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The opinions expressed by the participants of the entrepreneurs are their own. This excerpt is part of the second-quarter Launch Kit Entrepreneur.com, which explores the fundamentals of the launch across a wide range of industries. In Start Your Own Consulting Business, Entrepreneur Press staff and writer Eileen Figure Sandlin explain how you can start a profitable consulting business, regardless of whether your consulting business will focus on HR placement, computer troubleshooting, or anything else you can dream of. In this edited excerpt, the authors offer tips on providing customer service that will help you land a new business over and over again. To succeed as a consultant, you must do your best to set yourself apart from the competition. You want to give your clients a reason to say: I am very glad that I chose this consultant. One way to make sure it is to provide the best customer service on the planet. One great way to do this is by communicating with your client often about whether his or her expectations are being met and if the project develops at will. At the end of the first month of the project, I always ask my clients whether they think the value is achieved, said California coach and coach Susan Bock, who is president of the Association of Professional Consultants. I will give them a full refund and will not go on if I determine that it is not possible to deal with their unrealized expectations. Fred Elbel, a web design and computer consultant in Lakewood, Colorado, takes a different approach to customer service: He actually gives information for free as a way to make a favorable impression. I give a lot of free advice to clients - in fact, sometimes too much, he admits. This can be information like a backup computer system time. But what happens is that customers remember how I helped them, and they will call me when they don't have the time or skills to solve other problems. To succeed as a consultant, you need to develop a win-win style of customer service. This means that both you and your client should consider everything you do as something positive, a means of moving forward and/or a way to solve the problem. Your ultimate success depends on your ability to use your internal resources and strengths, as well as your ability to do your best to solve your customers' problems and problems and be positive and energetic while you do so. When you do these things and you and your client will come out winners. While problem solving and problem solving are certainly a core consultant function, there is another important task consultants need to take, says Melinda Patricia, a Virginia communications consultant One thing that I highly recommend, she says, is to find out what the power structure in this organization is and get to know the support staff as well as your contact person. Understanding Understanding help you make better decisions and give better advice. It will also help you find out who is coming to the person when you need input or a decision made in connection with the project you are handling. Successful consultants live these 10 credo of customer service:1. Accept full responsibility for your actions. Focus on doing your best, no matter how good, bad, or indifferent your client may be.2 Develop a sense of optimism and positive expectations. Start expecting the best from yourself, and soon the people around you will see what powerful power you represent. Remember that optimists are just people who have learned to discipline their attitude in their favor3. Motivate yourself to have never give up style. Make your customers feel like you're there for them no matter what. In other words, go beyond the responsibility to fulfill your end of the agreement.4 Continue to improve your communication skills. When communication fails, it causes chaos. Practice your listening skills. Sometimes customers may not understand what they want, so ask questions to make sure you understand what's expected of you.5 Believe in yourself. When you have a high level of self-esteem, the sky is the limit6. Be flexible. Any consultant who can maintain a high degree of flexibility will get a good reputation and will have no problem attracting new clients.7 Set goals. If you have an action plan with certain goals in mind, your goals will be easier to achieve. Remember that if you don't plan, you plan to fail.8 Organize yourself. This will impress your clients and help you become a more successful consultant. Look for a few solutions to the problem. You should also always look for creative ways to solve these problems. Walt Disney, a true visionary, if ever there was one, was a firm believer in the power of brainstorming; You must be, too!10. Be happy! When you are happy, those around you will be happy too. Secrets consulting SuccessErin Blaskie, author and expert on Internet marketing, offers these suggestions in order to become a successful consultant: Implementing ideas quickly. Don't hold back, and don't dilly-dally with details or try to be perfect. Get ideas out there and customize them as you go. Use your strengths, and delegate the rest. Don't try to do everything yourself. Let's face it - to be successful, you have to learn that you are not the best person to do everything in your business. Find the right people to help you and they will pay for themselves. Just do what you love. If you take on a job you don't like, you run