

CHAPTER 6

DEVELOPING AND DESIGNING PROCESS

Developing and Designing

In this chapter, we continue with a discussion of the first stage of consulting, developing business, by examining additional and important skills needed to win business. We focus on:

1. Aspects of making a good first-impression when meeting with a prospect for the first time.
2. The role emotions play in shaping and defining the problem.
3. How to craft a proposal.
4. Importance of setting and managing expectations.

We begin with what McKinsy calls the “elevator test” (Raisel, 1999), the challenge of figuring out what to say about ourselves, our work and our firm, when asked to do so by a client.

KNOWING WHAT TO SAY ABOUT YOURSELF

An important issue of “fit and chemistry” is the consultant’s ability to explain exactly and clearly the mission and services of the consulting firm and his or hers personal role in it. It is a good idea to write out a paragraph that succinctly describes exactly what you and the firm does. Then memorize it.

At some point in the first meeting it is likely that the client will ask you to describe what you do, personally, and what the firm does. Even if the client does not ask, it is a good idea to be ready to provide a quick overview. It should be short enough to say it in about one minute and in a language understandable by non-specialists. For example:

I am a senior information technology consultant with eight years of experience in designing, building, and implementing systems that integrate a company’s different computer systems. I work with companies of your size and complexity, and lead a group of technology specialists in my firm. My company has been in business for twelve years and has three locations around the country. We have developed our own consulting methods for large scale integration projects and use the latest project management techniques. The firm has experience in your industry and is a preferred supplier to SAP. We have comprehensive skills in all the major technology systems and platforms.

Be prepared to back up everything you say as the client may test you at this point. Depending on whom you are talking to (or who else is in the room) it will be necessary to adjust the language to suit the technical expertise of the audience. One tip is to use the “functional language” of the person you are meeting with. For example, in the finance department speak in terms of numbers, analysis, and balance sheets. If the audience is general management, speak in terms of strategy, operational performance, and results. In the marketing department, speak in terms of sales, customer service, and products. In the legal function, speak in terms of compliance, regulations, and standards.

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When discussing your firm and what you do as a consultant, a best practice is to find the right balance between using credible, technical jargon suitable for the functional specialist sitting in the room (such as IT, marketing, or finance) with the ideas, practices and technical jargon of your consulting specialty. Always practice what you will say before meeting with client. Always ask if they have any questions about yourself and the firm.

It is a good idea to have references ready to offer to the client so you can give names and contact numbers on the spot. This creates a positive and credible impression and immediately increases trust and confidence in the mind of the prospective client.

FIRST MEETING DYNAMICS

It is always a special time when consultants meet with a prospective client for the first time. It is fraught with subtle dynamics, multiple levels of communication, and important first impressions.

First Impressions. We know that it only takes a few moments for us to “know” whether or not we like someone or feel comfortable around them. We “pick-up” and tune-in to positive or negative energy, we sense whether we are accepted or rejected, being judged or being dealt with fairly, openly and with enquiry. Even though there is a lot going on when we meet strangers who may be in a position to give us business, it is important to tune into our feelings and be aware of how we are emotionally responding to the situation. This is an important aspect of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1997).

If we sense a negative, tough, judgmental atmosphere in the room, by tuning into ourselves and being conscious of our emotional response, we have the potential to make the most of the situation by controlling our emotional response and directing our energy toward constructive, useful outcomes. The fact is, some prospects may use a difficult, aggressive style to test us; to see how well we deal with toughness, negative statements, criticism, or a deep enquiry into our qualifications. The prospect may be testing how well the consultant can deal with the challenges of his or her organization; seeing if the consultant can “take the heat” or function well under pressure. So, do not be discouraged by a cold atmosphere. Think of it as a test of your fortitude and mental toughness under pressure. See it as a challenge to demonstrate just how good you are!

Rapport. Experienced consultants look for ways to quickly establish rapport in the first meeting. Using good manners, being polite, and showing courtesy and respect, are very important and obvious ways to make a good first-impression. Some other things that help to put people at ease and get things started include the following.

1. Look around the client’s office for anything in common such as sports trophies, family pictures, holiday pictures, degrees, awards, community recognition, collected artifacts, hobbies, etc. Use these in the conversation to break the ice, show empathy, and be relaxed (but not too informal).

