

CRAFT OF CONSULTING PODCAST

EPISODE 5: Helping Clients Transform—with Andrea Fabbri

Deb Zahn: Hi, I want to welcome you to Episode 5 of the Craft of Consulting podcast. My guest today is Andrea Fabbri. He is the managing director of the New York office of BrandingBusiness. BrandingBusiness is one of the world's leading brand strategy agencies. And, as a consultant, Andrea, works with companies big and small all around the world on how to design and execute brand strategies. And in today's interview, we're actually going to go really deep into his craft as a consultant. We're going to talk about how he helps clients understand and fully embrace what it is that he does, what branding ultimately is, and then how he also works with organizations and companies to truly help them transform. We're also going to talk a lot about culture and cultural fit, and how those are critical in helping companies and organizations, not just make change, but also make sure those changes stick.

And it's a really interesting interview because Andrea also happens to be a jazz musician. Throughout the interview, you'll hear him pepper in reflections about how consulting in jazz are alike. It's a real treat today to listen to Andrea talk about what he does and how he does it. Let's get started.

Deb Zahn: I want to welcome my guest Andrea Fabbri. Andre, tell my audience what type of consulting you do.

Andrea Fabbri: Yes, thanks, Deb. I am a brand strategy consultant or as I often refer to myself, as a corporate therapist.

Deb Zahn: I understand that and how did you get into consulting? How did that start for you?

Andrea Fabbri: Well, it started really on the corporate side, even though you wouldn't call that necessarily consulting but oftentimes, particularly certain positions, and that was the one that I had 21 years ago. Positions that demand managing change by nature of the project. Oftentimes, you find yourself starting to adopt the skills that consultants adopt because you have to manage several issues that again, typically consultant manage. That's really when I started into that. In 1998, I used to work for an international organization called Infosec, which is the world's largest

satellite communications provider. Really is the company that started the satellite communications industry was established in 1964 by JFK and other 11-member nations.

The company was an international organization just like the United Nations until 2001. And then it became private. In the process, of course, the company's management realized that, although up to the point when they became private, they really have never had to think about branding. They really have to think about positioning because they were being sustained by ongoing contributions from the various member countries, 145-member countries to be precise, but suddenly the organization needed now to become a private brand, a dynamic brand competing against a variety of telecommunications providers. Moving from being a customer service-oriented organization to be more of a sales-oriented organization, changing culture, the company never really had to do marketing after that point.

Here it is. This Italian person, I am from Italy from Rome, who understands the opportunity and I presented a plan to the CEO at the time. The plan was approved. And the plan also enabled me to bring and hire two agencies, branding agencies that were actually based here in New York, where I currently live and work. And that was really the beginning of my understanding of the importance of the work that I do. I can explore more and that I can expand more on that but also falling in love with it. It's a very fascinating discipline. You need to have right brain, left brain. You need to be a psychologist. You need to be a business thinker. You need to be creative but very structured. You need to be thinking out the box but also very conservative.

And you need to be very data oriented, being very comfortable with statistics, but also very comfortable with out of the box thinking. And also you have to manage design. You need to understand technology. You need to understand employees. You need change management and I became fascinated by the multifaceted nature of the job. Multifaceted nature required to be successful at the job and I can expand on that more. That was really the beginning and when I left in 2007, their company after going through mergers, acquisitions, campaigns in 18 languages in 200 countries. Amazing stories that I can talk about and probably write a book. I created my own consulting firm focused on clean tech. And then from there, I sort of naturally gravitated more and more towards joining larger agencies. And today, I'm managing director for Branding Business here in New York City.

Deb Zahn: That's great. And I've actually, so all of the skills you've mentioned, I think that's like a checklist for what I've seen you do. Because I've, of course, been lucky enough to see you in action.

Now one of the things that I know is true with a lot of consultants and I know is very true for branding is often, even after clients hire you and they know they want branding or they know FOR me, they want, strategic planning or they want something else, they often have a very limited view of what it actually is. In branding, I imagine they think, "Oh, it's picking colors and logos and visuals and all that sort of fun stuff." How is it that you get clients to engage in a sort of broad deeper understanding of what you actually do and the value of what you do?