the risk of doing a bad job or taking light years to complete the task. No one is in mind and should not do everything. Rather, we have to do the work we're passionate about, that it makes us successful. Work only with people who energize you. Find clients who inspire who embrace your talents and who how you work. Limit overheads. Stay in the green and you will become more successful. Think about how much less stress you'll have when money isn't a problem! Be generous. Do not be afraid to give away information or help your fellow businessman for nothing in return. It feels great and people will remember you. The opinions expressed by the participants of the entrepreneurs are their own. Editor's note: This article was an excerpt from our Consulting Business Launch Guide, available from an entrepreneurial bookstore. The dictionary identifies a consultant as an expert in a particular field who works as an advisor to either the company or another person. Sounds pretty vague, doesn't it? But if you haven't been in a coma for the last decade, you probably have a good idea of what a counselor is. Businesses certainly understand what consultants are. In 1997, U.S. companies spent just over \$12 billion on consulting. According to Anna Flowers, a spokeswoman for the Association of Professional Consultants in Irvine, California, the association has recently noticed an increase in calls about getting information from people who want to get into the business. The market opens up to the business consulting arena, Flowers said. Melinda, an independent consultant in Arlington, Va., believes that more people are getting into consulting because technology has made it easier to do so. The same technology that helped me be successful as a consultant made it easier for others to do the same, she says. The job of a consultant is to consult. No more, no less. It's that simple. There's no magic formula or secret that makes one consultant more successful than another. But what separates a good consultant from a bad consultant is passion and pursuit of excellence. And - oh yes - a good consultant should be aware of the subject he or she is advising in. You see, in this day and age, everyone can be a consultant. All you need to discover is your particular gift. For example, are you very comfortable working around computers? Do you keep up with the latest software and hardware information that seems to be changing almost daily? And are you able to take that knowledge that you have gained and turn it into a resource that someone would be willing to pay the money for? Then you won't have a problem working as a computer consultant. Or are you an expert in fundraising? Maybe you've worked in nonprofits in fundraising, marketing, public relations or sales, and over the years you've discovered how to raise money. As the man who turned a decade of fundraising success into a lucrative business, I can tell you that fundraising consulting is really a growing industry. Things to consider before becoming a consultantWhat certification and special licensing will be Have to? Depending on your profession, you may need a special certification or special license before you can start working as a consultant. For example, fund-raising consultants do not need special certification, although you can be certified through the National Society of Fundraising Managers. And in some states, you may need to register as a professional fundraising consultant before starting a business. Can I become a consultant? Before you dangle your pebbles and hope that customers start to beat your door down to hire you, make sure you have the qualifications you need to get the job done. If you want to be a computer consultant, for example, make sure you are up to date in the knowledge department with all the trends and changes in the computer industry. Am I organized enough to be a consultant? Do I like to plan my day? I'm an expert when it comes to time management? You had to answer yes to all three of these questions! Do I love the network? Networking is critical to the success of any type of consultant today. Start building your network of contacts immediately. Do I set long-term and short-term goals? And they let me become a consultant? If your goals don't align with the time and energy needed to open and successfully build a consulting business, then rethink before making any moves in that direction! Top 20 consulting business is thriving todayThough you can be a consultant in almost any field these days, now the top 20 consulting businesses include:1. Accounting: Accounting is what every business needs, no matter how big or small. Accounting consultants can help a business with all its financial needs2. Advertising: This type of consultant is usually hired by the business to develop a good strategic advertising campaign3. Audit: From consultants who check utility bills for small businesses to consultants who do basic work for telecommunications firms, audit consultants enjoy the fruits of their work4. Business: Know how to help a business make a profit? If you have a common sense business, then you will do well as a business consultant. After computer consulting, people in this area are the next most sought-after.5. Business writing: Everyone knows that most businessmen have problems when it comes to writing a report - or even a simple memo. Enter business consultant writing and everyone is happy!6. Career counseling: More and more people are being