

## **“Top 10 Winning Qualities of Consultants”**

This was recently posted in the Consultancy Blog of the Professional Engineer Society by **Mr. James Khalil, PE**. It is wonderful wisdom for our industry and great a personal motivator for me. IEC & Associates is committed to implementing and practicing these principals on all of our projects.

You can find success in consulting by developing certain qualities. They make you more effective. After years of consulting experience, **Mr. James Khalil, P.E** has distilled these qualities into a top ten list.

### **1. Professionalism**

Consultants should always keep in mind that client relationship should remain at a professional level. It is sometimes easy for consultants to take on an “employee attitude,” which in many environments can backfire on the consultant and actually create a negative situation for the project.

### **2. Time Management**

Consultants should look for ways to adjust their work style to accommodate the schedule, budget and overall requirements of the project. This is particularly true when faced with pressure to maintain high quality within finite time and budget constraints.

### **3. Judgment**

Consultants are required to have good judgment when confronted with a problem. We should not jump to conclusions. Consultants should take time to consider the facts and to get feedback from their peers and management before reaching a decision.

### **4. Team Player**

Consultants must demonstrate that they are team players and are willing to learn from team members, genuinely valuing the input and expertise of others. It is important to establish a collaborative relationship with peers.

### **5. Good Communication Skills**

The consultant should have excellent oral and written communication skills. Since we are often viewed as the subject matter expert (SME), we should be able to communicate our opinions effectively. In addition to English, it is beneficial to know the language widely used by the employees of the company. In some countries, the documentation may be in a local language. Ideally, the consultant can easily read this language without employing any translators.

### **6. Expert Knowledge**

Clients typically approach an external consultant for two reasons: 1) the client expects the consultant to have more expertise than the organization’s internal resources or 2) because clients do not have sufficient time to solve their own problems or implement their own projects. As consultants, our level of knowledge should be broad enough to know when to ask questions and/or where to research to find solutions. At all times, the consultant should remain current by reading journals, magazines, informative websites and through networking with fellow consultants. We should know how to apply theory into practice and also be skillful in using appropriate tools (software, professional journals, etc.) to function efficiently in the job.

### **7. Good Listening Skills**

During the consulting process, consultants will meet different people with unique characteristics.

Some will be verbose, others reticent. Having excellent listening skills will encourage all to talk freely. This leads to more information sharing which, in the end, can make the consulting process more streamlined.

### **8. Roles and Responsibilities**

It is important for consultants to understand the responsibilities of their role, as well as the practices and parameters of the job. You may notice that each client has a different take on what the role of a consultant entails. Clarifying your client's expectations and deliverables beforehand may possibly be the single most important task one undertakes. Remember that in a consulting role the client also has duties and responsibilities: they are bringing you in to recommend what they should implement. If they fail to implement within the agreed terms then you can't help them further and it's time to walk away. Remember that each client has his or her own preconceived view of the consultant's abilities and capabilities views that will almost certainly differ from reality by varying degrees. Some clients expect the consultant to be a god and recommend solutions that will fix everything that is wrong with their organization; others expect one to be nothing much more than a glorified mechanic called in to fix the photocopiers. Clarifying what you can and cannot do, and what you are willing to do, are paramount concerns before commencing work.

### **9. Involve Other Consultants**

Saying "I don't know" is often a very good answer to a question. An even better answer is "I don't know, but I know people who do know." Consultants do not know everything, and should not be expected to know everything. Saying, "I do not know" will not damage your prestige. As an example, if your client has a problem related to legal issues, try to consult with a legal consultant to help your client find a solution to the problem.

### **10. Reputation**

Protect your public reputation above everything else—you will not get an easy chance to repair it if it is damaged. If necessary, walk away from situations or contracts that could potentially damage your reputation. Consulting is not simply contracting by another name; it involves duties of care and levels of accountability, responsibility and integrity that may well be greater than those of the client. If that proves to be the case and you find a client's operations and methods are not ethical, then it is time to walk away. Be selective about the clients for whom you work.

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