

CRAFT OF CONSULTING PODCAST

EPISODE 8: What New Consultants Need to Do to Succeed—with Michael Field

Deb Zahn: I want to welcome you to episode eight of the Craft of Consulting Podcast. I have a great guest today: Michael Field of EvettField Partners. They're a specialist consulting firm, and they work with business owners and leaders of medium-size business-to-business (B2B) organizations in Australia and New Zealand. Before consulting, he held senior strategic marketing and strategy and business development roles for technology companies as well as B2B and member service organizations. So he comes with a lot of experience. As a consultant, he works a lot with legacy companies. These are often family owned, so they need his help in figuring out how to invest in sustaining what they built but also how to grow their legacy for future generations. We're going to talk about what that looks like and how he helps them.

Another thing that he's going to talk about, which is really interesting and I love it, is, from the beginning, he and his firm decided that they would grow their business by the work they decline. And he's going to talk about how that actually helped them grow their firm and maintain a very solid focus on value creation. He's also going to offer a lot of advice for any professionals who are thinking about or who have decided to become consultants. He's going to talk about how they need to invest their time in defining their value proposition for an identified market, also clarifying and building a new brand separate from what they used to do under employment, and then skills that you specifically need for a consultant.

And then lastly, he talks about the importance of getting past barriers like sales reluctance and breaking through that critical first 8 to 12 months that can really make or break being a new consultant and being able to be successful. So very excited to have him on. Let's get started.

I want to welcome my guest Michael to the show. Michael, thank you very much for joining me.

Michael Field: Thank you. It's my pleasure.

Deb Zahn: So let's start off and have you tell my listeners what kind of consulting do you do?

Michael Field: Sure. The business that we're in is providing consulting services to mid-size B2B organizations. They are very much manufacturing industries

in Australia and New Zealand. The work that we do for them is really around competitive strategy and driving enterprise values. So very much topline revenue focused.

Deb Zahn: That's great, and when did you personally become a consultant? How did that happen?

Michael Field: About 10 years ago. The experience was that I felt that I had worked through every type of general manager, executive, and director role that I could. I started my career as a 20-year-old working in newspapers, and I finished in general management roles in technology and other companies. And I looked at the opportunity of...do I just want to do another corporate gig where it's repeating the same things or do I want to have the challenge of working across a whole range of different industry categories? And I chose the challenge.

Deb Zahn: Yeah, and that is the beautiful thing about consulting. Now I know that you in particular, because we talked a little bit before, work a lot with businesses that are building a legacy. So not just trying to build a business but either because it's a family or there's something special about their particular business, that they're really focused on the legacy aspect of it. Can you say a little bit about what that's like and what makes that unique from the standpoint of working as a consultant with them?

Michael Field: Sure. The vast majority of the businesses that we work with are private, family-owned operated businesses. They're very often second- and third-generation family businesses. There's one in particular that I'm thinking about where the grandson is now the managing director, and the founder was a fantastic inventor and innovative in the wine industry. And working with a client like that, you're not just working to quarterly financial performance. You're investing in their people and they are. They take their role in the community incredibly seriously. For that client, they are the largest employer in the region. And they're not only defending the legacy of their previous generations, they're building a legacy for future generations. So you're sitting opposite somebody whose heart and soul is in it. They really want the best and they're, in my experience, much more willing to make investments in longer-term activities rather than short-term activities.

Deb Zahn: That's great. Now I never worked with clients like that but I have worked with organizations where somebody was there from the beginning and it's been 30 years, it's been 40 years. I know that one of the unique things about those types of engagements is often, it's more than a business to them. It is, and in your case, it's family, but it's also their identity. Which

can make it really an interesting project to work on because it brings a whole new layer to the skills that you have to bring as a consultant. Have you experienced that? And how do you approach that?

Michael Field: You are right. Every business owner and every family dynamic is different, and each one of those presents different challenges and opportunities. The way we approach that is we have quite direct but fair conversations with the client in the first instance to say that, "Look, we are really interested in growing enterprise value. There are 3 things we need for this engagement to work. The first is a committed leadership team, so that's committed to growth and change. The second is an aggressive growth target. We need to be going somewhere. And the third thing is a deadline. And if you're prepared to sign up for all 3 of those things, we're going to have a really meaningful engagement."

