

WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT TO HIRE A CONSULTANT

By Michael Sleppin, Paradigm Associates

A couple of months ago a Construction Industry association was kind enough to ask me to be one of the speakers at its annual convention. When I asked what they would like me to speak about, without hesitation he responded “about why our members should use consultants.” When I asked why that would be a topic that would be useful to the audience, he said, “most of our members are privately owned businesses, and don’t get to hear other views but their own very often.”

There is no doubt that we in the USA are being bombarded with new challenges on an ongoing basis. Failure to adapt will become a death sentence for many organizations. The difficulty all of us have in adapting to change is that **THE RANGE OF WHAT WE THINK AND DO IS LIMITED BY WHAT WE FAIL TO NOTICE. UNTIL WE BEGIN TO NOTICE WHAT WE FAIL TO NOTICE, WE CAN’T CHANGE AND IMPROVE.**

The value of bringing in an outsider is that the outsider is not in any emotional bind. Quite often those who have built their lives around an enterprise are the last to be open to change. This is a psychological dynamic called a “Competing Commitment.” Every one of us has competing commitments. Every one of you reading this article has competing commitments. We often fail to recognize that the competing commitments are causing us to be rigid in our approaches to essential and critical matters in the organization. People don’t realize they have assumptions that may be false because they accept those assumptions as reality. How often do you or I critically examine our basic assumptions? Not often enough.

Examining our assumptions is one of the most difficult tasks we need to engage in, if changes for the better are to be made. Outside consultants not emotionally involved in your business are the perfect tool to help you. Even at the middle management level, the help can be valuable.

I was asked by the President of the company I work with to coach/consult with

John Doe. Why I asked. “Everyone calls him Hitler, and unless he stops being Hitler he’s history.” So no matter how qualified he was in other aspects, the fact that he was perceived as “Hitler” was going to sink his career. The happy ending to the story is that he no longer is Hitler, and he is still working at the company. He had no idea that his behavior, which he believed was a help to the company, was perceived that way only by himself.

At the upper management levels, I have worked with multi-million dollar firms that were being run as if they were some Mom and Pop business. If the Owner/President did not take some action, then everyone else waited for the message to come down from the mountain before doing anything. Having a STRATEGY, brilliant EXECUTION, competent LEADERSHIP, and a CULTURE to support the other three elements can not be developed by insiders.

‘My goal is to become a Trusted Advisor’

As long as 1987 IBM published research on its findings regarding the elements needed to successfully change. Their research revealed that when they attempted to change from within there was resistance to change.

Almost all of you use lawyers and accountants. These are technical consultants. The reason many are less open to using consultants and trainers on business matters is that you can’t touch, smell, or taste what is being presented. People buy successful outcomes. Often it is difficult to express the successful outcome in concrete ways that would cause you to take action and bring in an outsider. Because consulting and training is very much a personal service business, you would want to make sure that you are

comfortable and share values with the person(s) you bring in.

My goal, always, is to become A TRUSTED ADVISOR. A trusted advisor will always place your interests, feelings, fears, etc. at the front of his/her agenda. People who share values and are willing to make adjustments when necessary will succeed.

Most of us have heard that “the definition of insanity is continuing to do the same things but expecting the results to be different.” Your business world is becoming even more demanding. Management issues, lead times, staffing levels, coordination of resources, quality, costs of labor are only a few of the issues that must be addressed effectively in order to win. Status Quo is no longer a choice. Even your role in the company is no longer clear. Senior Leadership and Mid Level Management have been transformed within the past five years to such a degree that if you were leading or managing “the old way” you are stealing from the firm. Here’s what it comes down to. You have no competitive advantage relative to SUPPLIERS, TECHNOLOGY, OR RESOURCES. All your competition knows the same suppliers, technology and where to acquire the necessary resources. **YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE COMES FROM THE BEHAVIOR (ACTIONS) OF THE PEOPLE IN THE ORGANIZATION FROM THE PRESIDENT TO THE JANITOR.**

Most are very comfortable discussing the technical issues that are part of a project. Most are less comfortable and often downright uncomfortable discussing business issues.

I urge you to be open-minded about bringing in outsiders to work with you on matters of critical importance to the life of the business...to family members who rely on the success of the business...to employees who need the right guidance to be productive...to the community you serve that relies on your talents to keep the community a wonderful place where future generations grow up.