Andrea Fabbri: By actually having a very different conversation with clients. I don't focus on branding, particularly in the early stages. I focus on the questions, whether it's a merger an acquisition or a mature company that realizes that it needs to change and innovating the marketplace. There are very fundamental, almost ontological questions that need to be answered. Who do you need to be in the marketplace in the future in order to drive business? What's going to be your value? What do you want to stand in the mind and the hearts of your customers? How do you want to move your culture to get there? What kind of trust formation organization do you need to put in place so that you can become that company? None of these questions utilize the word brand, but these are all the questions that pertain to the word brand.

Oftentimes, I am asked to define what is a brand. My definition is one that seems to be better understood and accepted is what do you want your customers and your employees to think of you and to feel when they experience your value through your products, your people, and your communications. And by defining it this way, it moves the conversation from pretty words and pretty pictures to actual value that derives from the interaction between a customer and a company through those components that I just mentioned. By moving the conversation from brand to those questions, I am able to have business conversations with the client, particularly in the early stages that are typically characterized by a discovery process, by data gathering, by insights, by fact finding, and so on.

That discovery phase is there to answer real business questions and then, as the client becomes more and more comfortable, then obviously, inevitably, we start using more and I suddenly, I do start using more of those terms like brand positioning. I try not to do it too much at the

beginning to avoid people falling into a very often myopic view of what a brand is or their own view, which might not be necessarily incorrect or oftentimes is partial and is colored by their own personal experiences. It is about elevating their conversation to a much more strategic level and trying to make sure that that conversation stays at that level for as long as I can.

Deb Zahn: And I know that by those questions, what you're pointing out, which is again, what a lot of consultants even in different fields do, is you're ultimately talking about transformation.

Andrea Fabbri: Yeah.

Deb Zahn: And those questions, I would imagine, try and get clients into the mindset of that's ultimately what this is about. How do you get clients to embrace that that's really what you're after and the rest of the branding elements are a reflection of that?

Andrea Fabbri: Well, oftentimes, practically all the work that we do pertains to companies facing inflection points. It can be a small company that now has an opportunity to grow because of certain market conditions. Or it can be another type of inflection point of a mature company that has been around 100 years threatened by emerging technologies. Or a merger or acquisition that brings about and brings out all kinds of other issues. Then I've to focus on that first and foremost, that sort of that part of the conversation and that is the tricky part. I always say. That's why I was using earlier the word corporate therapist. I really am a corporate therapist and I have sort of three basic sort of areas that I tried to focus on. But the first of all, there's no change that can come because again, companies that face these kinds of inflection points necessarily realize that they have to change.

Then the question though, of course, is to convince them that they have to change. To do that, it is necessary to have data and insights. Without data, there's no strategy. There's no recommendation that can be believed. There's no thoughtful strategic plan that can be embraced. Data and evidence-based thinking equals confidence in the recommendation that is an essential step. And obviously, the bigger the change, the more data and the more evidence you have to gather and make sure that it's not just qualitative but really also quantitative. The key there is to remove the conversation from opinions, to move it from the opinions sort of type, to move it to the more towards facts and evidence. That is also necessary because typically in a situation of change. Some managers are much quicker to embrace change than others.

Without evidence, management teams don't go along towards a common path. Evidence can be used to win their approval and have them agree to a path forward, which then leads me to the second path. That path forward is probably the trickiest one certainly, politically speaking. Now that the first one is full of the perils and the difficult situation, a brand is a promise, particularly in the case of change, if the promise is just a promise and what you go to the market with doesn't really match reality. Well then, what is a brand good for? One of the, I would say, pillars of my way of looking at brand strategy is to use a brand as a change agent. I look at the experience that a brand, particular brand strategy allows to define. And then I use that as a strategic plan to evaluate whether or not the company can deliver on that strategy by looking at processes, systems, culture, people skills, you name it, practically everything that I can.

