

Management Consultants: Competitive Advantage or Expensive Luxury?

A client-focused approach to hiring the right consultant

There is no question that engaging the services of a management consulting firm can be extremely advantageous. A qualified management consultant will offer a unique blend of problem solving skills, innovative business and technology solutions, and can be a critical catalyst to envision and implement organizational change in an increasingly competitive market. The problem is, it is possible to waste a considerable amount of money on inexperienced management consultants if you are not careful.

The Consultant's role

Consultant backgrounds vary significantly; the ideal consultant should be client-focused, enthusiastic, cost-effective, and have completed similar projects to the one you are considering. In today's marketplace, the consultant must genuinely care about the client's specific needs, exceed the client's expectations, maintain the highest level of integrity at all times, price their services competitively, and work diligently to deliver outstanding results.

The most proficient management consultants achieve this success by applying what they've learned from a wide variety of experiences to the facts and circumstances of your situation, in an objective, un-biased way. This means providing advice on increasing productivity, marketing and business development, strategic planning, staff training and evaluation, and operating efficiency.

The successful management consultant is analogous to the physician consultant. Management consultants identify and diagnose problems in practices, and categorize them in a realistic and specific context. The consultant delivers a prescription for future success, providing a detailed regimen of therapy for the practice to follow. They educate the practice on how to move forward, preventing future onset of the problem.

Most management consultants, however, do not take on the responsibility of nursing the practice back to health. Instead, they make practical recommendations, and refer the practice back to the "primary care" administrator for that purpose. A consultant that is also available to assist with the implementation phase, is exceptionally well positioned to address all your practice management needs.

When should I bring in an expert?

Every physician has their own specific agenda when bringing in an outside expert, but a few common problems lead physicians to contact management consultants more frequently. To achieve profitability and remain competitive, practices and physicians are faced with increased pressure to perform at optimal efficiency. If your practice is experiencing rising overhead, a reduction in gross revenues, or an increase in employee or physician turnover, then a practice evaluation by an experienced management consulting firm could be the key to your continued success.

Here are some other good reasons to consider hiring a third party management consultant:

- Your practice is a market leader in your area, and you are looking for innovative ways to gain an even greater market share
- Your practice is expanding to a new facility, merging, or acquiring one or more locations
- Feasibility studies, strategic planning, and establishing new practice locations
- Assistance with physician practice buy-in negotiations, income formula, workload distribution
- Physician recruiting assistance
- Executive staff development and team-builder programs

What are the risks?

Introducing a management consultant to your practice should be a very positive and beneficial experience, but just like the outcome of any surgical procedure there are no guarantees. It is important to consider how your staff will react to the consultant, will the consultant really listen, and do they share similar values to those of your practice? Some employees may feel intimidated or threatened because of the mere presence of a consultant; it is critical that the consultant is an excellent communicator, able to relate superbly on many levels with the physicians and their staff.

What is the key to finding the right consultant? It is important to do your due diligence once you have a pool of consultants to contact for more information. The goal is to get responses that make you comfortable with the firm's professionalism and approach to its clients' needs. Carefully check your consultant's references, talking to past clients should tell you whether you are on the right track, and help avoid any serious consequences. Each consulting firm has its own approach, philosophy, and methodology, but remember you are the prospective client and the one who needs to feel comfortable with the process.

A Vision for Success

The most successful people in any field know when to ask for help. When the issues at stake are significant in scope, have serious consequences, and fall outside your comfort level, it's time to call in a specialist in the field. A consultant may be able to offer you just the help you need.

Tony Rovinsky is the founder and principal of Rovinsky and Associates, Inc.

www.rovinskyandassociates.com

You may contact him at: TonyRovinsky@RovinskyandAssociates.com