Many business owners, and it's absolutely their right to do this, are more lifestyle owners. And they're really just looking to have a comfortable life and take comfortable earnings from the business. They're not an ideal fit for us and they're not generally looking for change. So, in the first instance, we try to qualify in or out the customer through some good, direct, meaningful conversations at the front end. And we remind them of those conversations if we find that we're kind of veering offtrack in some way.

Deb Zahn: I always love to hear consultants say that they're also looking for a fit with a client because the concern is always you want to build a business, you don't want to just chase business. And so how do you look at other things than those 3 "you have to be willing to do these 3 things." What kind of fit are you looking for? And if it isn't there, how do you communicate that such that it doesn't ruin the relationship, but they understand that they could be better served elsewhere?

Michael Field: Yeah, certainly. One of the ways to approach that is we have a very, very well-developed network of consultants who we can refer people to. So, one of the attractive parts about participating in this podcast today is that it's building capability in the consultant community, and I think that that's really valuable. So in the first instance, we need to make sure that we've properly scoped the work that needs to be done, and that there's a clear task. Secondly, is that the task for us? Is that the project or engagement that suits our services? And then, thirdly, is there a cultural fit with the people? And that's chemistry, and it's very hard to define that. And sometimes you just kind of know that it might not be the right chemistry fit.

We find that sometimes an organization...we did some work just recently. There was a very strong-minded advisory board of people who were kind of unwilling to budge on quite a number of things. And that's just not the right fit for us so we just find that if you have very straightforward conversations, you're very transparent about this is where we add value and our focus is on value creation. Both for them but also in the relationship, we want value creation in the relationship that we are both better as a result of working together. And a lot of that is the communication, the chemistry, and the willingness of the people to work.

But also the capability and skill fit. Is there a good skill fit for what you're doing? And we made a decision quite a number of years ago, it sounds like an odd statement, but we decided that we would grow the business by the work that we declined. It's been a fantastic decision. It doesn't tie up our resources on tasks that are not core for us. It doesn't cause us to be working with fractured relationships, and it's better for the customer and better for our team.

Deb Zahn: That's fantastic. I would imagine it also enables you over time to build up greater and greater mastery of the specific things that you do instead of...and I've seen a lot of new consultants do this where they'll take anything. If it even slightly has a whiff of something that they've done before, they'll take anything because they're coming at it from a scarcity mindset as opposed to: what is the niches in which I can add the most value?

Michael Field: Yes, absolutely, and I can understand that. Many people heading into consultancy, it might not be a choice of their own to leave the role that they're in. If they're leaving a corporate role, it may be a redundancy, a downsizing, and they find themselves that consultancy is an option for them. For many people, they don't actually know what it means to be a consultant. I don't say that in a disrespectful way. It's just that there is a perception that you can, with industry expertise, you can just step into consulting and earn a decent living. But you need to go through the process with yourself as you would with a brand.

You actually need to define your attributes. You need to define your capabilities, your value proposition. What is my value proposition and how am I going to communicate that? And who is the right audience for this? And if you invest the time in those things, then you don't have to be chasing the work that everyone else has rejected. You really want to be working on things that are your core capability, that you can do with confidence. There is absolutely a reassembling of the self after corporate

life to step into consultancy and be good at it, and it's not as natural a transition as some people may assume that it is.

Deb Zahn: No, because the skills that made you successful in your previous life, some of them will translate and some of them won't because consulting is a whole series of skills obviously that you get. Actually this leads this well into my next question which is: so I know that a number of folks who either find themselves in a situation where consulting seems like the best option or they're thinking about it. Or they're brand new and they're in their first 18 months, 2 years, or even earlier than that. What are some of the things that you're hearing from folks in that position, and what type of advice do you find yourself giving time and time again?

Michael Field: We have discussed this in the past. I've paid very close attention of being an active user of LinkedIn for 10 years, and I notice an enormous number of people stepping in and out of consulting. And the life expectancy in that is 12 to 18 months. Very often the things that, like you say, that cause their success in corporate life to not translate as well as they would like. We find that a couple of things. One is people assume that the brand that they worked for before, they might have worked for a large, well-recognized brand, is sufficient to carry their personal brand into the market. And it's simply not. Because you've worked for a big multi-national is good, but it's not a sufficient proof point to say you're going to be a great consultant and be able to solve my problem. In fact, for the customer, it creates a little bit more risk. Because if you worked for a big brand, you had an enormous engine behind you that could support you and now you're on your own. And what are your capabilities without that engine behind you? So that's difficult.

