Why Should You Hire A Consultant?

Extracted from an article written by Michael Lappin, Pres., Prestige Consulting Group

How many times have you asked if you can make the changes, fix the problem or add another project onto your team? If the answer is more than once, you have probably considered hiring a consultant.

What is a consultant? Consultants come in all shapes and sizes with many different specialties. There are large consulting firms that have hundreds of locations, independent consultants that are operating on their own, and every size company in the middle. Sometimes companies have internal consultants, or people who operate outside of a functional or operational area that are brought in to assist with a specific project. Generally, I define a consultant as anyone with the education, experience, and ability to listen and learn objectively who can assist with a business problem. A business problem can be defined as anything that has an opportunity for improvement.

Why would you use a consultant? The real question to answer before you decide to use a consultant is what you are hiring one to do. Without a clear definition of your business problem, there is no need to hire a consultant. There cannot be a successful consulting project without a project objective, timeframe and budget. Consulting services are not free, so anyone considering hiring a consultant needs to know how much they are willing to spend. Once this has been established, the next step is to determine if you should look internally, externally, or both.

An effective manager should look at all of the options for solving the business problem. This can be done by asking several more questions:
- When does this problem have to be solved? Is that a goal or a deadline?
- Can my current staff perform this problem if they had the time?
- Can other tasks be offloaded or postponed to provide the time?
- Are certain experiences required that my staff does not have?
- Can I hire someone to perform the task? And what would they do when the project was over?
- Do I want to hire an employee without a long-term need?
- If I must hire an external consultant, what do I want them to do?

You should hire a consultant only if you cannot successfully solve a business problem internally. To be a proper steward of your company's funds, you should not take hiring a consultant lightly. If you do decide to hire a consultant use the following checklist:
- Clearly define the project that you want to accomplish
- Clearly define the budget for the project
- Identify consulting firms with the experience and availability to meet your objectives
- Interview potential candidates and check their references