Out of that there are a lot of interesting conversations, a lot of political conversations. You have to be very careful, but out of that we develop a roadmap. So that when the strategies presented, people are engaged, they agreed to a plan, they agree to a path forward. Now the path forward needs to be quantified. And that is absolutely essential. If it remains theoretical, then it becomes advertising and that's not really the power of the brand fully realized. Based on this a gap analysis by comparing the brand promise based on a new strategy with the reality of the business, I develop a roadmap that looks at both internal as well as external areas that need to change. I'm currently doing a huge transformation project for a credit union and that's exactly what we're doing. It is incredible, the level of clarity and commitment that it brings. Because it doesn't only show them types of activities that are necessary, but it informs budgeting, it informs planning, it informs activities, and it becomes a management tool for the CEO. The CEO can see, "OK, here's the roadmap and I'm committing to. It's going to take this long." Usually it's not a year roadmap or two months, usually the three to five-year roadmap.

The third big component is, of course, the culture. If the culture doesn't come along with you, there is no brand. I am a big believer that brands are first and foremost successful if they're built within, so inside out. And so that becomes also then the third part. We analyze the brand, we compare the brand with the culture to understand gaps, and then develop a culture plan that allows us to move to organizations towards that brand promise. Example of the credit union. One of the new pillars for the success of the future that is embodied by the brand is innovation.

And I'm simplifying words here. Credit unions are not exactly known for innovations, are they? What we have to do, we have to make sure that the values, the vision, the mission, and some of the core statements that become the pillars of a culture contain elements that describe innovation.

Now this is interesting part. Innovation is perceived as product innovation. But innovation can be many, many things. And so how we are defining innovation for this culture is allowing the culture to believe that they can be innovative because there's nothing worse than saying, "OK, credit union, you need to be innovative. So you need to become Apple." People say, "I can't become Apple." But if you show them what they can become to get there. These are sort of the three big buckets I would say. That's why I was saying earlier, I'm a corporate therapist, which is what I find beautiful about the process but also what also makes it incredibly difficult because I have to convince management. I have to paint a future that they believe in. I have to deal with the politics. I have to convince the market. I have to convince the employees that that is the right path. I have to develop the assets that make things real. I have to show them gaps. I have to show them solutions. I have to then implement them and take ownership. It's a lot to handle, I don't know if answered the question, but maybe a bit lengthy. But this is really the sort of, in a nutshell how we build brands.

Deb Zahn:

Thank you. I want to dig into the culture a little bit because, again, I haven't seen any consulting that have done well who didn't have to address culture and cultural fit behind what you're trying to do. And so I know it's as you said, it's an important aspect of your work. I truly do believe the adage "culture eats strategy for lunch," which is generally why, whenever I meet with new consultants who are asking for advice, I always encourage them to pay careful and close attention to that and not just pick up one strategy and think you can airlift it into another organization. And it'll easily be adopted because the cultures could be drastically different. Say a little bit more about if a client has a desire for a brand and a reality that is so distinct from their culture. How do you either adjust how they are willing to accept and view it or how do you get them there?

Andrea Fabbri:

That's why it's a lot of corporate therapy. Obviously, I think you heard me saying this before. Rome was not built in a day. I know that because I was born in Rome. Grew up there. So I think I know something about it. I also know that in Rome, we have a person there right now he's called Pope Francis, who every Sunday comes out of a pulpit and believers and followers are rejoicing and believing in what he's saying. This is not how

cultures really work. In very simple terms, just to explain the concept, we believe in a roadmap that allows culture if drastically different from what the brand and the company needs to be in the marketplace to slowly evolve and get there. And in that roadmap what is essential is to identify a set of behaviors instead of cultural aspects that can be leveraged to win over and to move the organization slowly.

In that move, there are two key components. The first one is clarity and transparency. It's very important that people need to understand rationally what is this new future all about. Why do we need to move to become innovative? Now going back to my example for the credit union or why do we need to embrace whatever performance. And so there has to be first and foremost a rational evidence-based understanding from all the employees, particularly those in management positions about what is the new vision. What is the new route? Why we're doing it? What's driving it? Going back to those early questions that I was talking about. What are the questions that I help companies and trends? Without that rational foundation, it's very difficult for people to ask them. It's very difficult for us, for a consultant, for the CEO to ask to change. They need to be understanding it and then they need to be energized. So that's one.

