JOURNAL of PRACTICAL CONSULTING

Editor's Note
Zip, Zing and Consulting Success

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This issue of the JPC continues our broad mandate, which is to examine consulting from a broader, more practical, perspective. The articles assembled here suggest again that consulting, at its most basic, is a practical, value-added activity in which professionals, utilizing a variety of different tools, work with their clients to deliver the best possible solutions. Consulting remains a broad field, with boundaries that remain largely undefined. This openness has both positive and negative effects on the practice of consulting that has led to some demands for greater standardization, even policing. These issues will be taken up in a future issue of JPC.

The breadth of work undertaken by consultants and the largely unregulated nature of the profession increases the need to examine carefully what it is that consultants do and how they go about their craft. Addleson and Berger's *Putting Zing Back into Organizational Consulting* is a thoughtful piece in which the authors invite consultants to pay closer attention to how they organize, something they classify as the "zing" of consulting. Focusing on the zing as opposed to the traditional focus on "the zation" is said to come at a price. A rethinking of the possibilities that come from positive relationships where cooperation and collaboration are embraced is part of the message that Addleson and Berger share. Consulting as they see it "involves working *with*, not for, the client." By concentrating on the zing, consultants unleash their potential to revision the consulting task, changing in turn the way they help clients.

All of this is part of becoming a better consultant, a theme taken up by Hargis. Coping with economic uncertainty, or "lean times," is part of the ongoing reality of consulting. Finding ways to maximize the value of what are typically seen as wasted moments is important to the consultant's reorientation. Hargis' key point is that "consultants do not have 'professional' lives and 'personal' lives but *whole* lives." Moving away from a compartmentalized existence is useful from the point of view of an integrated or holistic view of consultant. In a word, consultants are real people too and play a variety of different roles. Finding ways to improve one's capacity in multiple roles ultimately feeds into the image of a more balanced and engaged consultant.

Consultants who are more engaged are more likely to see the connection between their individual and professional identities. As many consultants will know from experience, life is not always a smooth ride. Indeed, as Salmon says in her article, growing pains offer consultants the

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opportunity to review and perhaps reposition their practice. *Growing Pains: A Learning Process for Rebranding and Repositioning Your Consulting Practice* is a consultant's approach to the need to take stock. An important lesson communicated by Salmon and other contributors to this issue is the importance of continuous personal and professional development. Salmon encourages us to, "Capitalize on every opportunity to learn."

Consultants, perhaps as much as anyone else, run the risk of complacency. In such situations rebranding and repositioning can be an important means of stepping back and recreating a compelling vision for your consulting practice. The hoped-for end result is a successful consulting career. In our Practitioner's Corner, King identifies eight key principles of successful consulting that center on seeing consulting as a vocation. The principles are simple (e.g., be true to yourself; make a commitment to excellence; and perform a reality check) and require no special training to be implemented. What we get from all this is a package of simple solutions that the aspiring or experienced consultant can adapt for immediate use.

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Practitioner's Corner

Now That You've Been Called: 8 Principles of Successful Consulting

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Consultants are called to a myriad of responsibilities on both a professional and personal level. In today's society, where time is of the essence, serving with clarity of mind and a focus on purpose will prove beneficial to all involved. Identifying exactly what it is that you are called to do through your consulting practice will provide a balance and truth in both worlds. This article provides basic guidelines for maximizing your vocation as a consultant through introspective, intentional, and altruistic action.

Consultants are called to provide expert advice or opinion to others concerning professional or personal matters. Effective consultants will guide themselves as well as their clients in sanctioning the advantages found in a commitment of time, responsibility, and attention. In addition to this trilogy of benefits, the most successful consultants recognize that consulting is a vocation. Building on this notion of consulting as vocation, the following principles address critical aspects of consulting success. Each principle addresses a professional need that may be worth sharing with your clients.

One: Be True to Yourself

Have a golden rule for your consulting practice. Know *what* you are called to do and *why*. If you have more than one vocation, prioritizing them is important. Priority should not necessarily be given to the task that will yield the most monetarily. Rather, the choice should be made on points of principle and centered on your cardinal values. Take the time to embrace the duties, responsibilities and time commitment required of your vocation. Once you have made this discovery, know where to draw the line and do not cross it. Never compromise who you are or what you believe in to please others. Establish a baseline of non-negotiable core values.

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Two: Know if the Time is Right

One source of frustration is striving to complete goals at the wrong time. It is our responsibility as consultants to recognize the significance of time. An ability to know if this is "our season" will also prepare us in guiding our clients. It is not advisable to push past obstacles or advise clients to do the same if the attempt is being made in the "wrong season." So how do we differentiate between the two? Take an inventory. Are the people and responsibilities in your life being compromised because of your goals? Are you able to balance the other competing priorities in your life? If you have answered yes, then you may freely push past the seeming obstacles. Success will come with perseverance. However, if there is an imbalance in your life and matters such as family, friendships, and spiritual values have not been settled, perhaps now may not be the time for you to complete proposed changes. Recognizing when the time or season is right will help alleviate the frustration that comes from being misaligned to your purpose.

Three: Make a Commitment to Excellence

Excellence here does not mean without error. It refers to striving to do and to be the best at all times, operating within a framework of integrity. It is about living up to your full consulting potential. Beyond the professional terms laid out in the contract with your client, a commitment to excellence embraces confidentiality, character, and punctuality. Be enthusiastic about your mission! Independent or freelance consultants who operate their own businesses get to set their own hours. This can be a double-edged sword, unless you make a commitment to excellence. Build this into your standard operating procedures, anything less than excellence should be firmly resisted. Who wants to be known as a mediocre consultant! A commitment to excellence means that you are more likely to be taken seriously.

Four: Maximize learning

While consultants are often seen as the experts, the truth is that there is always a lot to learn. Begin with the knowledge that you do not know everything. This should lead you to build up your knowledge base and increase your overall marketability. Consultants are in the knowledge business. This is the mainstay of their ability to offer advice to clients. Expertise is not developed overnight. It is nurtured. The message then is to learn all that you can about your particular branch of consulting and any related arenas. This is especially important if you are thinking of pitching for work in an area that may be less familiar to you. The truth is that the best consultants, whatever their consulting niche, are also well rounded professionals. There are numerous opportunities to take training and certification classes to increase your knowledge. Where appropriate, you may even encourage your clients to do the same. Be careful not to proceed from a perspective of dissatisfaction, but rather from your ability to continue and grow. Be on the constant lookout for relevant seminars, workshops, and training sessions. You will discover a fascinating world of growth opportunities.