victims of corporate cuts, career consultants will always be in demand. Career consultants their clients in a profession or job that will help them be happy and productive as an employee7. Communications: Communications consultants specialize in helping employees of both large and small businesses improve communication with each other, which eventually business is more efficient and running smoothly8. Programmer: From software to hardware and everything in between, if you know computers, your biggest problem will be not having enough hours a day to meet your customers' demands!9. Editorial services: From newsletter preparation to corporate annual reports, consultants who are editorial experts will always be evaluated. Executive Search/Headhunter Firms: While it's not for everyone, there are people who love to find talent for employers. Gardening: In the last decade, demand for gardening consultants has blossomed (pun intended) into a \$1 million-a-year business. Not just companies hiring gardening consultants; so are people who are too busy to take care of their gardens at home.12. Grants: Once you learn to write a grant offer, you can name your price.13 Human Resources: As long as businesses have people's problems (and they always will), consultants in this field will enjoy an endless supply of corporate clients, both large and small. (People's problem prevention programs may include training employees to get along with others, respecting and even preventing violence in the workplace.) 14. Insurance: Everyone needs insurance and everyone needs an insurance consultant to help them find the best plan and price for them.15 Marketing: Can you help your business write a marketing plan? Or do you have ideas that you think will help promote the business? If so, why not try your hand at it as a marketing consultant?16. Wage management: Everyone should receive money. Using your knowledge and experience in wage management, you can provide this service to many businesses, both large and small.17 Public Relations: Getting good press coverage for any organization is a real art. When an organization finds a good PR consultant, they hang on to them for the rest of their lives!18. Publication: If you are interested in the publishing field, then learn everything you can and you too can be a publishing consultant. A publishing consultant usually helps new businesses when they are ready to launch a new newspaper, magazine, newsletter - and even websites and electronic newsletters.19 Taxes: With the right marketing and business plan (and a sincere interest in taxes), your career as a tax advisor can be very lucrative. The tax consultant advises companies on the legal methods of paying the lowest amount of tax.20 Written services: Everything related to the written word will always be in demand. Find your specialty in the writing field, and the sky will be the limit! Target market The idea may be the best you've ever thought of, but there has to be a market for your ideas. Someone should be willing and able to pay you for your expert advice. In other words, who are your potential customers? Will you be marketing your consulting services to large corporations? Or you will be specialty that will be the only interest for small businesses? Your services may be in demand by non-profit organizations. Either way, before you go ahead, make sure you spend time preparing both a business plan and a marketing plan. You won't be disappointed with the results - especially when customers start paying you! Why the organization wants to hire youSignifies for a recent survey, here are 10 reasons organizations hire consultants:1. A consultant can be hired because of his or her experience. This is where it pays to not only be really good in this area you choose to consult, but to have some type of track record that speaks for itself. For example, when I mentioned earlier that I became an expert as a fundraising consultant, I knew that every client who hired me does so partly based on my track record alone. After all, if you're a nonprofit organization that needs to raise \$1 million, it makes sense to hire someone who's already raised millions for other organizations. A consultant may be hired to identify problems. Sometimes employees are too close to a problem within an organization to identify it. That's when a consultant rides his white horse to save day three. A consultant can be hired in addition to staff. Sometimes a business discovers that it can save thousands of dollars a week by hiring consultants when they are needed rather than hiring full-time employees. Businesses understand that they save extra money without paying benefits for the consultants they hire. Although consultant fees are usually higher than an employee's salary in the long run, it just makes sense with the economic 2nd party to hire a consultant. The consultant can be hired as a catalyst. Let's face it. No one likes change, especially corporate America. But sometimes changes are needed and a consultant can be brought in to get the ball rolling. In other words, a consultant can do things without worrying about corporate culture, employee morale or other issues that will try when an organization tries to make changes.5 A consultant can be hired to ensure much-needed objectivity. Who is even more qualified to identify the problem than the consultant? A good consultant gives an objective, fresh perspective without worrying about what people in the organization might think about the results and how they were achieved.6 A consultant can be hired for training. These days, if you're a computer consultant who can show employees how to master the new program, then your phone probably hasn't stopped ringing for a while. A consultant may be asked to teach employees any number of different skills. However, the consultant must be prepared keep up with new discoveries in their field of expertise - and be prepared to teach new customers what they need to stay competitive.7 Consultant Consultant be hired to do the dirty work. Let's face it: no one wants to be the person who has to make staff cuts or eliminate the entire unit8. A consultant can be hired to bring new life to the organization. If you are good

