



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 businesses 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 B.

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.