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2. Break the ice at the beginning with “small talk” about the weather, the view from the office, the commute, traffic conditions, positive statements about office architecture, something big in the news, or general business conditions.
3. Use humor that is appropriate. Never make jokes that are vulgar or lewd or personal about the client. Use self-deprecating humor. Smile a lot. Laugh at the client’s jokes but never compete with a better one.
4. Always except a client’s offer for a drink, even if you do not want one or cannot finish it. Accepting hospitality is a way of showing respect and being polite.
5. Be led by the client’s agenda and weave your own into it. Check the client’s time schedule right at the beginning, to show respect.
6. Never violate the client’s space by standing too close; prolonging a handshake; putting things on the client’s furniture; asking to use the client’s equipment; or commenting on the room temperature. Avoid staring behavior.
7. Be well-groomed and wear conservative dress that is neutral and does not draw attention to itself. Clean nails, shiny shoes and combed hair say a lot about who you are. Declare if you have a head cold (if you have one) or the flu and keep your distance accordingly, refusing a handshake if needed.
8. Allow the client to show you the chair to sit in and wait for the client to ask you to sit. Breathe deeply and relax.

All of those rational and emotional things are part of forging first impressions. And it is something that both parties are doing. Table 6.1 shows the kinds of questions that each may be tacitly asking themselves to size up the other person. Each is trying to assess whether or not the two of you will be able to get along and work with one another; at what cost in time and treasure; and will it be an enjoyable, productive experience. In short, is there “chemistry” or not?

Table 6.1 Tacit Questions during the first Meeting

PROSPECTIVE CLIENT	CONSULTANT
“How good are these consultants?”	“Can I communicate with this person?”
“Will this person be able to work with my people?”	“What does this person want?”
“Can I trust this person?”	“Can I have influence here?”
“How professional do they look?”	“Does this person like me; like consultants?”
“How professional do they act?”	“How do I convince this person to buy our service?”

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Meetings Dynamics. One important aspect of the first meeting is that each may be experiencing a level of discomfort and anxiety about the whole situation and the prospect of entering into what might be a long working relationship. Often there is a lot at stake, worries about political and professional vulnerability, and concerns about the timeliness and quality of the solution sought. Clients and consultants both draw upon their previous experiences, working with consultants, using certain types of consulting strategies and methods, people's personalities and reputations. Naturally, if the experience has generally been a good one, concerns and worries are lessened. The opposite would be true if they have not. In general, the kinds of worries and concerns that both consultants and prospects have at this stage of the consulting cycle are shown in Table 6.2. The key implication of the kinds of worries and fears outlined in Table 6.2 is that during the first meeting, 1) the client will hold back key information or will not be completely honest with the consultant; 2) Since there may be just one meeting before a proposal is submitted, the consultant may fear that not enough of the right kind of information has been shared to enable an accurate proposal to be developed.

Table 6.2 Typical Worries and Concerns of Prospects and Consultants

CLIENT WORRIES ABOUT CONSULTANT	CONSULTANT ANXIETY ABOUT CLIENT
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I'll Look Unintelligent 2. The solution may not work 3. Consultant isn't experienced enough 4. Consultant doesn't know my business 5. Consultant may not "fit" my organizational culture 6. Consulting firm not able to hand the size of my organization 7. Consultant not flexible enough 8. Consultant has only "off the self" solutions 9. Loss of control 10. Risk of failure 11. Not getting what I want 12. Consultant will recommend more expensive solution that the problem requires 13. Consultant does not understand my constraints, such as budget 14. Consultant does not have technical expertise 15. Consultant will get transferred before the end of the project 16. Consultant will not deliver on time 17. Consultant will discuss problems with my competitors 18. Project will go over budget 19. Project will be late 20. Won't like the consultant 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Client looking for someone to blame 2. Client has hidden agenda 3. Client will not negotiate 4. Organizational Politics 5. Client has one-track mind around a certain solution 6. Client doesn't know what is needed 7. Unrealistic deadlines – "Have it done yesterday" 8. Client wants something outside my Firm's priorities or guidelines 9. Problems will come up outside my area of expertise 10. Client 's behavior is part of the problems 11. Lots of "people" problems 12. Client won't give enough time to the problem 13. I can't say "no" to a poor project 14. Client wants a solution to symptoms rather can cause 15. Client has reputation for being hard to work with 16. Client not fully committed 17. I'll look stupid 18. Client is not the decision maker 19. Client may be very slow in paying invoices 20. Client may not like me

Impact of the Proposal. In a competitive bidding situation where many consultants may be submitting proposals, a lack of candor and openness by the client in the first (and perhaps only) meeting, can produce a weak proposal.