at coming up with new ideas that work, then you will have no problem finding customers. At one time or another, most businesses need someone to administer first aid to get things rolling again.9. A consultant can be hired to create a new business. There are consultants who have become experts in this field. However, not everyone has the opportunity to understand the idea and develop a game plan10. A consultant can be hired to influence other people. Do you like to communicate with the rich and famous in your city? If so, you may be hired to do a consulting job simply based on someone you know. Although most consultants in this field work as lobbyists, there has been an increase in the number of people in the entertainment consulting business. The location and staff of your consulting business probably won't require a large capital investment at first glance. In fact, if you are able, you should consider working from your home. (Some case limitations and local laws may prohibit you from doing so; check with a lawyer before proceeding.) There are many advantages to having a home office. Among them: Low overheads. You don't have to worry about paying rent or utilities for the office; You'll appreciate this feature until you've set up a regular customer base. Flexibility. There is little doubt that working as a consultant at home gives you more flexibility. You can set your own clock and take time off as you need it. No nightmares during rush hour. For those who have been commuting to and from work during rush hour, this will be a welcome change of pace. Your home office space is likely to be taxed. The IRS has relaxed the rules for people who work from home, but check with your account or income tax to see if you are eligible for that deduction. Employees, when you first open the door to your consulting practice, you may be able to handle all the operations yourself. But as your consulting business starts to grow, you may need help handling administrative details or performing actual consulting assignments. You need to make some important decisions. For example, do you have the time it takes to label and insert a brochure into 1,000 envelopes? Can you afford to spend time doing administrative tasks when you could use that time effectively marketing your services - and registering new customers? Have options when the time comes to decide if you need help with paperwork. For example, if you quickly view the yellow pages, you'll find a number of small secretarial support firms. The stakes will depend on a variety of factors, including how large or small the small organization and what kinds of services it provides. Although it will pay you to shop around for these types of services, don't choose a secretarial service just because it's going to have the lowest prices in town. Instead, ask for links, preferably from other consultants who have used their services, or from small business owners. A good, reliable support service is worth the price in the long run. There will come a time, however, when you may find it more cost effective to hire someone to work in the office with you. Hiring a good support person can sometimes mean the difference between success and failure - between getting more customers or permanently losing customers. There are some advantages to having someone in the office with you. Among them: You save time and money. By having someone focus on more routine tasks (opening mail, filing, answering phones, etc.), you can focus all your efforts on recruiting new customers. Think about it: Do you want to lose \$500 a customer a day because you were too cheap to hire someone to stuff your brochures into envelopes? You're not worried about being out of the office. If you're a one-person operation, it's hard to be on the road marketing your services if you're worried about customer call - and only get a response machine. You have someone to offer a different perspective. Sometimes it can be quite lonely trying to do everything on your own. Having someone around the office during the day that can offer a different perspective can be helpful. Income and billing Now that you have decided to open your consulting business, you should be serious about how much money you will charge your clients. If you take too little, you will not succeed in business. If you take too much, you won't get any customers. So how do you find that middle ground, which seems fair to all involved? One way to help you decide how much to charge is to figure out what the bid contest is. A simple phone call, asking for their brochures and prices, should do the trick. Then set the tariffs so that you are competitive with everyone else in the community. Before you set