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Five: Satisfy What Others Need

Consultants are sometimes accused of pursuing their own agendas. Apart from the obvious problem of departing from a contractual obligation, it is worth remembering that consultants are in the service business. If you do not know or are unwilling to satisfy the needs of your client, you may be in the wrong business. Consultants who arrive at a client site or who approach a problem with their minds already made up as to the solution, fail the client and themselves. Be aware that what you want out of the consulting relationship may sometimes prevent you from seeing what the client needs. An ability to separate your wants from the client's needs is an important step in building the consulting relationship. Beyond the usual differentiation of consulting opportunities on the basis of work hours involved, level of expertise required, niche market and of course monetary reward, consultants should also look for opportunities to go beyond the proverbial call of consulting duty to making a difference in the life of the client. This is where satisfying a deeper need comes into its own. Again, from a relationship perspective this could become your unique selling point, helping to distinguish what you offer and are able to do from other consultants.

Six: Perform a Reality Check

Understand that we are not called to *perfection*. We do not live in a perfect world. We will make mistakes and there will be disappointments, even as we strive to do our very best. Be accepting and kind to yourself and to others when errors occur. The important thing here is how you react in these situations. The example you set for your clients will teach them that failure to meet a goal should not always be interpreted as defeat. Neither does it mean that we have failed personally. When things go wrong, see it as a learning opportunity. Revisit the project or your proposed solution and tweak the rough edges as necessary. Do this with an honesty of purpose and professional commitment to the excellence spoken about above. While performing the reality check, remember that neither performance nor excellence are about perfection. It is your ability to get up and try again (hopefully, within cost) that will demonstrate your commitment and strength as a consultant.

Seven: Stay in Your Lane

This is about staying focused and not drifting off in too many other directions. Sometimes it can be tempting for a consultant to get caught up with additional issues that are uncovered in the course of a primary engagement, even if these are tangential to the problem at hand. Resist the urge to lump every problem together or to remake yourself as a universal crusader. Unless you have a very lucrative consulting contract, chances are you have not been called to solve the problems of the world or offer solutions to every problem your client has. Staying in your lane is also about discipline and control. Establish boundaries. If necessary write them into the contract. There can only be one driver or project manager. Understand your role and stay focused. Encourage your client to do the same. Unless specifically invited (a rare feat), do not recast yourself as the client's CEO. As a consultant your duty is to provide clients with the proper guidance, motivation, and information. Stay in your lane and encourage others to do the same. This minimizes conflict and role strain.

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Eight: Due Diligence

There are no shortcuts to this rule. As many a consultant has learned to their detriment, the consequences of ignoring this rule can be painful in the extreme. Just as consultants bring their experience, training and commitment to each assignment, so too must they commit to a process of due diligence or the "discovery" process as the more legal minded might call it. Effective consulting is predicated on uncovering as many facts and details as possible. The idea with due diligence is to both seek out information that may assist the consulting process, as well as reduce the risk of being compromised by one's ignorance of pertinent facts. Ultimately, the emphasis on due diligence speaks to the issue of being a diligent consumer of information and more generally, one's consulting vocation. The cost of due diligence is usually assessed in terms of the time, focus and commitment made to specific client goals. However, the potential rewards are tremendous.

Conclusion

Serving effectively in consulting comes by way of learning how to be true to one's own purpose. This is a task that requires time, thought and steadfastness. Knowing which projects to decline will be equally as important as knowing which to accept. A successful consultant will ask themselves the tough questions in preparation for posing those same questions to their clients. Now that you have been called to the world of consulting, remain in tune with the original heartbeat of your business. Ask yourself why you were called to the vocation of consulting in the first place. Your answer will show you which track to remain on as you excel in your consulting practice.

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Putting Zing Back into Organizational Consulting

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This article is about the work consultants do with their clients, the way we think and talk with them and the way we think and talk with one another. Management and consulting grew up with a focus on the organization ("the zation"). We want consultants and their clients to pay attention to their organizing ("zing"). A variety of factors have made that distinction visible and a shift in paradigms desirable. One is awareness of the complexity of organizational problems. Another is a growing body of work on practice. Paying attention to zing means new possibilities for practice, but the shift comes at a price: rethinking what it means to be a consultant and changing the expectations of both clients and consultants.

Are You Thinking About Zing?

Does this story seem familiar? A senior vice-president (SVP) in a small corporation called me (Jennifer) for help. As part of a recent divisional reorganization, a unit had been newly created to deal with issues that had plagued his division for years. The new unit was in the process of getting its focus and vision, still figuring out what its work was, when there was a sense of increasing discord in the whole division. The reorganization had pulled people off the work they were doing. Everyone was feeling pinched and irritable.

To the SVP, the potential for conflict was rife and lines of communication were disintegrating. He worried that unless people learned how to deal with their disagreements, new silos would spring up that were worse than the ones the reorganization was designed to dismantle. He thought some kind of retreat would be just what the group needed. Together, we decided on a joint focus: making sense of the new structure that was in place and building skills around listening to one another and dealing with inevitable conflict. We picked a date, the client found a venue, and I bought my plane ticket.

The first day of the retreat was fantastic. The group was much less divided than I had feared and they were eager to learn new skills and tools. It was not until the end of the first day that I heard the murmurs about two of the members of the group, both from the newly created unit. By the end of the morning session on the second day, the animosity between these individuals was obvious. They interacted tersely, speaking in clipped, polite tones in front of the

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consultant. Each one looked as though, given the slightest provocation, he might swat the other. How had I missed this on day one? I mixed the units up on the first day, thinking that the problem was between units, not inside a single unit. This was a team building retreat after all. When we began to examine strategy, the units got together and only then did I see what the SVP knew all along. Now, with the level of anxiety in the room high, the easy banter of the day before was gone. The others were warily watching the two at the heart of the conflict. I took my client aside during a break and asked him to describe these two individuals. “They hate each other,” he said. They were both under advisement that their behavior was unacceptable. One of them, the supervisor of the other, has written up a behavior plan that the subordinate had to sign by the end of the retreat or be fired.

It was at this point, in the warm California sunshine with the entire division off site for two days that I realized what the purpose of the retreat should be. It was to deal with the ripple effect of these two people, who were openly hostile to one another, on the organizational culture and on their work. The animosity between the coworkers was not peripheral to the problems in the department; it was part of the root cause of the problems. Without attention in that direction, the retreat was not likely to be very useful. With this new-found knowledge, acquired too late to do any real good, I shuffled some things around, recreated some exercises and finished the retreat being both clearer about the problem and much less clear about my contribution to a potential solution.