Secondly, changing the culture takes two. It takes the people but also takes the management. Let's go back to the example, in the case of the innovative credit union. It's not about saying it. It's actually about showing it. So what we did, we put in place a 16-month plan that every month tied to a technology roadmap. Every month, show the employees that the company is truly committed to innovation by releasing a new product or simplifying a process that used to take 15 minutes, now takes 2. By changing branches and how branches operate, by doing many other things without going through the exhaustive list. That creates an understanding for the employees that you're not kidding, that the company is really, really committed. And that also ends up doing is, it ends up re-energizing and reaffirming for those that believe that that is the right path, their commitment towards the new direction. But it also enables those that don't want to have any part of it to naturally show signs of malcontent. And therefore, then the company has a clear ability to understand who's behind them, who's helping, and who's not. So that is the second step.

And in the process: communication, communications, communications, communications. And praising great behaviors, creating ambassadors. That is something that works quite well. And those are where I would say, these are the principles. Of course, easier said than done. For small companies, it's a lot easier when we have to deal with a company like we

were dealing last year that has 14,000 employees across 75 countries. Then it's a very different story because you're not just dealing with a company's culture. You're dealing with the cultural nuances based on where these people live and were born and sometimes it's not the same. Look at me, I'm Italian and I live in your city, although the city I think it's more Italian than most American cities but because of its heritage. And so that is the process.

And fundamentally all of that is a constant monitoring of how the organization between the management and direction of the management is chosen. And the company in scope, accepting failures, celebrating successes. I always tell the CEOs and the managers that I work with on an extensive repositioning of the brands. I always tell them: 70% is going to go really well, 10% is going to go, and OK, there's going to be a 10% that is not going to do well. Right from the beginning of the engagement, I start conditioning people to think that way. Not because of being defensive but because this is difficult. Things can happen that can alter the path to plan. Unexpected things hard to predict. It's the last point that I wanted to make is going in with open eyes, open mind. Really the key to success for a consultant is establishing such a relationship of trust and transparency that if things don't go well, it is understood why. Never shying away if you make a mistake. Always think proactively, always think on behalf [of your client], always solve problems, always show value. It can be very demanding. Just like a jazz performance, if you're a musician—and you know that I'm a musician—bizarre thing but you almost don't have to think what you're playing to play well. In fact, not only you cannot think, if you think too much in the middle of a jazz performance, you're not playing well, because you have to let go.

Deb Zahn: Well, I also really like the establishing some early tangible examples of things are different now. And I do a lot of strategic planning. And that's often what I tell places, particularly places where they have changed fatigue, initiatives that come in, most of the time they didn't really change anything. And oh, here's another one.

Andrea Fabbri: Here's another one.

Deb Zahn: Yeah, exactly. And, "Oh, look, it's a same suit, different consultant." And what I generally say is how to pick something even if it's small. That's enough of a pain point for enough people that you can instill them with hope. And, if you don't do that, they're not going to find anything that you're going to do believable. There was a doctor that I worked with ones who gave a somewhat off-color example of it, where he was talking about a doctor who was a gerontologist, who worked with elderly

population. His quality scores were just amazing, well beyond any of his peers. And they asked him, "How do you do it?" And he said, "It's easy. I solve their constipation. And then once I do that, they'll do anything I want." I always tell organizations, I tell that story. You have to find what yours is, even if it's a small thing and solve that. People feel like their day to day lives got a little bit better, and then you can usher in some of the larger things that you're talking about.

Andrea Fabbri:

Then, broadly speaking, there is always going to be a certain percentage of the culture that is the things have changed negatively. There is a natural resistance to change. We all have it. We can all look at our own lives and realize how we don't embrace change. A consultant by definition cannot be scared by change because usually were called in to manage change, whatever that means. I know in my case, that can be merger or an acquisition. Talk about a drastic change but listening is key and, you're right, showing success and then really showing that the company means it. I love reading classics and I had a classical education and I often use the example of a Trojan horse. I always tell the CEOs, OK, let's say in the case of innovation you want to be innovative. Great. What are three products that show the marketplace that you are really innovative or that you are really focused on performance? Pick three because we're going to use those as proof points and as evidence of your belief and commitment and the value that they can bring.