fees, make sure you have transferred all your expenses. There is nothing worse than setting rates, with your client paying you on time and then figuring out you haven't been able to include a few expenses that have materialized. This raises an important point to remember in every job you take from the customer: Include different paragraph lines in your offer fee. But don't pad different numbers to make extra income. Most customers will understand that there will undoubtedly be additional costs in each project. Just make sure everyone knows in advance the approximate figure for these costs. Before rates, find out which other consultants in your community charge for their services. Sometimes sometimes A phone call to another consultant's office asking what their fees will give you the answers you need. Or you may have to have a friend call and ask for their brochure, or any additional information they can gather regarding fees and pricing. If you live in a small town and there are no other consultants in your area, then rejoice and rejoice, but set your fees to a reasonable level! When setting rates, you have several options, including hourly rates, project cost, and fixer-based work. Let's take a closer look at each of them. Hourly fees You have to be careful when setting the hourly fee, because two things can happen: A) Your hourly rate is so high that no one could ever afford you (so no customer will ever knock on your door). B) Your hourly rate is so low that no one will take you seriously. Keep in mind one important rule when setting your fee, no matter what structure you decide: The more money people pay for a product or service, the more they expect to get for their money. In other words, if a customer agrees to an hourly rate of \$400, then you better give \$400 worth of services to that customer every hour you work for them. Some customers prefer to be billed on an hourly basis, while others hate the idea of paying someone what they perceive as too much per hour. These customers usually prefer to pay for the project. Project Tariffs When it works on the basis of the speed of the project, the consultant usually receives a fixed amount of money over a period of time. Some of my fundraising clients actually prefer to be charged this way, so it wasn't unusual for me to charge \$36,000 for a one year project in which I consulted them on how they could raise money. Because of the amount of money involved, most agencies prefer to be billed on a monthly basis. This worked well until I realized that many institutions were late to pay their monthly bills. Because of this, I decided that all future customers who wanted to be billed on a monthly basis would pay a first month fee and last month fee when signing a contract, it meant that if the agreed project amount was \$36,000 to be paid on a monthly basis, I received a check of \$6,000 before I started any work (\$3,000 for the first month fee and \$3000 for the last month). The Fixer BasisWorking fixer gives you a set monthly fee in which you agree to be available to work within an agreed number of hours for your client. Whereas in an ideal world you will have a dozen or so customers who hire and pay you a hefty amount each month (and never call you, except for a few hours here and there) don't get your hopes. Most companies that hire a consultant based on a retainer have a clause in their contract that prohibits you from working for their competitors. Working and getting paid in this method certainly has its own You have a guaranteed income every month, and when you start in your consulting business, cash flow can be a problem. Some consultants actually offer a percentage reduction in their fees if the client agrees to pay the monthly fixer fee. The average income when a consultant is paid on a fixer basis is \$3,500 per month. Marketing If your consulting business has no clients then you do not have a consulting business. But you should remember that selling your consulting services is not the same as selling a car or home. In the case of a car or home, the customer is probably already on the market for one or both of these products. Your job thus becomes harder because you are marketing your services to people who may not even know that they need these services. There are a number of techniques that are needed to become both familiar and comfortable in order to start attracting and holding customers. Let's take a look at some of the most common ones that are used by many consultants today. The Basics brochure there are five issues your brochure should consider. They: It should clearly convey what your services are. He has to tell customers why you are the best. This should give several reasons why you should be hired. It should include some brief biographical information. It should include some information about who your other customers are. That's it. Keep it simple, but do it right. Remember that your brochure represents you on the market, so make sure you polish it before you send it into action. Your entire consulting career depends on it! Cold CallingYou should do everything possible to do the cold work and make it easier for yourself. There are a few tricks that you can use to make a cold call a little easier for you: prepare a script in advance. Spell word for word what you expect to say when you get someone on the phone. Remember, however, that your goal is to get a face-to-face interview and, ultimately, a new client. So