New Ideas to Work With

What do you do if, like Jennifer, you realize the issue that had your attention or the problem they were working on was not what they were after? The moment of recognition that you are heading in the wrong direction, the “ah-ha” that something else is going on here, might not be as dramatic, but the contours of her tale are probably familiar. Certainly it is our impression that this happens frequently, not only in our own work but, listening to other consultants, in theirs as well.

Running into this scenario, a good consultant will probe beneath the surface, explore what went wrong, and vow not to be blindsided again. “Next time it’ll be different,” this good consultant might say. “Next time I’ll have more information going in.” Perhaps it is true that next time he will ask different questions and not be caught off guard in just the same way; but there are countless ways to be blindsided, especially if you believe your job is to identify and classify organizational problems so that you can find the right solutions. Consultants are often blindsided because they are, well, *blind* to key aspects of life at work.

This paper is about the work consultants do with their clients. It is about the way we think and talk with them; and it is about the way we think and talk with one another. In Jennifer’s story, a piece of information that the client did not know she needed was enough to reshape the intervention she thought he needed. Both client and consultant were busy doing what they do best: filtering out the noise, focusing on the most important pieces of data, and crafting a solution out of those pieces. This is often just the right thing to do and sometimes it is exactly wrong. We filter from the perspective of what we already know. What if that knowledge is insufficient? What if you are filtering out the wrong things and the gunk that gets left behind and discarded is actually what you want?

Our clients, especially our most successful clients, have been rewarded and promoted for being good (and often fast) at seeing a problem, classifying it and solving it. Consultants are also

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good at solving problems. Our assessment is that consultants often think they are hired to be *better* than their clients at solving problems; that is what they are there for. So one way of looking at Jennifer's story is that she was not as good at solving this problem as she could have been; or perhaps she was not as good at diagnosing the problem as she should have been. We are not, however, offering a lesson in how you can better classify or solve problems. Our argument is that the next move for consultants who want to improve their practices comes down to knowing when to shift paradigms. If we know how to do that for ourselves, we will be a lot further down the road in knowing what to do for our clients.

When a new idea comes out, consultants and leaders get excited about it and turn it into a fad, then discover that it is not as useful as they had hoped and they look about eagerly for the next idea and the next fad. This is an entirely human phenomenon and it tends to be misguided (like 9-year-olds struggling to believe in Santa Claus, we know it is a fantasy and somehow we do it anyway). A stream of relatively consistent new ideas in the organizational literature is pointing us towards a different vision of organizations. It also contains a deeply reverberant undertone that the work we are doing is inadequate for meeting the demands of organizations now. What should we make of this literature that includes communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), the role of the new professional (Schön, 1983), the learning organization (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Senge, 1990), and knowledge management (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Allee, 2003; Von Krog, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000)? Our response is that it is not a matter of debunking earlier ideas. The new literature shows that it is the *way* we treat the ideas and what we do with them that need debunking.

If we simply try to turn the ideas into another set of tools for our toolbox, we are likely to find that they are no more useful than the ones that have preceded them. If, on the other hand, we can begin to believe that they are calling us to develop new and different ways of thinking about organizations and new ways of talking about them, we may be able to shift out of our current (and limiting) problem-solving paradigm and into something more complex, though more expansive and with much greater potential for the work ahead of us.

The Zation and Zing

The gist of this paper is that there is a lens through which people can see a different, new story of how adults spend their working hours. With the story comes a new set of possible actions for consultants. The story is compelling and helpful, both from the perspective of diagnosis (What has gone wrong?) and prognosis (What will happen? Can we put it right? If so, how can we do it?). It is also a story of its time.

Until quite recently, perhaps the last 15-20 years, the story was simply not accessible. What has made it so is that during this time the ground of Organization Development (OD) has shifted, reflecting deeper shifts in Western thought and a new language has begun to emerge. We have to listen carefully in order to hear it, because our ears are not yet attuned to the ideas and distinctions of the new language. Once you begin to listen differently, you will recognize two distinctly different stories about what goes on in workplaces. Knowing that there are two stories, understanding how they differ and having an appreciation of what each is about, makes a whole range of new practices possible for consultants. If you go into organizations understanding both languages, you run less of a risk of being blindsided because you will be able to see things that were previously hidden from view.

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One story, the older familiar one, we call the *zation*. In this story a consultant is the expert whose job is to diagnose and fix problems. The problems are about the organi*zation*. Until recently, management theory and OD had just the one common story. Senior managers, administrators, and consultants talk to one another about structure, outcomes (efficiency is the goal), deliverables, a mission statement, and processes that you re-engineer. The story of the zation is based on the image of the organization-as-machine (see Morgan, 1986). Sometimes the zation goes wrong and when it does, it has to be fixed. That is where consultants come in. The structure, processes, and outcomes are *things* and consultants have tools and techniques for fixing them. Their practices revolve around restructuring, re-engineering work processes, downsizing, and building IT systems to capture and distribute the organization's knowledge. As Mintzberg and Van der Heyden (1999, p. 87) pointed out, if you "ask for a picture of the [organization]… chances are you'll be handed the company's org chart, with its orderly little boxes stacked atop one another." They pointed to the limited utility of the org chart, saying that it would "show you the names and titles of managers, but little else."

The other, newer story is about *zing*. Rather than a focus on the shape of the organization, in this story the major plotline is the action that takes place there, the organi*zing*. Mintzberg and Van der Heyden (1999) also described what happens when, instead of asking for a picture of the organization, you actually "take a look. In one corner, a group of people are huddled in debate over a vexing logistics problem. In another, someone is negotiating with a customer halfway around the world on the Internet. Everywhere you look, people and products are moving, crisscrossing this way and that" (p. 87). The authors remind us that "using an org chart to 'view' a company is like using a list of municipal managers to find your way around a city" (p. 87).

Zing is in its infancy, coming together from many ideas including communities of practice, the new professional, knowledge management, organization learning, dialogue, stewardship, and meaning making (or sense making) in organizations (Weick, 1995). The elements of the story are still a bit sketchy, but what is emerging is compelling enough to know that you have to pay attention. When you do, the role of consultants (and everyone else's role) is transformed in the most fundamental ways, from fixer to advisor and facilitator. You are dealing with how people interact to get things done. You are not looking for solutions but for practical ways to move forward. In this story, the consultant is a guide who helps people in organizations learn to think, see, and talk in different ways.

