

The World of Consulting

By Scott Legge

I have long held the opinion that the foodservice consulting profession shares more in common with those of other consulting specialties than we typically stop to consider. I would draw a foodservice industry-based analogy to the stance that many clients of our members frequently take: we're unique.

Most client groups that I dealt with when I was consulting felt that they were unique when compared to other foodservice and hospitality operations. Each hospital dietary department, every corporation with staff dining facilities, every sports arena, every restaurant – they all feel they are individual and have special needs. This is absolutely true but there are, undoubtedly, a great many similarities as well.

There are unique aspects to every kitchen, bar, restaurant, cafeteria and catering operation. Depending on what level of detail you choose to examine, it could be argued that each location of a multinational chain restaurant is unique, just because of all the variables that exist in our industry and the individual cultures of the city, states or provinces, countries, or continents where they are located. At the core, however, are a number of conventions, facts, best practices and operating principles that remain consistent in the foodservice and hospitality industry.

Likewise however, it should be fair to state that there are a great many similarities between foodservice consultants and other specialist consultants no matter what their industry of choice or their area of expertise. These similarities relate to the type of business that is defined as “consulting”.

I had an opportunity to attend a conference recently that was jointly produced by the Institute of Management Consultants (IMC USA) and the American Management Association (AMA). The ConsultingWorld™ event was held to coincide with the publishing of results of a sig-

nificant study of the Chief Executive Officers of companies that utilize consultants on a regular basis. While the study was not specifically about the types of consulting specialties for which these companies contract, it is my belief that there are parallels to the work of FCSI members and that we can learn from the results.

The survey

The Consulting Survey, developed by Consulting Intelligence asked pointed questions from two opposite perspectives: What do consultants really think about their clients? And, what do organizations really think about their consultants?

They went further. What makes the difference between a consulting problem and high consultant satisfaction? What differentiates a good consultant from a bad consultant? How do you find a good consultant? What qualities should you look for?

Part 1 of the survey gathered information on the experiences individuals and organizations have had with consultants. This part documents key elements of client satisfaction, the perceived benefits – and risks – associated with engaging external consultants and the specific qualities that are considered most important when evaluating a new consultant. This portion of the study was completed prior to the Consulting World conference.

Part 2 of the survey will begin toward the end of the summer and will gather information on the experiences that individual consultants and consulting firms have

had with their clients. This segment will document how consultants perceive the capability, competence and cooperativeness of their clients, the various approaches and methods they use when working with clients and the specific qualities they believe are the most important when deciding to work with a client.

A general session provided an important opportunity to hear directly from CEOs who had participated in the first portion of the study in the form of a panel discussion. The session was moderated by Bob Brown, founder and managing director of Consulting Intelligence, LLC and included panelists George Gordon, chairman and CEO of Enporion; Kelley Mossburg, president and corporate general manager of the Schenck Company; and Mahen Sanghrajka, CEO and president of Big Five Tours and Expeditions.

Here is a sampling of the responses to key questions asked of these panelists:

1. In what ways do you use consultants?
 - For projects where expertise does not exist in-house or if capacity in-house is lacking
 - For training in organizational development
 - During periods of major change
 - To act as the CEOs eyes and ears
2. How do you find/select a consultant?
 - Almost exclusively through referrals from colleagues followed by reference checks
 - Industry associations
3. How does a consultant get your attention?
 - Cultural “fit” is vitally important
 - Through evidence of leadership (speaking, writing)
 - Attending seminars/presentations that give a preview of consulting prowess and presentation capabilities
 - Introduction from a colleague followed by a personal phone call/interview
 - An attractive, informative web site is important
4. How do you justify the cost of retaining a consultant?
 - Consider it a long term strategic investment
 - Conduct an internal process to ensure resources (financial, HR, facilities, etc) are in place then begin RFP process
 - Gain approval from all departments on deliverables in advance
5. What advice would you give consultants to ensure a great experience?
 - Be crystal clear about deliverables
 - Build a bond with the team you will work with – act as part of the team and be humble yet forceful in your advice
 - **Listen** and ask good questions
 - Be **flexible** and adaptive
 - Be **observant**
 - Look for the answers; don’t come in predisposed to a solution

- Suggests that the consultant facilitate a brief session with the company’s team prior to making the selection to ensure a proper sense of team and focus in on the problem
- Communicate face-to-face more often with the CEO rather than relying on the internal team to do so

Closing remarks from the three CEO panelists:

- “Great facilitation is magical – poor facilitation is hard to recover from”
- “There is huge potential for service design delivery”
- “Unless you are really in consulting to make a tangible difference you should do something else”

Given that professional foodservice consultants may be retained by representatives at varying positions within client companies, the perspective could be similar to those reported by these CEOs or there could be different motives/expectations involved. However the advice given in response to these questions can only help the consulting community to make better approaches to potential client groups and in doing so elevate the profession of consulting in the global marketplace.