Same thing applies to the culture. What are the Trojan horses? How are we going to do this? And, of course, the "how" is the question. And each culture, each company in the case of culture requires its own approach. And that's why we do cultural mapping to understand broadly what is a culture like. Even in the same healthcare space, in the case of mergers and acquisitions is the perfect example. You think two hospitals are merging, "Oh, same industry, they're probably going to be very similar." No, I have plenty of evidence that shows exactly the opposite no cultural twins.

Deb Zahn:

Yeah, exactly. I also looked at one of your blogs where you're talking about the importance of action, and it really struck me. I'm originally from California, and now I live in New York. And so I've experienced the different cultures of both coasts. And in California, my job was to say, "OK, let's stop processing and talking and let's do something." It was to push towards action. And then I came to New York, and it's a completely different culture. And my job was to say, "No, no, don't just do something, think about it first and come up with a strategy." And both of those are important as for those clients who want to spend too much time deliberating. How do you spur them to coming up with a strategy,

taking action, and then making refinements as they go and then those who just want to ready, fire, aim and then jump right into action? How do you work with clients who sort of lean in either direction to get them to either develop a strategy or take action?

Andrea Fabbri:

Yeah, I thrive in them. No, just kidding. Well, what I do is I manage based on the plan. Any company will have people that are much more prone to act quickly and they might miss some important insights that may come out from a slightly more thorough thinking and vice versa. What I make sure that I do is I make the company adhere to the process. That's when the process becomes your best friend. Because if I'm asked to solve a problem, I should know that I need time. I can guess, after many years of doing this, I can promise you that within a week or two weeks working with a client, you already have an idea of what you might be doing for this company. In terms, of positioning, territory, not necessarily a crystal clear idea, but areas where you might want to take this company and the problems that you're observing already. I'm very, very careful about my early on observations because that's where my instinct is, hasn't been clouded yet, and it's all out there. But in general, the process becomes my best friend by making the company adhere or a company or a client adhere to a process that allows me to bring in an aligned people that want to go fast, and the people that want to go slow and make them go to the pace that I want them to go.

Now obviously that can change. If there is a constraint such as, we need to launch this new company for a merger in six months from now. Well, then everybody automatically agrees because they have to. They often have no choice. That's how I do it.

Moments of indecisions in general happen all the time. That's where, again, I go back to corporate therapist, and sometimes you just have to let it go. Sometimes you can't win. You can't win the argument. And in fact, by pushing for a decision, you might obtain exactly the opposite results that you had originally intended. Sometimes it's just better to let it go and then resume a conversation when the client is ready. That is a judgment call. That's why what I do requires certainly a lot of emotional intelligence. It's not just a numbers game. It's not a formulaic job. There's nothing formulaic about this job. Starting from a definitions. Each agency has its own definition of vision, mission, brand positioning, brand pillars, and so on.

Just why oftentimes, I don't even mention the word brand for that reason. That's how I do it, that's how it works for me. Now let's say sometimes I realized that I need to be prescriptive. And sometimes that

happens, where I basically had to say, "This is the decision. This is why. This is our professional point of view. It's up to you now." At some point the process has to move forward. So far, I have been lucky enough that people have listened to me and to my team. I never really had to face that situation. And maybe a couple of times, actually, but anyway, it's a partnership. That's where I was going. It's not the consultant. It really is a partner. When I succeed, I succeed because I'm a partner with the client and the client is a partner to me and vice versa. When things don't succeed is because a partnership doesn't work.

Deb Zahn: And I think it is that key you mentioned sort of one of the key ingredients of successful consulting is building that relationship and building a one based on trust and transparency, which I agree. I think relationships are always primary.

If you were advising a professional who was becoming a consultant, and they wanted to learn, the tricks of the trade, over a glass of wine, what would you advise them a really key if they want to be successful?

Andrea Fabbri: Ah, first of all, listening. I'd say half of my job is to listen and I don't mean just people talking to me. I know what they're saying. But also listen to the market, analyzing the data. What are the data telling me? How am I making sense of the data? But listening is absolutely essential. Without listening, there's no partnership that can happen. And hence I go back to that. That's for sure.

