

# Midwest Construction

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# Converging Viewpoints Regarding Successful Small Business Consulting Relationships

*"Consultants helped us during our budgeting and planning process last year. We found it to be a great way to better focus both our operation and goals & objectives for 2007"*

Paul Steger, Owner of Accurate Custom Cabinets, Addison, IL and ASA Member

The growth of the consulting industry in recent years speaks to the need for outside assistance and the best solutions to today's many challenges facing small business owners.

As markets change, if a business is not performing optimally, an entrepreneur may have a limited window for turning things around before reaching a crisis. Perhaps one of the biggest mistakes a business owner can make when considering whether to hire outside help is indecisiveness. If you think about it, there is little downside to making a decision that is reversible, and as many studies have confirmed, one's first instincts usually prove to be correct. Furthermore, there is often a significant, quantifiable problem cost to not acting decisively not to mention an almost certain loss in perceived leadership, employee morale, organizational productivity, and, in some cases, even business reputation.

When a business owner feels compelled to solicit outside assistance, the key to a successful client consultant experience lies in the quality of their relationship. According to Dave Dobson, Controller for ASA member Imperial Crane Service, Inc. located in Bridgeview, IL "Our busi-

## Key Elements for Successful Client - Consultant Relationships:

- Look for the following consulting attributes: a meaningful understanding of your business, flexibility, and sensitivity when recommending solutions.
- A willingness to challenge the client, and be challenged by the client.
- Ability to gain the respect of client staff.
- A focus on a return on the investment you are making to improve your business.
- A formal follow-up program that ensures project alignment and attainment.

ness welcomed the flexibility, acute business acumen, and sensitivity exhibited during our consulting project. It was felt the consultants had a sincere interest in solving our problems and reached their conclusions only after several thoughtful discussions. Our employees respected that approach, but their ability to deliver results was the baseline we used to evaluate the ultimate success of our consulting project."

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As statistics reveal, close to 60% of change is not effectively implemented. This is probably the single biggest fear client businesses share. Therefore, a formal follow-up pro-

gram including both on-site and off-site support after the completion of a consulting engagement is a must. Not only is that support important, however, as expressed above, the value you receive from consulting should significantly outweigh the cost, and there should be a plan for achievement of those goals and objectives early on in the process.

When Des Plaines subcontractor Natola Concrete decided to have consultants work in their business, says Joey Natola, "we set an objective of a 5% bottom line improvement. Roughly six months after that experience, we appear to be on target."

In today's business environment, business owners can benefit from professional outside consulting relationships. The best relationships have certain traits and shared goals and objectives.

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For more information, contact Jim Talerico, Director of Client Satisfaction for Strategic Business Partners, a management advisory firm specializing in improving the profitability, productivity and performance of small to mid-sized businesses. He can be reached at 1-866-475-7048, Extension 206 or at [capp@sbp-solutions.com](mailto:capp@sbp-solutions.com).