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This again shows that asking “SPIN” questions, and good listening are crucial. Such skills are crucial for overcoming the fears, worries, and concerns that consultants have about the prospective client and vice versa, the client of the consultant. By understanding the realities of “first meeting” dynamics, consultants can do a much better job of managing them to get the information needed to write a proposal. Consultants can:

- Ask what the client wants to accomplish at the meeting.
- Show empathy and express personal feelings.
- Acknowledge the awkward human dynamics of the meeting.
- Understand the psychological barriers (on both sides) to being as open and honest as possible.

Since the quality of the proposal is at stake, it is better to risk to exploring any worries or concerns the client may have about working together, than to ignore them. This may have the added benefit of revealing important aspects of client expectations, which we will discuss later in this chapter.

Having all the Answers. A point of concern for some consultants is that they feel they must be smart and have all the answers. This is not true. It cannot be true because when the consultant knows so little about the client and the business situation at this point. In fact, the client may just want to see how you think, test your integrity, to see if you are capable of making a good effort. During the first meeting, sincerity is more important than having a smart answer or the right solution. The client expects well thought-out points of view that are backed up with experience, facts, research, and analysis, rather than quick, “off-the-shelf” answers. The client may be testing to see if the consultant is capable of understanding the challenges, drivers and barriers to success. The more these kinds of issues can be acknowledged and discussed at the first meeting, even superficially, the greater will be the client’s confidence in the consultant, leading the client to believe that the consultant is mature and seasoned, able to handle the difficult questions and challenges that will inevitably occur. Consultants, who take these “first meeting impressions” matters seriously, study the dynamics and consciously strive to increase the client’s comfort and confidence levels, will win the business.

Levels of Client Openness. If the client is unduly anxious about the consultant or perhaps is worried about even entering into a consulting relationship in the first place, it can cause the client to deliberately or unconsciously misstate the problem. In general, the client may describe the problem: 1) too narrowly; 2) too broadly; 3) ambiguously; or 4) in a complex manner. The motivations behind such a description may come from the client being:

1. Ignorant of the true problem and hoping the consultant will find and define it.
2. Cautious about saying and revealing too much at this stage.
3. Unwilling to say too much to keep the cost down.
4. Trying to sound important and well informed.
5. Testing the consultant to see what he or she will do with the problem description.
6. Confused about the problem and unable to state it clearly.

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Regardless of the client's motivation, the job of the consultant is to keep *restating* the problem to verify if it is accurate, *reframing* the problem to clarify and sharpen its definition, and *refining* the problem to define its scope. We can see here the importance of SPIN questions as well as the interpersonal skills of active listening and a questioning strategy to yield an accurate definition of the problem. To achieve this, it may require being persistent and politely "pushing" the prospect to say more and to reveal underlying issues and broader implications. Consultants may be anxious about being persistent, assertive or even confrontational but it is part of the arsenal of interpersonal skills needed by effective consultants (Block, 1981).

At this stage in business development, clients are looking for clues that will raise their confidence in the decision they are about to make. Remember, if the consultant can help the prospective client think through the problem aloud in a positive and constructive manner, the more likely the client will have a positive impression of the consultant's ability. Successful reframing of the problem by the consultant tells the client a lot about the consultant's professionalism, experience, seriousness, thinking skills, interpersonal strengths and tenacity in defining the right problem to be solved. During this first meeting, where the total time available may be less than one hour, such an experience by the client makes a positive impression, raises confidence levels, and improves the likelihood of winning the business.

Finally, consultants must not underestimate or ignore the existence of their own fears, many of which are listed in Table 6.2. Use where possible the presence of such fears and worries as messages and topics for discussion. They are real and should not be allowed to cloud our thinking or reduce our own confidence level. As difficult as it may be to be to give them voice, consultants must learn to recognize and face the fears and push through them; to speak up despite the fears. These kinds of worries and concerns exist throughout a consulting engagement, so it is a best practice to periodically check with the client and discuss what fears exist and what can be done about them. If this is handled well, with diplomacy and advocacy, it will help to forge trust and a stronger relationship.

