



IS CONSULTING YOUR NEXT CAREER MOVE?

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SPCONSULTING

Consulting can be a very rewarding profession. It offers exposure to diverse and often leading-edge issues, the opportunity to work with a wide variety of clients and an accelerated career path paralleled by few other professions.

Consulting attracts both graduates who tend to look towards the larger consulting firms, and seasoned professionals who have worked in industry for some time and aim to leverage their knowledge in making a logical career change.

At the same time consulting is not for everybody and some factors should be considered before taking the plunge. The most fundamental relate to your proposition as a consultant, your ability to engage effectively, the lifestyle associated with consulting and the profile of the firm that you intend to work for.

Define your proposition

As a consultant you will need a proposition. This is what will get you hired by a consulting firm and will ultimately be the

main reason that clients want to work with you. Your proposition will be based upon two elements: Expertise and experience. For younger people the driving element tends to be expertise quantified by educational achievements. Good grades indicate the capacity to learn quickly, an important asset. Those who have worked for some years are likely to offer a mixed proposition leaning on the experience that they have gained in their field.

Ask yourself the question:

What makes you qualified to consult, and how would you explain this to others?

Interpersonal skills

Whether your proposition is expertise or experience weighted you will need a set of skills to put it into action. This is something that consulting firms pay a lot of attention to when recruiting. Consultants are expected to engage with confidence, communicate in a structured way, solve problems analytically, resolve interpersonal conflicts and formulate recommendations creatively. Those who are new to consulting

are not necessarily expected to have fully mastered these skills, some of which are personality-related, but should be able to demonstrate clear evidence of them.

How do these skills resonate with your own abilities?

Does your experience include examples of applying them?

The consulting lifestyle

Day-to-day life as a consultant will depend the type of work that you are doing. Having said that, consulting is an industrious profession for industrious people. There will be ups and downs in your workload, but often more ups than downs. From time to time you may need to work long hours and crunch to tight deadlines. An element of travel may also be required for client-facing engagements. This type of lifestyle calls for a degree of flexibility but it is certainly not dull, and savored by those who thrive on challenge yet are able to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Think about work-life balance upfront. This will help to avoid obstacles as your consulting career unfolds.

Selecting the right firm

Larger consulting firms address a broad range of activity domains, offer extensive internal development resources and the opportunity to work in large teams.

However, during their first years consultants may often be placed in behind-the-scenes consulting roles performing analysis or development tasks. Smaller, firms on the other hand are more inclined to place consultants in a client facing role early in

their careers. In the absence of a broad library of training resources they assimilate their staff through mentorship schemes. This approach requires a high level of independence from the individual but can result in an accelerated career path with fewer barriers. These are very different career and consulting experiences, both bearing their own pros and cons.

Consider the type of firm that best suits your personality and career goals. A good match will put you in an environment where you can excel.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Samir Parikh is a principal business consultant, practice manager, and consultancy CEO with over 25 years of industry experience. In 2000, Samir founded *SPConsulting* a global management consulting firm specializing in organizational strategy and change management.

With a track record of projects conducted in more than 50 countries the firm works closely with companies that are transforming into consulting-based organizations, delivering solutions and professional services in highly competitive environments.



FURTHER READING

Samir is the author of *The Consultant's Handbook*, published by John Wiley & Sons. This book provides a comprehensive guide for the practical implementation of consulting skills by professionals working in consulting and professional-services-related disciplines.

The book contains additional guidelines, examples and use-cases to support readers in implementation of consulting techniques, as well as practical tips and lessons-learned from real consulting engagements.