The views within these two stories are so different that if you are comfortable with the zation, an orderly structure managed from the top, you might not even be able to understand when people talk about zing, people interacting, discussing, negotiating, and debating with one another and in groups. Zing is work-life. It focuses on people: their interactions and relationships; their attitudes to each other and to what they are doing; and their values and perspectives (what matters, what is important, and how things ought to be done). Images of zing are motion, creativity, spontaneity, novelty, excitement, as well as frustration. By contrast, the only way to understand the zation is as something inert, rigid, and predictable (it has to be if someone controls it), like a large ship that moves only when the captain gives orders and only in the direction she intends.

The gap between the views of the zation and zing, we will see, is both the light and the shadow of the story of zing and is a major hurdle when it comes to shifting consulting practices to focus on organizing.

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Why is the Zation King?

Science has contributed enormously to our sense of the world and how to make sense of it. Just as our sense of order and structure about the liver and the lungs and about atoms and particles, changes what can be done for the human body, so do scientific metaphors help us understand organizational life. The first large-scale organizations were factories and there science showed its strength: find out how to break down the parts of the job, organize them into separate bits, and train people to perform those bits over and over again. Productivity rises and everyone has a Ford in the driveway.

These days, Fords are fabricated mostly by machines and the great majority of organizations, including government departments, PR firms, and homeowner's associations, provide intangible services, not things. Yet, the metaphor of organization-as-factory does not just linger, deeply etched into the social fabric, it remains the most prominent symbol of how things ought to be done at work. Consultants (and most management theories) attempt to break down a central issue such as leadership, team work, or innovation into discrete bits and create systems to improve those bits.

Consultants are equipped with a variety of instruments to measure and classify people, establish how they fit the organization and determine whether these parts will work together. They design performance-based pay structures and training programs to improve people's effectiveness and efficiency. They offer advice on how to administer performance evaluations, so that employees can get proper feedback and, if necessary, can raise their work from "acceptable" to "superior" and perhaps receive a pay increase as well. The consultant's job is to understand the organizational machine as well as possible, to find the bits that are out of alignment and to take appropriate steps to realign them (through training, restructuring, etc.).

The factory metaphor breaks down the complex organization into pieces that can be managed and manipulated, polished and honed. It makes it possible to design interventions that go after particular outcomes. We can master the zation and make changes to it. Over the years we have developed countless tools, processes, and measures to help us with this task. With the science of management, the zation became king. The only problem is that this focus does not actually work. The zation, to which everyone feels so attached, is (like the emperor) looking increasingly naked.

The Once and Future Zing

Zing is the activities, the doing, that keep people occupied every day at work. Zing is the finance group hammering out the fourth quarter budget; the project management team meeting to review progress on the first phase; the morning briefing of the 3rd precinct patrol squad; the shift change in the pre-natal wing; and the "crisis meeting" the client has called to review the terms of the contract.

Zing is the *process* of getting things (i.e., work) done and sharing knowledge: What happened on the last shift? Why is the client unhappy with the training that has been done? What were her expectations? How are people responding to the directive from head office about the restructuring? It is intensely social because it is about interacting with one another: talking, listening, squabbling, bickering, and joking on the phone, in motor cars, around lunch tables, in meetings, in offices and corridors, by e-mail and faxes.

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Zing, the motion of work, has always been there, but it has been hidden by the ideology of science, which does not do a good job of measuring things in motion. Now, because of a deep shift in Western thought and how people see the world, there is an opportunity to rediscover zing. If you look at a workplace through the eyes of those inside it – people with different interests, positions, responsibilities, and commitments – it becomes very hard to believe that you can say much of anything that has a zation-wide scope.

Zation to Zing is a Big Leap

Zing offers the possibility of new courses of action, including new approaches to old concerns, like improving the way organizations function. That is the light. The shadow of zing is that when you see things differently, it is difficult to hold onto beliefs and practices (e.g., management practices) you took for granted and accepted unquestioningly. For example, the organization, which once seemed real, turns out to have no substance. Where is that structure in organizations, except in the org chart on a printed page? Where is *Microsoft*, the *Department of Defense*, or the *American Psychological Association*? They are names above a door, in newspaper articles and on legal documents. Who is responsible? Who is accountable? Ask questions like these and the nature and purpose of organizational consulting begins to look very different. What is the possibility of whole systems change? Is any one person capable of managing change? Who actually owns the vision statement that is attributed to the organization? Why work at the top if that is only one place where people are organizing?

Consultants trained to see things through the zation lens with toolkits that equip them to deal with the zation problems, are likely to find the terrain of zing strange, even hostile. Jennifer's tale at the beginning of this article is about the consultant who, no doubt swayed by her client's perspectives and wishes, starts down the path of trying to fix the zation, but along the way discovers that the issues have to do with zing. Consultants start with the zation because they don't know any other way to begin. There is another way, strange and unfamiliar, and it requires reshaping what we think of as our own work as well as the work of our clients.

Where to Begin With Zing?

Practice is what people do. Wenger (2004) described practice as "the body of knowledge, methods, tools, which [people] share and develop together" (p. 3), which tells us that practice is social. People get things done by engaging one another. Their relationships matter. They make meaning together (about what is going on, what they ought to be doing, and who should be involved) and in the process, they share knowledge and learn from each other. In other words, they organize.

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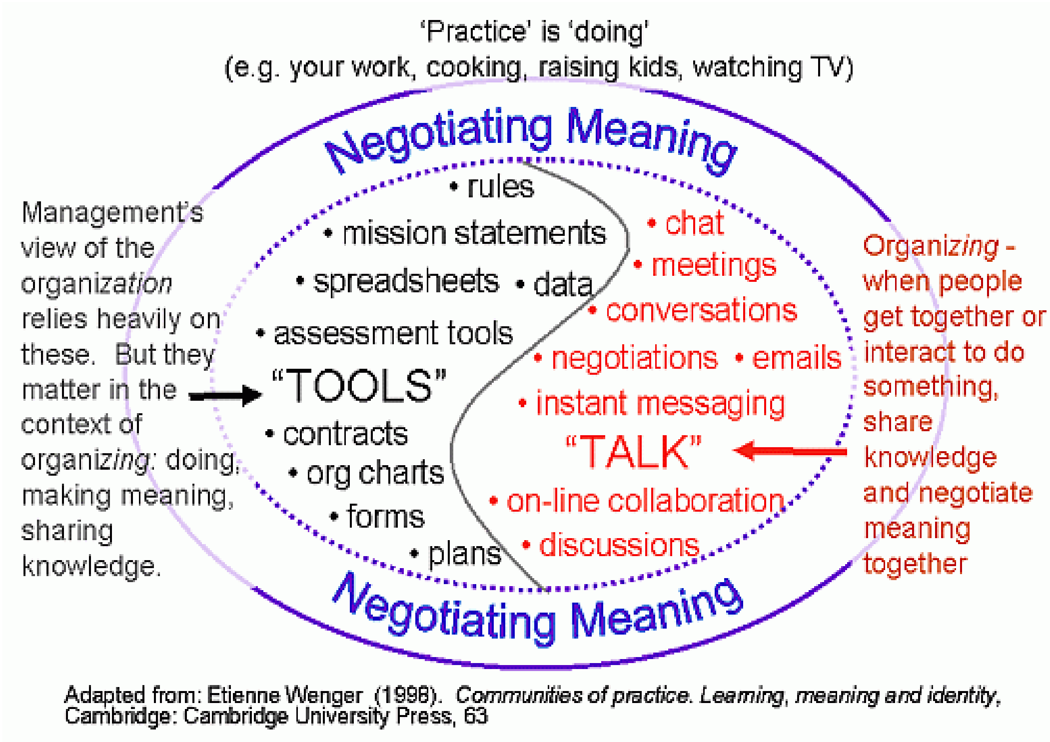

