



## General Resources for Learning for Consultants

### Know Your Community's Resources for Businesses

Depending on the size of the community, there is often a wide range of resources for consultants in the community. As a consultant, you should know what resources exist and when to refer your clients to those resources. Community resources often include, for example:

- Associations that provide opportunities for members to share feedback, materials and networking, along with regular conferences and discounts on purchases.
- Educational and training centers that provide programs, courses, seminars or workshops.
- Government agencies that provide a variety of services, including technical and managerial.
- Investors, such as individuals and corporations, who support provision of services to businesses.

### Use Internet Search Engines

Probably the largest source of assistance to you is the amazing amount of free resources on the Internet. Of course, there is no guarantee of the quality of the information that you will find there just like there is no guarantee of the quality of information that you will get from books or trainings. As with any adult in learning, you are often the “expert” at knowing what is useful for you to learn and when to learn it.

### Find a Mentor

Many might argue that it is unethical for you to begin consulting on organizational and management development projects without having first worked with more experienced consultants or mentors. Without having a mentor, you might hurt the health of your client's organizations and even yourself. The problem is that, even after having read a great deal of literature about consulting and organizational development, you still might not realize what you need to know, but still do not know. The concept of “shadow consulting,” or working closely with a more experienced consultant, is becoming much more common than even a decade ago.

A rather novel approach to mentoring is virtual mentoring. You might find a mentor willing to provide you guidance and support by using various means of telecommunications, for example, on-line forums or discussion groups.

### Engage in Networking

Networking with other consultants can be useful means for you to exchange useful information and materials about established and state-of-the-art tools and techniques. It is not uncommon that networking activities among organizational consultants also includes internal consultants – experts who are employees of organizations and responsible to consult to other departments in that organization. Thus, networking can be a useful means to advertise and promote your consulting business. Professional organizations usually provide wonderful opportunities for networking and many of them have chapters in various states. Numerous organizations are listed in Appendix A. Frequently, consultants organize small, local networking groups among themselves.

### Obtain Ongoing Support

Many professions use practitioners support groups, for example social workers, therapists and lawyers. The activities of organizational consulting can be quite frustrating at times, depending on your nature and the nature of your particular consulting project. Thus, a support group might be an extremely useful resource for you.

Note that consultants can gain support from a variety of types of resources. That might be an important consideration for you because, among some consultants, the notion of “support groups” might seem a little too “touchy feely.” An irony here is that many times, from networking and problem solving groups, consultants report that one of the most useful outcomes is support.

Consultants might gain support from a variety of sources, for example, from mentors and peer groups. Forms of useful peer groups might include study groups, discussion groups, dialogue groups or peer coaching groups.

### **Absorb Additional Readings**

Start your practice by reading literature about consulting. Much of that literature is about starting a consulting business, for example, conducting an inventory of consulting skills, developing marketing materials or setting up a home office. Sometimes that literature also includes very basic guidelines for identifying and solving problems in client’s organizations.

Next, read literature about the field of Organization Development (OD). OD focuses particularly on guidelines and materials to conduct effective organizational change. Thus, OD literature is critical to the consultant who seeks to work with organizations on projects that are significant in scope.

### **Volunteer Your Services**

One of the most powerful approaches for you to learn about organizations might be for you to volunteer your services to businesses or nonprofits. For example, you might join a Board of Directors. Nonprofits that value their Boards often arrange for training and orientation sessions for Board members. Your locale might have an organization that provides volunteers to nonprofits.

### Free Management Library<sup>SM</sup>

The Library includes extensive free materials about personal, professional and organizational development. The Library includes over 675 topics that are organized into the following popular categories. The list of topics is located at <http://www.managementhelp.org/> on the Web.