For more information about the survey or the organizations involved, please view the web sites of IMC USA and/or AMA.

Institute of Management Consultants – IMC

“Get Smart, Get Known, Get Business”

IMC USA is the premier professional association and sole certifying body dedicated to management consultants in the USA. The IMC USA mission is to promote excellence and ethics in management consulting through certification, education and professional resources. It awards the Certified Management Consultant (CMC®) designation, the global standard for technical competence, client satisfaction and professional conduct, recognized in 44 countries and the basis of the upcoming ISO registration for management consultants. Visit IMC USA at <http://www.imcusa.org>

American Management Association - AMA

American Management Association is a world leader in professional development and performance-based learning solutions. AMA provides individuals and organizations worldwide with the knowledge and tools to achieve performance excellence, adapt to changing realities and prosper in a complex and competitive world. Each year, thousands of customers learn new skills and behaviors, gain more confidence, advance their careers and contribute to the success of their organizations. AMA offers a range of unique seminars, workshops, conferences, customized corporate programs, online learning, newsletters, journals and AMA books. Visit AMA at www.amanet.org. 

The Consulting Profession

IMC USA National Board Chair Mark Haas, CMC offered the following observations at the Consulting World Conference in June.

Today's challenges are complex and require well managed solutions:

- Homeland Security
- National Disaster Relief
- Public Health
- Education
- Natural Resources
- Infrastructure

These challenges all present opportunities for the consulting profession. They all require good advice to those managing in these areas. And they require innovative, focused and timely solutions.

The Wall Street Journal reports that management consulting is one of the most desired professions today. The US Department of Labor indicates that the consulting profession will grow much faster than the average. There are trends toward the hiring of boutique firms and specialized consultants unlike any period in business history because clients want the best talent and proven ethics, not just the branded name of a firm.

Effective consultants develop the 'What' and the 'How' of consulting. The 'What' is the industry perspective that you bring to the table – your skill and experience may make you an expert, but do they necessarily make

you a good consultant? What remains is learning the discipline, skills and behaviors of a professional consultant, or the 'How'. IMC believes that they turn 'experts' into 'consultants'.

Good consultants stay ahead of change in terms of technology, regulations and business practices. IMC offers certification (CMC – Certified Management Consultant) credentials based on an international competency framework that lays out the consulting competencies and professional behaviors that effective consultants need. IMC also has a resource library with member authored articles, webinars and mentoring programs to assist members in achieving the competencies identified for consultants who may be just starting out or are retooling their practices.

Given that management consultancy (like foodservice consultancy) is an unlicensed profession, there is unfortunately, room for disappointment and dissatisfaction by clients who experience a poor consulting relationship. Licensing certification is a useful way to assure clients self-regulation and a commitment to excellence in ethics. IMC has developed a marketing kit to help individual CMC certified members market themselves along with the CMC brand.

IMC (like FCSI) is not a job placement organization but they do serve as a powerful business generator. Networking with fellow consultants who offer complimentary services is a powerful method of growing your business.

New Consulting Survey Shows Clients Very Satisfied With Consultants

The majority of executives who retain consultants as part of their job, rated the client-consultant experience as positive. According to a new survey co-sponsored by American Management Association (AMA) and The Institute of Management Consultants (IMC USA) and conducted by Consulting Intelligence (CI), 82 percent were satisfied with their interaction with a consultant.

The Consulting SurveySM asked senior-level managers, CEOs and other business professionals to rate their overall experiences working with consultants. A strong sense of client satisfaction, combined with the fact that a quarter of the respondents reported spending over \$1 million on external consultants each year, leads industry experts to predict continued growth and upsurge in the field.

"It is a very good time for the consulting marketplace. This data reaffirms our expectations of continued growth and improved client-consultant relationships across the industry," said Bob Brown, managing director of Consulting

Intelligence, LLC, who presented the complete survey findings at the ConsultingWorldTM conference on June 25. "In addition, the survey offers consultants the unique opportunity to get inside the minds of their clients and learn about their expectations on issues such as budgeting, performance, ethics and how they view the ideal consultant."

According to the respondents, the top-five qualities of the ideal consultant are competence, effective communication, accountability, experience and integrity.

Survey results also reveal that the consulting profession is viewed as trustworthy. When respondents were asked to rank a list of 10 representative professions from most trustworthy to least trustworthy, they ranked consulting as the 5th most trustworthy profession, behind nurses, doctors, teachers and accountants. Rounding out the list of professions were sales representatives, corporate executives, attorneys, journalists and politicians.