Figure 1. A view of practice: how people do work.

Suppose you are a doctor, teacher, marketing consultant, or realtor. While you are doing your work, whatever it happens to be, you will be interacting and talking to others. This is the "talk" part of practice (and of organizing). You engage other people in conversation. Along the way, you will also create "tools" to help you to work together. For example, doctors take notes, teachers draft schedules and marketing consultants create campaign mock-ups. Talk and tools are complementary and largely inseparable. When you realize this, there is something strangely ironic about consulting practices. Consultants, who could be seen as purveyors of practices, are myopic about practice. They do not see the importance of talk, the element that is the heart of practice. When people connect with one another, ask questions, tell stories, make jokes or try to explain their problems, their interactions create an invisible, fluid web of conversations. The web of conversations is the space of zing; the place in which people organize. If you were looking for the sources of zing, you would find them in their conversations. Yet conversations are generally outside the scope of consulting engagements.

Both consultants and managers prefer to focus on tools. Consulting practice is reflected in a maxims such as, "what gets measured gets done," which tells only half of the story of practice. Are professionals oblivious to their own organizing activities, unaware of how their relationships, conversations, and other interactions play out in their own work? More than 20 years ago, Donald Schön posed questions similar to these in his book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983). We are still waiting for professionals to take note. This may be why, when working with their clients, consultants are continually drawn to and led astray by the zation and the tools (restructuring, reengineering, and IT systems "to improve the transfer of data"), but they often seem oblivious to talk (conversations) and the zing.

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Mistaking Zing for the Zation: A Case Study

Being led astray by the zation is very common. To illustrate the problem, consider the *re*organi*zation* of a variety of United States federal government departments and agencies into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which began in 2002. This is a particularly striking example of how advisors and consultants rush to the zation, when they see problems like breakdowns in security or communication. When you understand the distinction between zing and the zation, you begin to realize that working on the zation is not going to solve those sorts of problems.

The DHS was created after official investigations identified "security failures" in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001. A document titled, "Department of Homeland Security," issued by President George Bush in June, 2002 says:

> Responsibilities for homeland security are dispersed among more than 100 different government organizations. America needs a single, unified homeland security *structure*…. [and t]he President proposes … the most significant transformation of the U.S. government in over half-century by largely *transforming and realigning* the current confusing patchwork of government activities *into a single department*… (emphasis added, p. 1)

The real puzzle is why anyone would think that amalgamating a number of huge hierarchical bureaucracies, with all the problems that come with complex zations, could streamline security, produce better communication and gain responsiveness, agility and accountability? Agility and accountability do not describe the zation (e.g., structures); they are about interactions, hence zing. In fact, everything you might consider a "security issue" ultimately has to do with zing; yet the most visible (and costly) response was *re*organi*zation* on a vast scale.

When we talk about "failures of communication," we include people's unwillingness or inability (for all sorts of different reasons) to share information. Perhaps they needed to interact with others in a different organization or even in the same organization who were not part of their reporting structure. "Boundaries to communication" do not arise simply because organizations have different names or different divisions. People may readily share knowledge within the same or between different organizations, if their relationships are collegial, if they are friendly, care for each other, have shared interests and speak the same language. On the other hand, if they are strangers, rivals (because they are competing with each other) or if there is animosity between them, they probably will not cooperate. It all depends on people's relationships or their attitudes towards one another.

Things go wrong in zing when people do not cooperate or collaborate because of bad relationships: a lack of trust, an absence of commitment or simple fear that they will lose their jobs if they do not do exactly what they are told. To understand what is going on, to make meaning of breakdowns, a consultant has to pay attention to people's relationships, to the meanings they attribute to their relationships and what is going on underneath, beneath the surface of those relationships. Knowing that people's relationships matter, not as the "soft stuff" that gets in the way, but as the core work that needs to get done, invites you to ask questions that have to do with our social needs, commitment, responsibility, care, accountability and trust.

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How does the consultant's tool box measure up to the challenges of zing? Organizing is practice; you cannot "reorganize" by redrawing the org chart, unless you treat relationships as your main responsibility. You cannot address communication breakdowns by purchasing an online collaborative tool, without understanding whether and why the people involved are unwilling to talk openly and share knowledge. The tools themselves never get to the problems of zing.

From this standpoint, consultants' preoccupation with things like org charts, software tools or process maps, is problematic when it distracts from the zing factors of people, their purposes, perspectives and attitudes to one another. That preoccupation mirrors the perspectives of people at the top "in charge" of organizations, whose roles and responsibilities revolve around the sustenance and protection of the zation. Of course, these leaders hire or approve the hiring of consultants and that makes the shift from the zation to zing more difficult, but still just as necessary. Otherwise, you are like the man who loses his car keys in a dark parking lot, but prefers to look for them under the nearest street light because he can see better there. The zation may be illuminating, but it is illuminating *things* that do not matter much for knowledge work, nor *practices* that do.

Consultants, Are You Ready For Zing?

Contemplating a change in consulting practices of the sort we have in mind, where you shift attention from the zation to zing, is an enormous leap that involves more than just retooling. In consulting, like all knowledge work, relationships matter. The way you show up is at least as important as the tools and techniques you have mastered. Your presence depends on your experience and the perspectives and approaches you bring, the way you talk to your clients about organizations and management and the way you engage other people. Becoming a zing-consultant is not primarily an intellectual accomplishment that involves learning new concepts. It involves a new presence, a different way of being in relationship with other people.