THE PROPOSAL PROCESS

The first meeting or series of meetings during the business development stage, ought to gather information about:

- Client's problem
- Technical requirement
- Organizational needs
- Procedures to be followed
- Timing
- Staffing

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- Roles and methods to be used
- Limits, boundaries, and any constraints
- If possible, some idea of the budget

Armed with as much accurate information as possible, yet acknowledging that much remains unknown until the work gets underway, it is now time to write the proposal. Table 6.3 shows the nine stages of the proposal process. Completing a proposal may take anywhere from a day to several weeks, depending on the size and complexity of the consulting work. Proposals for governmental agencies and many large companies that do a lot of work for the government usually have stringent requirements and demand a lot of back-up paperwork, details about the consulting firm, legal forms, specific descriptions of past consulting, competitive bidding procedures, details about engagement staff resources to be used, and a breakdown of costs. Putting all of this together can take a lot of time.

Table 6.3 Nine Stage of the Proposal Process

PROPOSAL STAGE	KEY ACTIONS/ISSUES
Identify Proposal Resources	Identify who will be involved in preparing, writing and presenting the proposal.
Outline the Content	Varies depending on the type of consulting being performed. Most established consulting firms have templates and standard formats
Assess Risks	For major consulting assignments, identify ahead of time areas of potential risk in performing the consulting and think through actions to mitigate the risk. Build time into the project plan as needed.
Describe Scope/Deliverables	Describe the scope of the work; needs; problem (s) to be solved; constraints; phases of the work; any interim deliverables; and final deliverables.
Identify the project team	Identify who may be available to perform the work; offer resumes in the proposal from whom the team may be selected.
Prepare a project plan	Develop a time-sequenced plan for each major task of the project, showing responsibilities, deliverables, interconnected deliverables, and completion dates.
Decide on Pricing	Based on the project plan, develop a work plan based on assumptions about tasks, resources needed, time, and client's contributions; calculate the cost by phase of work and overall investment by the client. Ensure project makes money.
Present/Submit the proposal	Send the proposal to the client and be prepared to meet with the client to discuss each aspect of the proposal. Revise as needed.
Ask for the business	When the client has had all questions answered and expresses any kind of interest (i.e. "buy signals"), state that you want the business and ask the client to give it to you.

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Consulting firms often do a cost/benefit analysis on their proposal development process to assess 1) the time and money required to complete a proposal, versus 2) the likelihood of winning the business once it is submitted. Such analysis is needed because some organizations and especially governmental agencies (which by law must receive a number of proposals and give each one a careful evaluation) announce a “request for proposal” (RFP) and then use their *preferred supplier* any way. Another problem is that clients may use the FFP process to learn how to it themselves.

Consulting firms know these tricks and may decide that the complexity of some RFP’s is so great and the probability of winning the business so low, that it may not be worth going through all of the time and effort to prepare a proposal, even if the contract is large.

Proposal Development. If management decides to submit a proposal there are a number of steps requires. We will now briefly examine each of the nine steps of the proposal development process summarized in Table 6.3.

1. **Identify Proposal Resources.** In general, this means getting people to write (or at least contribute to) the proposal who will actually work on the project. The reasons to do this are simple. The more the consulting team knows about the project and the work, the more likely that they will “hit the ground running” with detailed knowledge of the project, be more motivated, have early characteristics of an effective team, and be able to work effectively with the client. Several minds working on the proposal can make it a much better document in its coverage of the issues, the business case, and clarity in the writing. A best practice is to start the team building process with the people who write the proposal.
2. **Outline the Content.** While this can range quite widely, in general all proposals contain: 1) an opening statement that covers the content of the proposal document; 2) details of the content areas relevant to the type of consulting being undertaken; 3) a section on professional fees, expenses, and billing; 4) a description of the scope of work, assumptions, risks, and any constraints such as intellectual property rights; 5) a closing statement including next steps; and 6) qualifications of the consulting team.

Proposals may be in a “letter format” to make it easier and more interesting to read. Proposals in information technology (IT) consulting are more “cut and dry” stating just the facts and using a combination of IT language and legalese. Management consultants use a combination of letter formats and pithy, technical language. Table 6.4 depicts a proposal agenda used in actual consulting practice. It is a good idea to make proposals user friendly, easy to read, and clear. They must also be well formatted, have no grammatical errors, and look professional. Many prospective clients use the proposal to judge the quality of work they can expect from the consultant. Sloppy proposals lose business. To avoid errors, *always* have a second pair of eyes review the document before sending it to the client.

