

When to Bring in a Consultant

Many business professionals debate about when to seek a consultant's help. Ask yourself these questions before making the decision:

- **Do I have the expertise?**

You should decide if you really have the right background, or if trying something new will only hurt your credibility. For example, if you've never created an executive incentive program, it could be risky for both your organization and your career.

- **Do I understand best practices?**

Learning what other organizations do may help you make better choices. That assessment tool you took at a development seminar may be right for hiring employees, for instance, but you really need to know more about it. Reputable consultants will have an opinion about what works and what doesn't. Their repeat business depends on making good, sound recommendations.

- **Is an independent judgment important?**

An outsider without a previous history or strong biases can be very valuable. Some organizations call in third party assessors for high-level job candidates, for example, to compensate for their own blind spots and preferences. Or, with some situations, getting another view of a serious issue can help you identify the wisest next steps.

- **How critical is confidentiality?**

Sometimes, a performance problem, a personal issue or a possible major organizational change may be sensitive enough that working with an outsider is the best protection. They can work with a lower profile, are less likely to be overheard in the cafeteria, and, if truly professional, understand that confidentiality is essential.

- **Does "do it yourself" make sense?**

The price tag for some products or services can be less than the blood, sweat and tears you would shed trying to duplicate them. Do you have the time, and the depth of knowledge, to create what you need and deliver the best result?

You may not always need a consultant. But, think carefully about what you're trying to accomplish before you plunge in too deeply without one.