

Workplace Harmony™

Hiring A Consultant: Tips for getting the most from a consultant.

When to hire. Consider a consultant when you have a problem that requires specialized knowledge, or for projects that require skills outside your business' normal functions.

Know the problem. Identify the problem before seeking a consultant.

Selection. Make sure they have the skills and attitude that's appropriate for the job.

Specialists. Find a consultant with expertise that matches your needs. Ask other professionals for referrals. You can always resort to the yellow pages.

Check references. Get a list of clients for whom the candidate has performed similar services.

Interview them. Make sure the consultant is going to be directly involved in your project, rather than delegate it to an associate. Also, they should adapt their knowledge to your unique business problems, ask relevant questions and have good business sense.

The relationship. Choose a consultant with whom you can maintain a peer relationship. Make sure you'll have a meeting of the minds.

Clarity. Get a clear, detailed description of the work to be done. Ask the consultant to provide a detailed project plan. Make sure you understand what result the consultant is promising.

A written contract. Is the quoted price firm or an estimate? Identify checkpoints such as completion of phases or tasks throughout the project, and tie consultant's payments to major checkpoints.

A team approach. Be collaborative. Get your employees involved. Not only will you keep the consultant's hours down by leveraging your own resources, but also the project will be more successful if employees are part of the process and support it.

Be responsible. Hold up your end of the bargain. Understand at the beginning of the project what the consultant expects from you. If you don't have time to work with the consultant throughout the project, appoint someone to be the project liaison.

The buck stops with you. Remember that you're the decision-maker. The consultant's job is to provide you with what he or she believes are your best options and as much information as possible to help you decide what's the best solution for your company.