As a zation consultant, whether you are aware of it or not, you show up in a certain way, as an expert-cum-problem-solver. When they hire a consultant, this is what most clients expect to get, because it is the image of consulting that the profession has cultivated. On the one hand, it is going to be difficult to break this mould. On the other, there is a compelling practical reason for wanting to do so. The reason is that consultants are often expected to solve extremely tough problems (see Kahane, 2004), which managers may believe are beyond their abilities and which is why they hired the consultant in the first place.

If all the problems we encountered in organizations were like fixing a car that will not start, the expert-cum-problem-solver image would take consultants a long way. Fixing a car is a "tame problem." Fixing homeland security is not; it is a "wicked" one and, according to Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber (1973) who coined the distinction, wicked problems cannot be solved by experts. It is easy to see why if we go back to Jennifer's real problem, the animosity between two coworkers, which was a zing issue and a wicked problem. There are a few steps Jennifer or her client could have taken to solve the problem. One would have been to fire either or both of the people involved; or to send one to an overseas division, with the hope that he will get on with his coworkers there. As long as the two are working together, however, the problem will persist, unless their relationship changes. Jennifer could have worked with them on their relationship, coaching them either individually or together. The problem, however, (like with all zing

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problems) is in the way people interact and whether it is resolved depends on the people themselves.

Organizational issues are wicked problems, whether they are big (like homeland security) or small (like Jennifer's discovery of the troubles caused by personal animosities). Zation-oriented, problem-solving approaches will not resolve those problems; at least not in the sense of "making the problem go away." Yet consultants are still hired to deliver solutions. Leaders expect their advisors to have answers. What is a consultant to do? What might she offer? Here is a simple framework for practicing zing-consulting.

A Framework for Practicing Zing-Consulting

The first thing she might offer is a new perspective. That may sound wishy-washy but, given the complexity of the issues they are dealing with and the fact that their zation lenses lend themselves to myopia, having access to new zing perspectives on problems (and remember that is not the same as offering solutions) can be a revelation to their clients. It may be the most important thing consultants can do for their clients. Initially, this is not what clients will expect, but no matter what they might believe, while the zation is the focus of consulting interventions, they are not getting solutions anyway, only temporary fixes at best (the DHS reorganization is a sobering reminder of this). It is important that everyone begin to understand that the predicament is dealing with complex zing problems. To resolve those, you deal with the issues where they arise and focus on how people organize. It does not help to pretend that someone somewhere possesses magic that can make the whole zation better.

The work of dealing with zing problems is in making meaning of the wicked problem, with whoever has a stake in it and can influence the outcome. So the second thing a zing-consultant might do is to identify the stakeholders and broaden the range of constituents who will participate with her in resolving the issues. To do this she will have to get permission from her clients to broaden the scope of the consulting engagement, sometimes to include people outside the organization itself, because zing problems do not fall neatly into departments or divisions or even organizations. Zing is based on social networks and relationships and those do not observe formal boundaries. When people organize across formal boundaries like departmental ones, consulting practices have to cross them too. In our experience, your efforts to open up the consulting engagement, to work with a larger number of constituents, usually run counter to the prevailing mindset of control. Clients often say, "We don't want too many people to know about the problem." If the client's view is that only a few people need to be involved, but the issue looks bigger, you will have to persuade him to see things differently.

A third, crucial repositioning for the zing consultant is in seeing that consulting involves working *with*, not for, the client. The Latin root of the word "consult" means "counsel." Although we talk a good deal about consulting relationships, much of today's management and organizational consulting work is best described as a transaction, not a relationship. The problem-solving zation orientation lends itself to transactions-based practice. "You sell us a solution; we pay you for it." You might just as well be selling donuts or shoes. Zing-consulting is mostly about making meaning of the problem and that demands a reflective approach. The zing-consultant has to develop and negotiate non-standard consulting contracts oriented to building and sustaining the client-consultant relationship, rather than to delivering a specific product by a given date.

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Something that may not be obvious is that when the heart of your consulting practice is a meaning-making relationship, rather than a problem-solving transaction, the consultant has relinquished the power that is implicit in the claim that, “I can solve your problem if you pay my fee.” Which is why, as we have noted, when you consult with zing, you show up differently; open to learning rather than having the answers.

Conclusion

What it all comes down to is that a new perspective on the work we do might change the way we work, which might in turn, change the way we help our clients. As the world gets more complex and people in organizations are asked to do more and more knowledge work, people inside those organizations need to change. That means that we as consultants, need to change what we offer to our clients. A focus on zing, sitting next to our more standard focus on the zation, offers us a whole new way to view those problems we are most often called in to help solve. It allows us to resist the calls to “fix” problems we know are too wicked to fix and to show our clients a new way to think about the work they do (as we ourselves are doing our work in a new way).

We offer ideas to help you begin to move in this direction, but what is really required is that you tilt your head just slightly to change the view that you see. Paying attention to people and the work they do allows new questions, new actions and new hope for consultants who are tired of walking away from organizations, knowing that they have not done what they set out to do or that the solutions offered will never be well implemented. We all want to be better at what we do, because what we do is critically important to our clients and to the world those clients live in. Feeling more successful and making a bigger difference might help us put the zing back into consulting after all.

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Growing Pains: A Learning Process for Rebranding and Repositioning Your Consulting Practice

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Salmon Consulting

In this article, the author shares her personal experience of the process of evaluating and rebranding her consulting practice. Looking back over 7 years of experience as an independent consultant, she explores the importance of learning, drivers, rebranding and repositioning, and lessons learned. This article also provides practical tips for effective rebranding and repositioning.

The Journey So Far: Opportunities and Obstacles

The year 2000 marked a significant turning point in my career as I reviewed my personal and professional development plan; I began to think about a career as an independent consultant. At the time, I was director of strategic developments for Talent and Skills 2000 (TS2K), a pan-London social regeneration project that focussed on developing the employability and entrepreneurial skills of unemployed young people. In recognition of my work, I was among a select group of women awarded the title, "Women of the Year," at the Millennium Festival of Women's Work. In 2001, I was a finalist in the "European Union of Women of Achievement Award" for "contributions to pan-European understanding and progress, and for providing inspiration to others." This became a great springboard for launching my consulting career. It was one of the timeliest moments in my career. As Ravi I. Jayakaran (2008) said, "The reality is that opportunity will usually occur but once in a life time."

