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WISE MANAGEMENT RECOGNIZES WHEN AND HOW TO USE A CONSULTANT

Managing any business today, whether it is an international corporation or a local gift shop, is more challenging than ever. And some of the challenges involved in surviving and growing can't always be solved by the people closest to them. Wise management recognizes when it needs help. That is why companies and organizations have always used outside consultants.

Here are some guidelines on how to find and effectively use a consultant.

Recognize when you need or should use a consultant. It is generally because one or more of the following situations exist:

- You need certain expertise and do not have it in-house.
- There are problems you have been unable to solve – or maybe even identify.
- You need an objective, unbiased perspective or fresh new ideas.
- You need to identify opportunities and implement strategies to grow.

Next, proceed as follows:

- Define the situation in writing.
- Develop a list of candidates. While there are professional organizations and directories you can refer to, or you can go online, personal contacts and referrals are generally the best sources.
- Interview several candidates. Describe the situation and what you want. Ask how they would go about their work, what the end product would be, how long it would take and what it would cost. Evaluate their experience and approach.
- Request proposals and references from the consultants you are interested in. Be sure the proposals cover the process, the timetable, what your people must do, the fee and any additional expenses.
- Check their references by phone or in-person – never in writing. Ask blunt questions such as, “Would you use this person (or firm) again?”
- Invite back the candidates you are still interested in.
 - o If appropriate, have one or more members of your management team meet with them first and give you their comments.
 - o Then interview the candidate(s) again. Ask blunt questions. Determine if they are really interested in this situation. If they are, ask “Why?”

Then make your decision – alone or in consultation with your management team. Fee should not be the prime consideration. Regardless of what is in the written proposal, you must feel that you can trust the consultant and work with them.

After you have selected your consultant, don't think you can just sit back and wait for the report. The consultant will need help from you and your people such as:

- Cooperation
- Accurate data and information
- A knowledgeable person to be the contact and liaison

After you have received and reviewed the report, if implementation will be required consider using the consultant to facilitate it. Many companies waste the money they have spent on a consultant, or unfairly criticize the work, either by poorly implementing the recommendations or by not implementing them at all.

Depending on the situation and why the consultant was brought in, following their advice will usually result in some changes in the operation – so prepare yourself and your people for change. If you selected the right consultant, and worked with them properly, their analysis and advice should provide the help you need – and the changes will be for the better.

P.O. Box 551, Wayne, PA 19087-0551 • 610-644-7020 • fax: 610-296-8726
email: bob@robertdenney.com • web site: www.robertdenney.com