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3. **Assess Risks.** Risk assessment is the process of examining each aspect of the project to determine if something could go wrong and if so, what plans need to be put in place now, so that actions can be taken to either: 1) reduce the risk; or 2) solve the problem if something does go wrong. A good way to do this is to consider the *probability* and *seriousness* of a problem then actions to reduce the risk occurring. For the proposal, the key to risk management at this point is to identify any risks, think about what could go wrong and plan actions to reduce the risks by building them into the project proposal. Actions might include special meetings, training, and use of more experienced consultants, etc. Risk assessment methods are discussed in more detail in chapter seven.
4. **Describe Scope and Deliverables.** This is a description of what is included in the design, development, delivery and implementation of a solution. For example, whether or not leader's guides are included in a training program or if overseas locations are included in the deployment of a new information systems, or if all competitors in the industry will or will not be analyzed. Scope describes the boundaries of what is and is not included in the engagement. Boundaries may address such issues as time, volume, specifications, functionality, locations, depth, speed, intensity, documentation, and people.

Deliverables are often described in terms of "interim deliverables" such as status reports, periodic data, studies, outlines, renderings, test pieces, mock-ups or models. In the proposal, interim deliverables are used to indicate progress and show when things will be completed, before a solutions is finally delivered. Clients love to see progress. The proposal sets expectations about how progress will be made, by when and to what degree. This serves to increase client confidence. Another major benefit of stating interim deliverables in the proposal is that it may be possible to invoice the client for such completed, but interim work.

5. **Identify the project team.** As already suggested, the proposal should indicate the likely team members from the consulting firm that will be on the project. The qualifications section describes the education, background, and consulting experience of the potential team, for consideration by the client. It is important to maintain flexibility on resources by stating that the team members will be selected from *among* the resumes enclosed, subject to availability when the project starts.
6. **Prepare a Project Plan.** The project plan is a detailed description of the consulting project's major tasks, timetable and responsibilities. It is a detailed analysis of who is responsible and accountable for task completion. The plan shows in chronological sequence the start and the end of each task, milestones for interim deliverables and overall completion time for the engagement. The consultant needs to make sure everything is in sequence and is consistent with the client's expectation. Since the proposal is the main document that everyone uses to understand the totality of the engagement -- the vision, mission and strategy, the timetable, performance expectations, and billing -- the project plan represents a summary "template" of the whole project that is presented to the client.

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7. **Decide on Pricing.** The *project* plan is a summary of the detailed work plan. The *work* plan is a careful and accurate analysis of exactly what it will take to perform the consulting in terms of phases of work, resources, time and cost (investment). The work plan is not shared with the client for it explains the pricing strategy for the engagement. Table 6.5 depicts an example of a work plan showing resources and costs, etc. The work plan is a function of who is working on the project, how much time each consultant is contributing, the cost of that contribution, the administrative overhead used, and the profit target needed by the firm. Pricing of consultants includes overall consultant's daily rates (per diem fees) which includes the person's salary plus administrative overhead and profit margin.

Table 6.4 Example of a Proposal Format

Content Area	Explanation
Introductory Paragraph	This refers to the last meeting with the client and thanks the prospective client for the time spent discussing the RFP. It outlines the proposal content.
Understanding of Need	Several paragraphs that summarize the history or background and facts learned during the first meeting; the stated problem and needs; and any client requirement.
Approach to the Work	The discrete and logical phases of work that must be done to complete the work. Often includes: data gathering and recommendations, design work, development of materials and deliverables, delivery of finished work, testing of solutions, and the roll out or implementation of the solution.
Professional Fees	Best offered as an "estimate" and as a range of dollars rather than one number, especially if client resources will be used but as yet unknown in what way. Estimates are used because the scope of work may change and more meetings may occur than planned in the project plan.
Schedule and Staffing	A simple statement of the estimated completion dates for each phase of the work and an indication of who will be project leader, part of the consulting team and engagement manager, when needed. It is best to state that the team will be selected from biographies provided in the proposal.
Qualifications	A description of the firm's experience and relevant consulting; a list of the biographies of the consultants suggested for the team.
Closing Paragraph	A general statement of enthusiasm about working in collaboration with the client on an important and challenging assignment. Thanks for the opportunity to submit the proposal and what the next steps will be to follow up.
Signature Line	Many consultants use the proposal as their contract. If so, have a signature line at the bottom of the proposal for the client to sign and return a copy for contractual purposes. Many consulting <i>firms</i> have a separate contract, based on the proposal. An interim "letter of intent" may serve as a semi-contract to get the work locked-in and preliminary work underway.