Advertising and Promotion	Benefits and Compensation	Boards of Directors
Career Development	Chief Executive Role	Communication (Interprsnl)
Communication (Writing)	Computers, Internet & Web	Consultants (using)
Coordinating Activities	Creativity and Innovation	Crisis Management
Customer Satisfaction	Customer Service	E-Commerce
Employee Performance	Employee Wellness Programs	Ethics - Practical Toolkit
Evaluations (many kinds)	Facilities Management	Finances (For-Profit)
Finances (Nonprofit)	Fundraising (Nonprofit)	General Resources
Group Performance	Group Skills	Guiding Skills
Human Resources Mgmnt	Insurance (Business)	Interpersonal Skills
Interviewing (all kinds)	Jobs	Leadership (Introduction)
Leadership Development	Legal Information	Management (Introduction)
Management Development	Marketing	Operations Management
Organizational Alliances	Organizational Change	Org'l Communication
Organizational Performance	Organizations (Introduction)	Organizing (many kinds)
Performance Management	Personal Development	Personal Productivity
Personal Wellness	Planning (many kinds)	Policies (Personnel)
Product Selection & Dev.	Program Management	Project Management
Public and Media Relations	Quality Management	Research Methods
Risk Management	Sales	Social Entrepreneurship
Staffing	Starting an Organization	Supervision (Introduction)
Supervisory Development	Systems Thinking	Taxation
Training Basics	Volunteers	-----

## Free eMBA<sup>SM</sup> Organizational Development Programs

There is a program for nonprofits and a program for for-profits. They include online integrated courses that can be taken for free by anyone, anywhere at any time. At the end of the program, each learner will have all of the basic systems and processes needed to start and operate an organization. Learners from corporations are encouraged to work with their Boards of Directors while going through the program. Members share plans, policies and procedures.

Any of the courses in the program can be taken separately. You can see the eMBA's on the right side of the Free Management Library website at <http://managementhelp.org>.

For example, courses in the for-profit eMBA include the following:

1. Preparatory Workshop (skills in reading, studying, getting help, etc.)
2. Starting and Understanding Your Organization
3. Overview of Role of Chief Executive
4. Basic Skills in Management and Leadership
5. Building and Maintaining an Effective Board of Directors
6. Developing Your Strategic Plan
7. Designing and Marketing Your Products and Services
8. Managing Your Finances and Taxes
9. Staffing and Supervision of Employees
10. Managing Ethics in the Workplace: Practical Guide for Managers

## Professional Organizations

Note that many of the following organizations have local chapters in various states.

1. American Society for Training and Development  
National organization for professionals in training and development  
<http://www.astd.org>
2. Association of Management Consultant Firms  
National organization to foster understanding of management consulting, provide a forum for confronting common challenges, expand the knowledge base and champion ethics  
<http://www.amcf.org>  
  
International Association of Facilitators  
National organization for facilitators of a wide variety of applications, for example, strategic planning, action planning or general meeting management  
<http://www.iaf-world.org/>
3. International Society for Performance Improvement  
National organization focused on models, tools and techniques to improve performance of organizations, processes and individuals  
<http://www.ispi.org/>
4. National Organizational Network  
National organization that develops, supports and inspires practitioners and enhances the body of knowledge in human organization and systems development  
<http://www.odnetwork.org/>
5. Organization Development Institute  
International organization for professional Organization Development practitioners – the only one that suggests specific levels of professionalism among practitioners  
<http://members.aol.com/odinst/>

### **Sources of Consultants and Mentors**

1. In the USA, contact your Secretary of State and/or state's Attorney General's office and ask for a list of resources. In Canada, contact the appropriate provincial agency.
2. Look in the Yellow Pages of your local telephone directory for professional associations. Look for networks or associations of organization development practitioners, facilitators or trainers.
3. Look in the Yellow Pages of your local telephone directory under the category of "Consultant".
4. Contact local large corporations. They often have community service programs and can provide a wide range of management and technical expertise. Speak to the head of the Human Resources Department.
5. Call a local university or college and speak to someone in the college of Human Resources, Training and Development, or Business Administration.
6. Ask a retired business person (from a for-profit or nonprofit organization). They have extensive expertise in professional and organizational development.