

# SUCCESSFUL INDEPENDENT CONSULTING

**RELATIONSHIPS  
THAT FOCUS ON  
MUTUAL BENEFIT**

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MODERN MANAGEMENT  
MADE EASY SERIES

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# Successful Independent Consulting

Relationships That Focus on Mutual Benefit

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## Practical ink

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# Introduction

I started 1994 as a middle manager in a software organization. In August of that year, I argued—politely—with a senior manager. Three weeks later, that company laid me off. My employer called it a layoff, but I was the only one affected.

I'd flirted with the idea of consulting before, but had not prepared for an abrupt transition to running my own business. It took me three months, but I landed a workshop as my first engagement in 1994. The next year, I replaced my salary. But, finally, in 1996, I made enough money as a consultant that my business was successful enough to more than replace my employee salary and benefits.

I've now spent almost three decades as an independent consultant. Along the way, I've learned what's worked for many other successful independent consultants and me. Successful independent consultants share many of the same qualities. We practice these actions, what I refer to as the consulting engine:

- Use both consistent and a variety of content marketing to attract our ideal clients.
- Learn via formal and informal training throughout our consulting careers.
- Choose which work to do and when to drop certain work.
- Charge enough for our expertise so our clients see our value and we benefit.

In addition to the consulting engine, we create systems so our businesses can thrive.

If you're considering consulting, this book contains everything I know about how to be a successful independent consultant.

Maybe you've seen consultants who were not successful. In my experience, these consultants miss one or more of the consulting engine actions.

There are even some common sayings about consulting. Maybe you've heard, "Consultants are people who take your watch, tell you what time it is, and then charge you a pile of money." In this case, the client does not perceive any added value from the consultant. Too often, that's because the consultant does not have the expertise or experience to deliver value.

Or, you might have seen the consultant-as-seagull. They swoop around, poop a lot, and then leave. When they leave, the client is often in a worse place. In my experience, seagull consultants have expertise in a box. If the client needs their expertise, that's great. But the consultant doesn't have enough critical thinking skills or additional expertise or experience to deliver value to the client.

Worse, you might see a too-common practice of larger consulting firms. The senior people at the top of a consulting firm sell the services to the client. Then, the people at the "bottom," the new, untested, and inexperienced people, deliver the services. Without experience, these people stumble through engagements.

These consulting options all focus on the consultant's personal benefit, often doing something *to* the client. None of these options create win-win relationships for effective and mutual benefit.

Instead, successful independent consultants use their expertise, and all their value to build relationships and deliver results *with* their clients.

Consultants support a client's changes. Clients learn and grow. In exchange, clients pay consultants. However, successful independent consultants also learn from the engagement and gain more experience.

That relationship and learning—not only money—is how independent consultants succeed. It's also how they build relationships that

can help the consultant serve that client again and again.

You don't have to resort to taking watches, acting like a seagull, or separating how you sell your services from delivering those services.

Instead, you can create a satisfying and successful professional life that serves you and your clients.

There are two parts to becoming a successful independent consultant: working *in* the business, to create your consulting engine, and working *on* the business, to maintain your sanity and excitement.

Let's start with the consulting engine.