before you end up stumbling about your sales presentation (either in person or over the phone), write a script and practice it over and over again. Be the inventors in your efforts to reach decision-making. In most cases you will come across a secretary or administrative assistant who has a year's experience turning away from cold callers like you. But don't give up! Don't let any obstacles stand in your way! To avoid being checked by the secretary, try calling before she is at work. Yes, you may have to call before 8am or after 5pm, but at this time, most likely the decision maker you are trying to reach will answer to your own phone. Limit your cold just a few days a month. And look forward to those days making sure you put all your effort into the process. So not only will it become easier to make these cold calls, but you will find yourself actually looking forward to make do the restrictions you'll put on advertising your consulting services will be directly tied to your advertising budget. If you happen to have a very healthy advertising budget, remember that you don't have to spend money on advertising just because you have to spend it. Advertising can be very expensive. Jeffrey B., a Harrisburg, Pa., consultant, advertises in his association publications. They publish what is called the Green Book, which is a directory of research and marketing consulting businesses across the country. It helped me start a new business, he says. Other consultants, such as Merrily S. in Newark, Delaware, depend on word of mouth. The best form of advertising (for my business) was word of mouth and recommendations from other people, she says. Depending on the type of service you offer, you may need to advertise in specialized trade magazines or magazines. For example, as a fundraising consultant, I have placed ads in publications such as Chronicle Of Charity, Nonprofit Times and Fundraising Weekly.Before you spend money, start looking through professional magazines and newspapers in relation to the areas you specialize in, and examine ads that have been posted by other consultants and then carefully determine how effective you think their ads might be. Then develop the one that suits you best. NewslettersWhat is your consulting area you should have more than enough information to get a newsletter as a means of attracting potential clients. If you don't have the time, or don't feel comfortable self-publishing your own newsletter, hire a local freelance writer and graphic designer to do the job for you. Again, you don't have to make it an expensive, four-color, glossy publication. The easier you hold it, the better. A good newsletter will sell itself based on content rather than splashy design. Start collecting newsletters that are published in your consulting area. If you think they're not published, or if you think there are only a few in your area, guess again. A quick visit to the library will show several newsletters catalogs - Oxbridge Newsletters (Oxbridge Communications) and Hudson Newsletter Catalog (ClearingHouse Newsletter) - which list, on the topic, newsletters that are published not only in the United States but also in other countries. Spend some time writing for sample copies before designing and writing the first issue of your own newsletter. You will be surprised by the quality of the newsletters that are produced today. Newsletters are an effective means of communication and, look, represent the best advertising media for a consultant to sell their services. Think about it the next time you get a newsletter in the mail. Did you put it aside to read it later? And why would you do that? Probably because wanted to make sure you didn't miss any important news or information. What about the pamphlet you received in the mail the same day? Did you put it aside to read later? Or did it go straight into the trash can? Think about it before spending a lot of money on shiny brochures that may not even read. Public speaking is another great way to recruit new clients and earn a reputation as an excellence in your community. If you live in a city so small it doesn't have a Chamber of Commerce or Lion's Club, Rotary Club or other similar service organization, you can start offering your services as a speaker for lunches, dinners or any other special occasion. In addition to using the phone directory, see if someone has posted a directory of service organizations in your community. You can visit the library and ask at the help desk. Go through and compile a list of organizations that hold monthly meetings and therefore can use guest speakers. Contact each group and offer your public speaking services. Ask referralsIt's often overlooked method of finding new customers is such a simple marketing tool (which is why it's usually not thought of), you'll kick yourself for not thinking about it yourself. When you have finished your consulting assignment and your client is in seventh heaven (and no doubt sings your praises), it's a great time to ask for directions! Just send a note or a short email asking for the names of any colleagues, friends or business partners they feel can be a good prospect for your consulting services. Ask their permission to mention their name when you write to the people whose names they give you. Sometimes all you need is to have a mutual friend or a respected business partner to get the attention of a potential client. 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