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# trekking

a newsletter on practical strategic planning and action  
issue #9: getting the most out of your consulting relationships

## editor's message

This month, we look at the role of management consultants. Our Strategic Planning section makes the case that you should hold consultants to the "personal trainer standard", and our Strategic Action section examines the role of strategy consultants. Our Industry Snapshot has some tips for getting off on the right foot with your clients this year, and this month's Reading List highlights a pamphlet by the Institute of Management Consultants on "How to Hire a Management Consultant".

## strategic planning

*The Consultant as Personal Trainer*

If you are like me, you are starting off the year determined to get more exercise. The way I see it, my options are to:

- Do it on my own
- Get inspiration from one of the dozens of books and magazines that promise the answer to my problems
- Sign up for a class
- Hire a personal trainer

When you are facing a challenge in your business, the options are actually very similar. The business equivalent of the last option—a personal trainer—is a management consultant. Webster's reflects the accepted definition of a consultant as "one who gives professional advice or services." We think you should expect much more than that.

If you really want to succeed, you should hold your consultant to the "personal trainer standard". What do I mean by that? A personal trainer will take the time to understand your current state of health and specific goals. They will then apply their expertise to come up with an exercise plan that works for you. Finally, and probably most importantly, they will set up a schedule to work with you to implement your exercise plan. This is the way a good consultant should work with you. No surprises there.

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But *please* notice one very important point—a **personal trainer does not do the exercise for you**. Here is where the parallel to consulting gets lost too often for a lot of people. A good management consultant is one who helps you get to where you need to be by helping you to develop your own skills, build your own organizational muscle, and do the hard work needed to be successful. Consultants inform, advise, and challenge—but they should not do the work!

-Mary Adams ([adams@trekconsulting.com](mailto:adams@trekconsulting.com))

## strategic action

### *The Role of the Strategic Planning Consultant*

I have been challenged more than once by the question, “Why would anyone outsource their strategy to a consultant?” This feels like one of those deal-killer objections that should end the conversation, since we are management consultants who focus heavily on strategy. The truth is, you should not hire someone to do this for you.

That’s right; **you should never outsource your strategy**. Your strategy is the core of who you are as a company and where you are going. Strategy should only be developed by insiders, preferably the managers who are going to implement it.

But your strategy, like your post-holiday exercise routine, may be greatly improved by using a good consultant. A strategy consultant can help you to:

- Develop fresh information about your market, your customers and your company to encourage innovative thinking
- Structure a process that encourages continuous learning and performance improvement
- Provide focus and discipline to ensure that the process works the way you would like

In some companies, this is the job of a specific position or a department. However, this function serves as an internal consultant and still should not be developing the strategy. Whether internal or external, a good consultant can help the managers on the line (who should be forming the strategy itself) create a good process and keep it on track.

- Michael Oleksak ([oleksak@trekconsulting.com](mailto:oleksak@trekconsulting.com))

## industry snapshot

### *Setting the Stage for 2005 with your Customers*

Late last year, we kicked off an assignment with a new client to develop a long term value and exit plan. But our conversations about the business kept coming back to a pressing priority of the CEO: the finalization of annual account plans for their customers. These plans are critical because they essentially become a contract for a full year of business with the customer. We shifted gears and tuned up their process, locking in a much better year for the company by doing two things that may also be applicable for you:

- Have strategic conversations with your key customers. Don't just talk about what you have to sell today. Understand their goals for the year and how your company can help them reach those goals. Also, ask them about the longer term—where they see the market going beyond the year ahead. For more information about this topic, visit our Web site for the article on Strategic Conversations with Your Customers.
- Take a fresh look at your customer communication materials. Are you demonstrating your understanding of their goals? Are you relating the value of your firm? It is always important to make it clear how your services are addressing the client's pain and making their lives better. Bring up the level of your materials to reinforce your image and your connection with the customer.

Whether or not you work on the basis of annual agreements, now is a great time to tune up your customer relationship management.

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## reading list

### **How to Hire a Management Consultant and Get the Results You Expect** By IMC USA

Given our focus on consulting this month, we thought it might be helpful to refer you to a pamphlet produced by an organization to which both of our principals belong, the Institute of Management Consultants-USA. This pamphlet is based on a manual developed by Stewart Washburn twenty-five years ago. Stewart is now retired but was for many years an important member of both the IMC national and New England regional organizations. It includes the answers to basic questions about using and identifying the best management consultant to fit your needs. It also includes the Code of Ethics to which all members of IMC (including Trek Consulting) comply.

This document is available online as a service of IMC-USA. Please note that you will have to register to get the manual, but you may opt out of their mailing list.



## announcements

Family Business E-News included a piece by Trek entitled, "How to Plan an Off-Site Family Business Meeting".

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Trek will be speaking to the Printing Industries of New England on March 9, 2005 about building realizable value for business owners.

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Next month, Trekking will address the art and science of business strategy.

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## about trek consulting

Since 1999, Trek Consulting has helped CEO's of early stage and middle market companies to face challenges of growth, change and succession. Our hallmarks are fresh information, disciplined analysis and practicality. We help you create specific action plans with metrics tied to revenues, costs or corporate value. Then we follow up to help you keep on track and/or adjust your plans as circumstances change.

Our clients report improved market focus, increased revenues, better margins and lowered costs. To learn more about Trek Consulting and how we can help you improve your company's results, visit us on the web at [www.trekconsulting.com](http://www.trekconsulting.com) or call us at 781-729-1008.