

Member insights

Is consulting for you? Five ways to find out

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Perhaps you have asked yourself if you'd like to leave your current job or transition into consulting. After all, it is a growing field with a potentially high demand. Sometimes organizations don't have the desire or resources to hire a full-time or part-time professional, so they look to contract with a consultant. If they contact RPCN members, they get the help they need; with my company, that means help with finding money for their projects.

These "big picture" questions that may help you determine whether consulting is right for you.

1. Do you believe in what you are doing? If so, being a consultant won't feel like "selling." I recently had coffee with a friend who said she could never go into consulting. When I asked why, she replied, "I don't like selling." Uh oh, I thought ... I don't like selling either, but finding clients for my consulting business never *feels* like selling. Instead, when I meet with a potential new client, it's exciting to hear about their work, their mission and their passion. That is energizing and makes me realize just how much we can accomplish together. Once I communicate that, it *is* selling! On the other hand, if you are in a field that just doesn't feel right to you, then the selling *will* be a struggle, and you may find yourself feeling routinely drained rather than energized.

2. Do you see opportunity everywhere? A certain sense of optimism seems to be necessary to enjoy the practice of consulting. Your clients may be so immersed in their daily work and responsibilities that they rely on you to find opportunities for them. For Grants4Good, this means helping to plan projects so they are ready for funding, identifying the best grant prospects, or even determining the direction of an organization. On your own time, do you network with various sectors, read business journals and scan relevant news on a regular basis? These are some of the ways to see the opportunities for your clients to meet their needs, and are essential to being an effective consultant.

3. Can you focus on your most-important work and say "no" to things that could derail you? This type of clarity and focus is not easy; nine years into my own business, I'm still learning how to turn down projects. If you see opportunity everywhere, you may want to *do* everything, too. At some point, there will no longer be enough time to do it all; you might even feel irritable and tired, leading to a distinctive lack of joy. In my first few years of consulting, it felt like my

business was running me, instead of the other way around. That is a sure sign to slow down, re-assess your reasons for being in this business and list your priorities.

4. What attracts you to being a consultant? Is it the promise of autonomy and flexibility? Or the challenge of making it on your own? Have you always known there is an inner entrepreneur in you that needs to come out (perhaps you were the one who organized the neighborhood garage sale as a child)? Would you rather follow your own mission, instead of the one set by your company or supervisor? Will your lifestyle support a few meager financial years and the fluctuation in income that can sometimes happen in consulting? Do you have a support system in place for those times you feel isolated? If you are honest and realistic about your expectations, and if they will help you accomplish your life goals, then maybe consulting is right for you.

5. Are you ready to learn? There are numerous resources for people wanting to get started in consulting. The most valuable early knowledge I gained was from an online course on starting your own consulting business. Alan Weiss has published several books with concrete advice for everything from marketing your business to determining pricing. The best learning, however, is in networking with other consultants and hearing about their experiences. Consider attending RPCN meetings, national conferences, training opportunities or events of other professional groups. A consultant must continuously train and learn to stay relevant in the field. And that is part of the fun.

Consulting is a chance to do what matters most to you and to thrive. At the same time, you will be helping others achieve their missions and succeed. What could be better?

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