

The Challenge with Management Consulting

Written By: Gary Collins and Chris Kortschot

Being a management consultant can be a rewarding, stimulating profession. You get the opportunity to meet many interesting people and get to know many interesting businesses. You pick your hours, and you pick your price. You, are in control of you.

But there is one fundamental challenge with this career. Unlike any other job, the customer is almost never right. In a world where customers are expecting never to be confronted, this is not an easy obstacle to overcome.

“The customer is always right” was a term first coined at the turn of the 20th century by Marshall Field’s department store in Chicago, now known as Macy’s following the 2006 takeover. Since that time it has become the mantra of almost all successful businesses today and people have not only gotten used to it, they have come to expect it.

If the customer expects to be treated as though they are right in all other aspects of life, why would it be any different within management consulting? Well, just for the record, it isn’t.

Our clients come to us when they have symptoms of a problem. Declining sales, high employee turnover, operational inconsistencies, customer dissatisfaction, technology that doesn’t deliver, stagnation, etc. Like a symptom of an illness, it may be caused by one or more of a wide variety of problems. And like a patient, business owners naturally start to diagnose the problem prior to seeing the doctor.

The problem is that the patient almost never knows what is actually wrong with them yet they always have a theory. The same is true when you have a problem with your business.

In many cases, business owners come to us for validation, not a diagnosis. This means, if we are to do our job honestly, respectfully, and successfully, we have to remind our clients that things aren’t working correctly. The unfortunate reality is that in some of these cases, we are not able to fix what we were contracted to because this obstacle is too great to overcome.

The message that should be taken from this post is this: If you are the one making the decisions for your company, and it is not performing the way you want, you might be more responsible than originally considered. If nothing else, a little introspection never hurt anyone.