Taking Stock

So what were my unique selling points? It was a rich blend of values, passion, a track record of success, as well as experience in strategic development in the arts and not-for-profit sector. My vision was to help individuals and organisations realize their fullest potential. At the time, I recognized that there was a demand for my talent and skills, as well as opportunities to provide services through existing networks and relationships. Having sought professional advice, I decided not to invest in marketing at that stage. However, I commissioned the design of a

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business card using the description, “Salmon Consulting,” followed by, “Strategic and Organisational Performance Consultant.” I still use the same business card and it continues to create the same engaging response from people, “What do you do?”

During the first 18 months of consulting (2001 to 2003), I had three major assignments and the success of one of the assignments created the opportunity to lead the organization that I was helping to establish. Being values driven and passionate about the vision and objectives of the organization, I agreed. I had not considered the implications or impact that the decision would have on my plans for Salmon Consulting. Having put my consulting practice on hold, my advice to anyone who is seduced into an executive role after launching an independent consulting career would be to pause and seriously think about it. Consider the benefits to you and your consulting career. If you must, do it for a fixed time with clear objectives, but first get professional advice.

In 2004, when considering the re-launch of my consulting career, I assessed the situation. The benefits to me were the development of an incredibly rich experience, connection to a network of new and existing stakeholders and relationships to individuals and agencies that were committed to supporting my consulting career. As one corporate executive said at the time, “Consulting opportunities … better play to your experience and relationship skills.”

Over the past 3 years, I have developed my niche through providing consulting and interim management services to public and third sector organizations and have built a reputation for helping individuals and organizations improve their performance through “learning,” in order to achieve their individual and organizational objectives. The added dividend for me was an annual increase of revenue and profits targets.

While leading my consulting practice, I have also been headhunted and have explored a select number of job opportunities. While I made it to many final interviews, the honest reality is that the jobs were never for me. My eclectic career and experience of different industry sectors in executive, non-executive and consulting roles did not always work in my favour.

While the preparation for these job interviews was demanding and at times a distraction from developing my consulting work, they were great learning opportunities that enabled me to showcase my talent and skills to potential clients.

Personal and Professional Development and Learning

One of the means to developing a successful consulting practice is to engage in continuous personal and professional development. Capitalize on every opportunity to learn**.** A year ago, acting on the advice of a respected director from an executive search company, I decided to work with a coaching consultant to:

- Assess my career in terms of: “Where I have come from? Where I am now? Where I want to be in the long term?”
- Explore my values, vision, strengths, motivation and potential areas for development;
- Make a decision about where I would like to be in the long term and the options for achieving this;
- Shape my resume and present myself in the market place.

At the end of the 4-month process, there was a mass of evidence from a range of sources, including feedback from past and current clients, results of self-assessment tools and a track of

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achievements to support my decision to invest in the development and growth of my consulting practice. Having invested in leading and developing individuals and organizations, it was time for me to focus on developing and leading myself. However brilliant you are at developing others, you cannot do it effectively for yourself by yourself. This is something that I have learnt and have acted on very early in my career. Always seek support and help from those whom you trust and where there is mutual respect.

Rebranding and Repositioning

I commissioned the services of a marketing and communication specialist to help contexualise and facilitate the rebranding and repositioning of my consulting practice. I had previous experience of working with this consultant on the rebranding of a logo for one my clients and liked her approach. I also trusted her judgement.

My principal objective for rebranding was to maximise on accomplishments and create a compelling future for my consulting practice that would enable it to develop and grow over the next three to five years. I wanted the new brand to reflect what was uniquely special about me, what made me the most desirable choice and what I could do differently to create the maximum impact through helping and supporting individuals and organizations.

The outcome and impact of the work from my "Portfolio of Professional Practice," as well as coaching sessions were part of the preparation process. I agreed to an initial two sessions that were designed to help clarify what I wanted in terms of identifying my professional identity and brand, my core messages, as well as facilitating my move from consultant to consultancy.

The first issue I explored as part of this rebranding exercise was the brand name, "Salmon Consulting" and the title, "Strategic and Organisational Performance Consultant." These terms were relatively unknown in terms of my professional identify, often raising questions about what I actually do. Professionally, I am known as Maureen Salmon. When I first started consulting, I would not have considered using "Maureen Salmon" as my professional identify or brand. Yet, it has evolved into my professional identity.

As part of the rebranding and repositioning process, I researched the name Maureen. Maureen is a name that has new meaning. To illustrate, it is used in a PR campaign http://www.hellomaureen.co.uk/ that exemplifies positive images of Maureen. The British Formula 1 racing driver Lewis Hamilton tells the story of the van that his father bought to take the family on his racing tours when he was a child. His mother named it Maureen. This for me indicates "routes to success."

It is ironic that I am now known professionally as Maureen Salmon. I realized that who I am as an individual matters to clients and they clearly defined me in terms of my values, interests and strengths. This has proven to be an ideal base on which to build my professional business model. I have not yet made the decision whether to include "Maureen" as part of my new brand name, even though my name has been a strong brand image for my existing clients. The question I needed to ask was what my name would mean to new clients, markets and potential associates?

The second issue I explored was service provision and delivery. I offer a broad range of services, which are very much a reflection of my eclectic career background and the need to be flexible in order to meet the needs of clients. Moving forward, I intended to hone in on the services that are in line with my unique selling points.

The third issue was how to make the transition from consulting to consultancy. As part of the process, I researched and reviewed a number of web sites of women who worked as

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independent consultants, but who ran consultancies where they worked with associates. The use of my first name also raised the issue of revealing ones gender identity and whether this helps or hinders ones business development and growth.

Since I started the work on rebranding, I have won a contract to design, develop and deliver an international leadership development programme. This is a special assignment that combines my strategic and leadership development skills. The learning from this assignment will help to shape future services for leadership development nationally and internationally.

The impact of the rebranding process has so far been a positive driver for action and prioritization of my consulting practice. This demonstrates that you can begin to reap the benefit of your development investment from the start of the process and that the benefit is not something that will magically appear only at the end of the process.

Core Actions

As I go forward, my core actions for completing this rebranding and repositioning process will include:

- Developing a new business model and business plan with a menu of services with related strategies in marketing/communication, revenue and profits growth;
- Expanding my "external" core messages to reflect vision, current social, cultural economic and political trends;
- Designing a new logo based on my personal brand that capitalizes on my unique selling points;
- Designing and launching a new web site.

Learning Points and Practical Tips for Rebranding and Repositioning

During this process, I have learnt many important lessons that helped to increase my confidence and enthusiasm for rebranding and repositioning, but it is not an easy or "instant" process. Here are some practical tips for rebranding and repositioning:

1. *Mindset shift*
   A mindset shift entails becoming adept at giving professional advice and being schooled in the art of facilitation. It involves a high degree of creativity, innovation and cultivation of a visionary spirit.