The Practice of Professional Consulting

Calculated for each task and phase of the work, the total price to the client is the aggregate of each consultant's chargeability or application for each of the phases. A range of professional fees may be appropriate if it unclear exactly how long it will take to perform the work or if the client will supply consultants to perform some of the work. It may require making a high, medium, low calculation and giving the client a proposed or *estimated* price based on a point between the high and low.

The keys to building a profitable consulting firm are "application" and "realization." Application is the amount of time any consultant has that is billable to a client (called "utilization" in Europe). Realization is the firm's ability to collect its income from clients. Since cash flow is often a struggle for most consulting businesses, getting clients to pay in a thirty-day cycle is an important part of setting expectations. If the client has a policy to pay based on a ninety-day cycle, it may seriously hurt the consulting firm's cash flow and put a constraint on its operational ability. It may be important to design the "approach to work" in the proposal in such a way as to ensure billing helps the consulting firm's monthly cash flow.

Table 6.5 Project Pricing From the Work Plan

Phase	Task	Consultant Resource	Days X	Per Diem Fee =	Task Total	Phase Total	Project Total
I	A	Bill	3	2,500	7,500	20,500	
	B	Bill	4	2,500	10,000		
		Rakesh	1.5	2,000	3,000		
II	A	Susan	2	2,000	4,000	4,000	
III	A	Rakesh	3	2,000	6,000	43,500	
	B	Jay	5	1,500	7,500		
	C	Paul	10	2,500	30,000		
IV	A	Bill	3	2,500	7,500	28,500	96,500
	A	Hilary Tony	3	4,000	12,000		
	A		3	3,000	9,000		
Extra	@ 10%						9,650
Grand	Total :						106,150
<p>Note: The number of days may be stated as High, Medium and Low to create a range of time; The "extra" is to ensure extra time the client demands for meeting etc., is covered; the per diem fee includes salary, overhead and profit margin.</p>							

8. **Presenting the proposal.** Usually clients ask consultants to submit the proposal by mail or as an e-mail attachment (hint: send the proposal as a PDF file to avoid technical problems or possible fraud), so there is no a chance to present the proposal and answer questions. From time-to-time, a client may expect a proposal presentation; if so, make sure the *best* presenter on the team delivers

the presentation. This may not always be the lead consultant. Make the presentation short and use PowerPoint technology to support the presentation. Deliver the presentation in a way that allows the maximum time for the client to probe and ask questions. Anyone of the team can answer questions.

When possible, ask the client for feedback on draft proposals before the final proposal is submitted. This is often achievable with work that is repeat business and where there is a long-term relationship established. Always remember that as consultants, we are trying to help our client be successful. Sometimes that means helping the client to sell the proposal to his or her internal organization, requiring the proposal to have the right language, ideas, key phrases, look and feel for a range of managers from different functions. In established relationships, clients often help their consultants with draft proposals to ensure the best proposal is produced; one that helps both parties.

9. **Ask for the business.** As a general rule, consultants need to find language that enables them to communicate with enthusiasm about working with the client on the “important and challenging” assignment at hand. Remember, clients often need to have their confidence raised. So raise it by demonstrating confidence in your own proposal, which is recommending an approach to solving the client’s problem. Be thankful, collaborative and show passion for the work; show energy and enthusiasm. Tell the client you *want* the business (not “need” the business) and indicate that you are able to get started right away. End the presentation or conversation with a question about “next steps?”

To make the proposal writing process easier, consultants normally use templates, old proposals, or standard formats. Even though each proposal is unique in its content, the categories of information and the formatting are often standard. Templates keep the process as short as possible and efficient, without sacrificing quality. But, even with templates, it is better to take extra time and to be careful, rather than rushing the proposal only to find something missing or grammatical errors.

In summary, the proposal process can be time consuming and burdensome but they are very important documents that must be done to the best of our ability. The proposal is the first document that brings the whole consulting engagement together in one place and is a fundamental bridge between our firm and the clients. It is the basis for establishing a contractual and legally binding agreement. Unless built into the project plan, proposal development is done free of charge as part of the sales process and as the outcome of the business development stage.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

One of the critical features of developing business is to get the expectations right. The ability to manage expectations is part of a consultant's core competency. As consultants, we have expectations about how we will work with clients; and clients have expectations of how the work will be accomplished. Quite often these expectations are different, remain hidden or are left unspoken and that creates problems.

