all kinds, branding is becoming the key to setting yourself apart and being remembered. The goal of branding is to end up with your name, or the name of your service or web site, foremost in the minds

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of those who need the professional services you can provide." Take a corollary tip from Marshall Goldsmith, a well-known consultant, who says, "You need to talk about your brand and services in plain English."

If you find yourself in a position to use this advice and follow the twelve steps, the following words of John D. Rockefeller may help you maintain perspective. "The ability to deal with people is as purchasable a commodity as sugar or coffee. And I will pay more for that ability, than for any other under the sun." ■



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