



**How to Select a Consultant**

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## How to Select a Consultant

by Angela Krass

**You've reached a point in your career where you need some assistance in refining your direction? Edited and re-edited your portfolio... Postponed creating a marketing plan ... Thinking about changing your creative direction, struggling with your vision. Where are you now? Where do you want to go/be? How are you going to get there? How badly do you want to get there? Hiring a Consultant may be your best most effective solution.**

The Consultant's job, as an advisor, is to identify opportunities, problems and recommend strategies to improve your business offering a fresh, unbiased view of your organization. A Consultant should provide an independent perspective, knowledge and judgment developed from hands-on experience. Their role is to supplement your knowledge so you can make better, more informed decisions.

### **The Process For Selecting a Consultant is Made up of 4 Major Steps:**

#### ***Step 1***

Define how you see the Consultant role. Know your target goals and available budget. Consultants generally fall into broad categories: Operational – focus on the business side of your company; Creative – focus on building, fine tuning and editing your portfolio; Strategic – focus on defining your market and creating action and marketing plans.

Prepare a written description of the scope of the work, defining the problems. Spend time outlining the issues you want help with. Identifying the scope of the work needed will help narrow the list of possible candidates. Be clear about why you are looking for a Consultant and what you want the Consultant to assist you with. Be specific about what you want the Consultant to do. What is the Consultant's special area of expertise? Does it match what you want them to do for you? What is the Consultant's knowledge of the industry?

#### ***Step 2***

Assemble a list of possible candidates. Ask people you respect for the name of a Consultant they trust. Find out what they experienced in working with their Consultant and how they were helped. Look most carefully at Consultants that have worked with photographers you respect. You are looking for familiarity with the issues you need assistance with and "fit". That is, do you think you will work well together? Your gut instinct on fit is probably correct, so don't deny it.

The Screening Process Contact the Consultants that look promising based on recommendations of your colleagues. Start with an exploratory phone call.

## **Step 3**

Make direct inquiries with prepared list of questions.

Inquire about:

- if consultant is interested in working with you
- availability and schedule
- qualifications and past relevant experience
- key skills and approach
- fees
- a pre-meeting before deciding whether to hire the consultant - is there a charge for this meeting?

Notice whether he or she:

- is a clear and direct communicator
- seems genuinely interested in you and your situation
- listens to you and understands what you are saying
- talks more about you and your needs rather than himself or herself
- is positive, confident and pragmatic

## **Step 4**

Check references. Ask candidates to give you 3-5 names of past clients for whom they have done similar work. Then call the clients and ask how satisfied they were with the Consultant. The best question you can ask is, "Would you hire this person again?" Specifically ask what the Consultant did for the client. Was the Consultant's work the same work you want the Consultant to do for you? If it matches, the client can provide valuable info about the Consultant's work.

Once selection is made:

Great care should be exercised when choosing a Consultant. The chemistry must be right. Take the initiative and stay involved, discuss your needs, problems, and parameters in candid terms from the start. They are not a substitute for your responsibility. The ultimate decision-making and approval stays with you. Don't abdicate decision-making to the Consultant. Set a budget and/or schedule upfront.

Most Consultants agree that restructuring involves two phases: a design phase, in which new ways of doing work are produced, and an implementation phase, in which the new ways of doing work actually are put in place. Avoid misunderstandings, request a letter of agreement determining the length of your association alongside the fee, as well as what services you expect.

Finally, say thank you to all the candidates for their time and effort. Be gracious to those you do not select – you may need them in the future. If the Consultant you select was referred to you, thank the person who made the referral.

*"You have to find something that you love enough to be able to take risks, jump over the hurdles and break through the brick walls that are always going to be placed in front of you. If you don't have that kind of feeling for what it is you are doing, you'll stop at the first giant hurdle." -- George Lucas*

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