Expectations should be made explicit and managed by discussing them; by sharing how we work (for example, procedures, style, and ethics,) and by asking the client questions about what they expect in the consulting relationship. Table 6.6 lists some of the question consultants might ask to clarify expectations concerning *roles, deliverables, process, timing, and tasks*.

It is important to remember that clients *and* consultants often make assumptions about those kinds of expectations and most of them impact the content of proposals, in turn impacting pricing. Therefore, it is crucial to test and validate assumptions, openly discuss expectations and clear up any misunderstandings *before* leaving the first meeting and going off to write a proposal.

Table 6.6 Client-Consultant Expectations

ROLES:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What roles do you anticipate you/we will play on this project? 2. Will we be viewed as a business partner, receiving visibility and access within your organization? 3. Who will receive a transfer of knowledge and skills as a result of this engagement? 4. What are your project management requirements on this project? 5. Who is responsible to individually and collectively manage change during and after the project?
SOLUTIONS:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the expected deliverables? 2. What, if any, budget parameters do you have? 3. What type of documentation will you need? 4. Do you expect us to do skills transfer? 5. What criteria will be used to measure our success in providing deliverables that meet your expectations?
PROCESS:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can we most effectively interact with your project manager and your team? 2. How can we most effectively interact with other consultants in your organization? 3. How can we ensure clear and timely communications? 4. What, if anything, might prevent you from using the deliverables? 5. What process do you feel needs to be put in place to ensure that change is sustained? 6. How do we best involve you throughout the engagement?
TIMING:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When would you like to "kick-off" this engagement? 2. When do you wish to complete this engagement? 3. When can a decision be made to proceed in order to deliver in this timeframe? 4. Does your organization have other dependencies on this work that affects completion goals? 5. What variables, if any, might impact our being able to meet this time target? 6. Are there resources available to support us if we determine lack of resources may prevent completion?
TASKS:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What specific resources are available to assist us in performing the work? 2. Because of our interdependence, how can we assure your organization will cooperate? 3. How do you prefer we provide reports of the status of each task, milestone, deliverable? 4. Do you know of third-party partners/other consultants who can work with us to complete the tasks? 5. Would you agree to have us refer you to qualified third-party partners to assist us?

(Adapted from Microsoft Consulting Services Division)

The Practice of Professional Consulting

Finally, while expectations can be clarified by calling the client while writing the proposal, they must also be clarified throughout the entire consulting process once the business is won. After all, things change with time and with project implementation, as more is understood about the precise requirements and demands of the consulting. Such conversations may be disputatious and difficult, sometimes leading to renegotiating aspects of the initial proposal. However, they are vital to ensuring and nurturing mutual respect and trust – hallmarks of professionalism.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have described the phenomenon that consulting is a people business. Business development is about selling oneself and by extension a relationship, during the first meeting with a prospective client. In some sense, the medium (consultant) is the message. Thus, in this and the previous chapter, we have spent quite a bit of time on leadership, interpersonal skills, people dynamics, aspects of emotional intelligence, and behaving collaboratively as we perform the tasks of business development. These competencies are, of course, relevant throughout the entire consulting cycle, but never more important than right at the beginning, as we are making our first impressions.

Working through the Developing stage and Designing role demand many skills that reach well beyond a consultant's technical expertise. Consultants should always keep in mind that clients make buying decisions based on the "fit" and "chemistry" of the person as much as by reputation and expertise. Thus, during the initial meetings, consultants must pay close attention to rhythm, pacing, listening, emotional intelligence, vocal tone, attitude, questions, humor, sharing of air time, team orientation, and expectations, etc. All of those elements contribute to winning or losing business. Exceptional and successful consultants never take the people-side of consulting for granted. Rather, they spend a lot of time honing and perfecting their people skills. Such skills are used for effective leadership, making a good first-impression, doing needs analysis, problem framing, scoping the work, managing expectations, and developing proposals.

In the next chapter, we will see how those skills are put to use in the second stage of consulting, Mobilizing people and getting them Aligned and committed to the project. We will also examine resource planning, project planning, risk assessment, and how to turn groups into high performing teams.