

# **SO YOU WANT TO BE A CONSULTANT? (Or Maybe Just Thinking About It)**

**Presented to the Orange County Chapter  
American Institute of Chemical Engineers  
February 26, 2002**

## ***Understanding Today's Job Market, How Did it Get So Bad?***

### **Classical Company Structure**

1. Understanding the pyramid structure
2. Upward movement within the company into management
3. Retention of experienced employees to build knowledge base
4. Pride in company operations and products
5. Maintain internal R&D programs for product development
6. Departure of employees due to retirement
7. Departure of employees to seek other opportunities

### **Challenges to the Classical Company Structure**

1. Price becomes the primary selling point
2. Disappearance of quality service
3. Company products are seen as a commodity
4. Pressure to perform in the short term
5. Need to reduce costs to stay competitive
6. Pressure of globalization, i.e. cheap foreign labor

### **Company Responses to Challenges in the Market Place**

1. Company mergers to cut costs and share resources
2. Elimination of employees in non-critical or duplicative positions
3. Running the company with as few employees as possible
4. The disappearance of the company as a warm place to be
5. New adversarial relationship between employees and their employer
6. Worker has become a commodity and a liability to company's profits
7. Wrongful-termination lawsuits
8. Morale suffers

## ***Adapting to the high-speed, fast-paced, global, zero-security workplace!***

### **How to Cope with Today's Company Structure**

1. Think of yourself as a professional athlete with two careers
2. Accept the lack of security in the workplace as a long-term situation
3. Question whether you want to be promoted to an unsatisfying job
4. Stay positive about yourself and your career
5. See today's rapid job turnover as an opportunity
6. Look for opportunities that are good for your self esteem
7. Realize that the only security is in building your own business

### **The Opportunity for the Consultant in Today's Job Market**

1. Provide expertise lost through reductions in staff
2. Provide services that are not needed on a regular basis
3. Reduce the number of employees needed to run a company
4. Catch mistakes before they become costly to fix
5. Provide valuable insight for younger company employees
6. Avoid fines from regulatory agencies
7. Provide a significant cost savings to the company

## ***Before you Take the Plunge into Consulting...***

### **Deciding if Consulting Would be a Good Career Choice for You**

1. Do you have personal relationships with several potential clients?
2. Do you know people or companies that you could network with to find business?
3. Do you have the self-discipline to work on your own?
4. Do you have the skills to market your services?
5. Would customers think of you as an expert in your field?
6. Can you survive a drop in your income until your business is established?
7. Can you obtain good health insurance at a reasonable cost?
8. Do you have the support of your family?

### **Picking an Area to Consult In**

1. Draw a flow diagram showing the decision-making process for a variety of activities within companies in your field
2. At what points do they use outside consultants, engineering firms or equipment vendors to help make decisions or provide expertise?
3. Where are companies usually lacking full-time staff to help make decisions?
4. Talk to successful consultants and find out what they are doing
5. Is there an area that personally interests you?

### **Things to Do Before Launching your Consulting Career**

1. Develop personal relationships with potential clients
2. Join a company that allows you to develop personal relationships with the customers
3. Become more actively involved in marketing and sales to meet potential clients
4. Build your personal consulting “tool box”
5. Sharpen your interviewing skills
6. Sharpen your writing skills
7. Sharpen your public-speaking skills
8. Learn how to look successful
9. Join committees or groups that will raise your profile
10. Present papers at conferences or author articles in journals
11. Set aside money to supplement your income
12. Become a professional engineer
13. Take the “Would I buy this computer test?”

### **Building your Personal Consulting “Tool Box”**

1. Technical reference library
2. Regulatory reference library
3. Vendor catalogs or buyer guides
4. Electronic drawing files
5. Short-cut calculation methods
6. Electronic copies of forms, calculation sheets, standards, etc.
7. Several resumes and project case histories
8. Anything that will make your work faster

### ***Taking the “Would I Buy This Computer” Test...***

#### **Would I Buy This Computer Test?**

1. How long has it been on the market?
2. Does it have the latest technology?
3. Does it have good reviews?
4. How easy is it to use?
5. Will it help me get ahead at work?
6. What happens if I experience problems?
7. How quickly can I get service?
8. Can I afford it?
9. Does anyone I know own one?

### **Would I Hire This Consultant?**

1. How old are they?
2. Do they know the latest technologies?
3. What do other people say about them?
4. How easy will they be to work with?
5. Will they help me get ahead at work?
6. What happens if they give me bad advice?
7. Are they available to help right now?
8. How expensive are their rates?
9. Who are they working for right now?

### ***Improving your Chances of Success...***

#### **Improving your Chances of Succeeding as a Consultant**

1. Ask your employer if you can work part time
2. Develop a detailed business plan
3. Ask potential clients if they are happy with the consultants they are using now
4. Dress like your potential clients
5. Bundle your services with successful service companies or individuals
6. Identify companies that have restructured and lost experienced people
7. Develop a web page that people will find helpful and informative
8. Ask related organizations to post a link to your web page
9. Join associations that your potential clients are members of
10. Provide free assistance to these associations
11. Provide free “get acquainted meeting” to potential clients

#### **Supplementing your Consulting Income**

1. Work part time for your old employer
2. Work part time for temporary employment agencies
3. Work part time for any company that needs your help

#### **The Art of Networking to Find Clients**

1. Bundle your services with other consultants, equipment vendors or service organizations to help their sales
2. Offer finder’s fees to equipment vendors who work on commissions
3. Work on solving problems that you know are common to your area of consulting
4. Ask satisfied customers to recommend people for you to call
5. Attend meetings to find out what potential clients are worried about, then come up with a solution
6. Let potential customers know that you have solutions to problems they are or will be faced with

### **Mistakes to Avoid**

1. Work on projects outside your area of expertise
2. Depend on a few good clients for all of your work
3. Stop marketing yourself
4. Not reading journals and attend meetings to stay current
5. Not being available during business hours
6. Not keeping good records and correspondence files
7. Taking clients for granted
8. Being under-funded at the beginning
9. Starting business without good business plan

### **Setting up Your Home Office**

1. Two phone lines, one for the fax machine
2. High-speed internet connection, DSL or cable
3. Phone service with call-forwarding and voice mail
4. Cell phone
5. Reference library
6. Drawing files
7. Computer with printer and scanner
8. Comfortable desk and chair
9. Good lighting
10. Web page for advertising your business
11. Reliable e-mail