The second aspect to this, they need to have courage, not arrogance. See, courage means conviction but cannot be arrogance. It has to be informed by humility and humility has to be grounded in data. If you have conviction because of the data and the insights that you've gathered, and is that data is fully transparent out there and it's been communicated, then the recommendations of what you're recommending is not seeing as an arrogant point of view. Although, I guess you could combine arrogantly in this case you probably need some media training.

Deb Zahn: Don't do that!

Andrea Fabbri: Don't do that. Courage to have courage. It takes a while to be standing in front of people with conviction and say this is what you need to do and yet not come across as arrogant. Come across believable. I know that doesn't mean that we need to sell because in fact if you clearly [focused] on sales you cannot succeed in this job. You're great at selling but then you have to do. My view of this job is you can only be successful if you come from a place of humility and knowledge. The two are very

interrelated. When I started doing this, I mean reading, listening, watching, talking to people, studying them how they were doing it. I was relentless because I wanted to and I understood that I could not be taken seriously unless I was coming from a place of knowledge and understanding. The courage that's definitely very important and the humility and knowledge.

And then there is the last one this is a bit of a bizarre maybe one but it's really, let's use an often-used expression, problem solving creativity. People approaching consultants are not approaching us because they want a solution that has been already applied somewhere else. This is not a numbers game one plus one equal two. They're looking for some fresh thinking that helps them get out of a problem that helps them move forward. Really. Whatever that means. And so creativity becomes essential to fuel creativity as necessary, absolutely necessary to be almost obsessively inquisitive, almost like an obsessive mind. Obsessive, not because you're obsessive, because the mind cannot stop in search for the truth until it gets to the truth. And usually you know when you get to the truth.

As you notice, I haven't talked about MBA. I haven't talked about business. These are just qualities that you need to have as a human being. One thing that frustrates me sometimes it's how much importance is given to "Oh, he has an MBA" or, "Oh, she has a MBA from Harvard, she must be really smart." Nothing wrong with MBA from Harvard, or many other great institutions. I have an MBA. That is not necessarily what makes a great consultant. I go back to the corporate therapist, you really also ultimately need to be able to love and endure a great deal of problems on the way and come up with the solutions on the spot sometimes. But there is redemption at the end. And then there's nothing more beautiful and satisfying to me. Right now, we're launching three brands. They are new companies that have been around for a long time, and we are relaunching them in the marketplace. The day that you relaunch this look in the eyes of the CEO that has been staring at your eyes and trusting you for the last two years. Or you look at the eyes of the HR director with whom you work with for the last year to put together a culture plan. The brand is launched and you look at their eyes, the confidence. You realize that you haven't just rebranded, you have given these people a new sense of themselves. There is a new self awareness of what they can be beyond pushing products, beyond accounting, beyond finances, beyond profitability. There is new life that flows through. And that is something that I sincerely enjoy it because, at the end of the project, I realized I actually made a difference for this company. I haven't just gone there to fix the plumbing and left. I make

them believe in themselves again. That's an incredible output of our work.

Deb Zahn:

And I think a testament to how much you care about the people that you work with. Which I think is essential for consultants. You truly have to care. You truly have to want to get to that moment where you see the joy and the excitement and the newness on their face.

Let me ask you a last question because of course, the other part of being a consultant of any kind, hopefully, is to have balance in your life and to be able to actually enjoy your multiple different aspects even while we all work very hard. I know that you love your time with your family but as you mentioned, you're jazz musician, which is extraordinarily cool. How did you get into that and what does that do to bring that balance to your life?

Andrea Fabbri:

Balancing life is something that kind of goes up and down because if you care a lot about your clients' success, oftentimes you need to leave your hobbies or what you really like to do aside. That's something that has to be stated. For me, I play a little less now, still regularly. Playing music is like breathing. I have to play music. My brain plays music even when I'm on the subway on my own. I'm not really their board. I'm actually having a full concert. That's what I wanted to be when I was younger. And then I made different choices. I'm still very active. And I'm fortunate that way. Now, why I say that? Because what I do is the yin yang of music. I'm using in branding and consulting the same skills that are using music exactly the same one. For me, I became aware of that, that's when suddenly I realized, of course, I have to be up with something because these are the skills that I have naturally that I've been gifted so I have to do that. But this is more of a theoretical answer in brushstrokes. I think you can't be a great consultant unless sometimes you forget that you are one. And recharging the famous batteries if you want to use an often-used metaphor.