2. *Continuous personal and professional development*
   In order to ensure continuous development, a high level of self-awareness and self-assessment is needed.

3. *Quality time*
   Quality time is essential in order to critically reflect and learn from one's own and other people's experiences, both positive and negative.

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4. *Focus is important*
   During the process, be prepared to say no to opportunities that don't play to your strengths or fit into your development plans.

5. *Deep understanding of the external environment*
   Develop a deep understanding of the external environment, including existing and new clients, competitors, consulting/consultancy markets and the wider social, cultural, economic and political environment.

6. *In-depth understanding of existing and new clients*
   Understanding your clients is important if you are to not simply meet, but exceed expectations.

7. *Discipline*
   Discipline is reflected in developing a plan of action that includes milestones and completion of deadlines.

8. *Review and Refresh*
   The consulting market is over-crowded and is constantly changing, so be prepared to continuously review and refresh your brand and market position.

My final word of advice to anyone wanting to go this route is to be bold, take a calculated risk and focus on the outcome and impact of the fresh brand.

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She has a Master of Arts in Arts Management from City University London and a Professional Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher and Professional Education from the Institute of Education, University of London. She is a member of the Institute of Business Consulting, an associate member of the Chartered Management Institute and a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

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Lean Time Pursuits: Becoming a Better Consultant (and Person) on Your Off Days

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How can consultants use the time between consulting engagements more productively? Those who learn to view the professional and personal elements of life holistically can find many opportunities to strengthen relationships, sharpen skills, and achieve balance, allowing time for everything that is important to us: family, work, community, and spiritual needs.

Whether you are a consultant practicing on your own or heading up a small firm, you will probably experience lean times in between engagements when the phone does not ring and no new work is coming your way. It is up to you whether this will be a stressful time or a productive time. The way you view life as a whole can make a difference in how you handle these lean times. The more holistic your view of life, the better consultant and person you will become. Who we are and what we bring to others is shaped by all that we do, not just by our paid, professional endeavors. You can enrich your business acumen by strengthening your relationships and sharpening your skills.

Consider that consultants do not have “professional” lives and “personal” lives but *whole* lives. Work is not the good part of our lives and non-work the bad part. The two domains work together to make up our whole lives. Once we understand this concept, we can use our lean times productively, enhance our flexibility, and create synergy that strengthens all our endeavors. When we stop compartmentalizing our lives into work and non-work domains, we achieve balance that allows us to enjoy the intensity of each moment and tend to everything that is important to us: our families, work, communities, and spiritual needs.

We plan our work, but we neglect to plan our lives. Right now, while the phone is not ringing, is the perfect time to map out a strategy for achieving the balance that will help us become not only better consultants, but better parents, spouses, friends and community members. Here are some ideas to help you start framing your strategic thinking.

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1. *Begin with deep self-assessment*

   Ask yourself what you want to accomplish both personally and professionally. How do you want to allocate your time among your roles as consultant, parent, spouse, friend, and community member? What are your priorities?

2. *Think about how you can reach your life goals through your work*

   Ask yourself what consulting work you want to do. Write down what your ideal consulting work would look like in five years. Once you have identified the work you want to do, ask yourself what work you are ready and able to do. Do some market research and talk with other consultants to find out what work is available. Identify what you need to learn in order to do the ideal work you have identified. Start reading and studying.

3. *Adopt an abundance mentality*

   View slow times as a gift. Spend quality time with loved ones and friends. Catch up on chores around the house that you have not had time to do. These activities can help lessen the stress and anxiety that accompany lean times. While a certain amount of stress keeps your adrenaline flowing and provides a sense of urgency, try to manage your stress in a way that creates energy instead of anxiety and paralysis.

4. *Learn to savor each moment and do things when your energy and motivation levels are high*

   This might include doing market research early on Saturday morning, writing an article for a consulting journal, reading a novel or going for a walk. Rigidly allocating time for activities such as exercise or spending time with your parents may help you manage your busy schedule, but it can also detract from the quality and enjoyment of your experiences.

5. *Focus on your strengths*

   Focusing on your strengths may provide you with your greatest growth opportunities. We sometimes put our strengths on auto pilot, because we think we are doing so well. As a result, our attention may have become dulled in these areas. You may become so dependent on your model that you stop hearing your clients' concerns. Acknowledge your skills and then learn more about them. The energy and motivation flowing from your strengths can help you identify options that you may not have considered and help you keep your skills on track.

6. *Think of ways you can make yourself visible through paid and non-paid pursuits*

   Use these activities to sharpen your skills, develop new capabilities, and market them to potential new clients. You might:

   - Speak at civic organization functions;
   - Lead a workshop within your local community;

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- Publish articles about your experiences and aspirations;
- Present papers at national conferences;
- Meet with other consultants to gain new perspectives;
- Offer to train others in subject areas that interest you;
- Take a class or research new areas of prospective new consulting assignments.

7. *Consider new marketing tools that you have not tried before*
   Think about different ways potential clients can experience you. These might include networking, developing products like training materials, teaching, print interviews, print and electronic newsletters, trade association leadership, radio interviews, television appearances or developing your own Web site with chat rooms.

8. *Spend time developing your emotional intelligence*
   This is a core competency that all professionals need to continually upgrade. Learning to handle your emotions while talking and listening carefully to people will enhance your relationships with your clients, colleagues, family, and friends.

9. *Consider how you will maintain balance between your personal and professional goals when things begin to turn around and the phone starts ringing*
   As your thoughts are consumed by business strategy, your competitive position, cost and quality, client loyalty and market dynamics, do not forget that the other aspects of your life deserve equal attention. Decide now how you will maintain your relationships and tend to the needs of your family, friends, and community. Make sure that you are not used up in the pursuit of your ambitions. Find ways to reenergize so that you can do the work you love and participate in the life you want for yourself and others.

Lean times do not have to be about stress and high anxiety. They can be a time to strengthen relationships, enhance skills, discover new interests, and make contacts that will generate work you want to do. All the different roles and aspects of your life can work together to shape your personal direction if you allow them to. The work you do during lean times can enhance all areas of your life. When you look in the mirror you may see not just a better consultant whose phone is ringing with new opportunities, but a fulfilled parent, spouse, friend, and community member.

About the Author

Cynthia C. Hargis has 24 years of experience as a higher education administrator. She has spent the past 17 years working with education program administrators in the areas of communication, organizational change, mentoring relationships, teambuilding, conflict resolution and negotiation, stress management, and wellness through balanced living.
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