But it is essential for me to go here and there on weekends on my own, not with the kids, but on my own. On climbs on my own. Just to be nature. I don't have to speak, which is beautiful. I speak all day long. Just read my own thoughts, read my own thinking, my own emotions. Physical activity is phenomenal for that and really fun getting away and forgetting what I do. That is probably the most important thing I do. And I do it absolutely on a weekly basis. I have to. I'm happy to be with my beautiful wife. I love my kids. They're very active. I take them to all kinds of activities. They play really, really well soccer. They're on an amazing team so I'm happy with that. But I also have to have time for myself. I

guess to answer your question, getting distance from what I do allows me then when I go back to it to be to have fresh perspectives. And I have to tell you, oftentimes the best ideas come usually after a long hike in the mountains, I come back thinking, "Wow, did I think about that." Anyway.

Deb Zahn: Yeah, my happy places is my huge vegetable garden. And so I go out and I commune with my vegetables and talk to them and coax them into, giving us and...

Andrea Fabbri: I love cooking too.

Deb Zahn: And I tell my clients I was picking beets and I had this great idea! That is often it. When I just I turn off that side of my brain and I am in nature and then I essentially let the ideas flow.

Andrea Fabbri: One of the things that I noticed that particularly if I think about when I started compared to now and we were just talking this morning with my two chief creative officers, how design has almost become a commodity and there is a tendency to be formulaic. I hate formulaic. I can't. Jazz is anything but formulaic. You can go to see a performance of the same artist night after night. And you will not play the same notes, at least the good ones. And I really I like that. And that's something that we always have to be careful. We are valuable if we come up with something that it isn't formulaic. We need to be grounded. We need to be structured. We need to provide and exude confidence. But we cannot be formulaic. We need to have that spark and sometimes big ones and other times be moderate.

I think that's one complaint that I have sometimes about businesses today that they want things done quickly. And there is a tendency of going towards what it is known. My tendency is always to go where it is unknown. Let's explore. Let's think big and, of course, it has to be informed by data. That's why I was thinking, I was saying earlier you need to be courageous, but you need to embrace the uncertainty. I'd say probably that is the one thing that defines a great consultant the not having fear of the unknown any project. I start I have an idea of what needs to happen but what do I know what's going to happen four months from now. Some people cannot deal with uncertainty. I thrive in it.

Deb Zahn: Yeah, especially when it's combined with that curiosity. Without uncertainty there is no curiosity about what's coming next. I facilitate quite a bit and I've had people ask me how, when so much as unknown, I can facilitate towards something. I say I don't actually know where we're going at the beginning of it and there's always that moment about two

thirds through where I think, "I've no idea what that what is going to happen here but I'm really curious where we're going," and this is my role.

Andrea Fabbri: Absolutely, I completely agree. That happens to me all the time, particularly in workshops.

Deb Zahn: Yeah. Well, Andrea, I really appreciate you spending the time with us. I'm not just going to call you a therapist, I'm actually going to call you the corporate philosopher/therapist. I think that's a better term. But this is really helpful. And I think it's a good way for, again, professionals who've been in the world who are thinking, "Well, now I want to take what I know and be a consultant," to really think about how to approach it. I really appreciate your insights.

Andrea Fabbri: Absolutely, I've really enjoyed this conversation. And also thanks for the opportunity, Deb.

Deb Zahn: Oh, my pleasure. Thank you.

All right. I hope you enjoyed listening to Andrea to talk about consulting and jazz as much as I did. This has been episode five of the Craft of Consulting podcast.

I've got a lot of other great interviews that are coming up so please hit subscribe, so you don't miss anything. And as always, there's a lot more information that you can get on craftofconsulting.com. Looking forward to having you on the next episode. Bye, bye.