We find that there's a reluctance to be perceived as a salesperson. There's a reluctance to actually accept the role of business development networking, proposal writing, follow ups, and all the things that a well-qualified, well-heeled salesperson would do, but someone from executive and general management might find a little bit on the nose. So, these are things that might sound simple when you say them out loud, but they're very real. And sales reluctance is an enormous one, but I think the main one is what we talked about earlier, is just a lack of clarity around the value proposition.

Am I just a general consultant who will take on work at an hourly rate or a day rate that's available and essentially be a freelancer? Or am I going to actually build a set of capabilities and assets in my playbook that have a market value, that have got an identified market? And I'm able to bring those to market through not only my personal networks but also through

the lens of marketing. That could be publishing, that could be being a guest on a podcast or speaking at a conference. And really being confident and comfortable to put yourself forward as a brand and say, "This is my core capability. This is my skillset. This is how I add value."

Deb Zahn: I would imagine that scares away a number of folks when they hear that's really what it ultimately takes to do it. So I work at a mid-size firm in the U.S., and we do healthcare consulting. And we get a lot of folks who ran hospitals, they ran large organizations. We get a number of people from government who have never been in the position, as I say, to beg for their bread. And more importantly, to know the difference between Wonder Bread and some really good high-end artisanal bread, which is where they should be aiming. And they struggle a lot particularly with suddenly having to have transactional conversations, and that's a piece I wanted to talk to and dig a little deeper into you about. Which at the heart of some of the business development is being able to get to a place where, if you are a fit for them, and if they are a fit for you, you are engaging in competing a transaction. And that's really different than when most of us did when we used to be in our previous jobs.

How would you encourage a new consultant to get comfortable with that and to understand how to do it? And what skills do they need to bring to it, both hard and soft skills?

Michael Field: Sure. There's quite a few, I'm not sure that I can cover them all, but I'll do my best. The first one is around being clear on the value of your skills. So not the value of your hours or days, but the value that your skills bring to the customer. I recommend that anyone entering consultancy, one of the first things they look at is how can I demonstrate a verifiable, provable ROI on the work that I do? And that is a little bit of work in there. It's not a straightforward thing to do. If you are willing to first of all step into the needs analysis, the scoping stage, which is not selling. It's just understanding a problem. If you're willing to work through that and work with the customer to understand, what is the impact if this isn't fixed? What impact does it have if things stay the way they are? And what level of investment is required to fix this problem. And how would that pay off? Having those sorts of conversations are good, executive level conversations. But it helps place a value on the work that you do and then when structuring a proposal back to the client, it's a really good reference point to say, "We've established that this is costing you \$300,000, \$400,000 a year, year in year out. The proposal that I have is a \$30,000 solution to that problem, and it will take a 3-month investment from you and us to make that happen. How does that sit with you?"

It's a very evidence-based and logical discussion to have. And although yes, you are asking for sale, you are qualifying the customer around a price and budget and these sorts of things. You're really just having an executive discussion around the value of applying resources and investment into solving a problem. So I think a mindset is part of that.

The other point, I just want to go back a little bit on that. One of the issues that I see with consultants really who don't break through to be a successful consultant is they actually rely far too much on their existing network. And they think that that will be enough to keep them fed and watered, and it simply isn't.

It very often gives them a false sense of security for the first six months because they are easier conversations. They can have a coffee and a lunch with a known colleague. They can say, "Yes, we've got something for you." And they pull off a couple of small projects. They fail to turn those into case studies, they fail to turn those into marketable testimonials to use. And then once that dries up, they wonder where the project pipeline is going to come from. So I just wanted to make that point that it really is a continual nurturing of your network and expanding of that network.

Deb Zahn: Right, and to balance of... and again, I've seen consultants do this on both sides, where they're only looking ahead because they're so worried about what's going to happen if they aren't continually getting new business that they don't focus on the clients that they have in front of them. And that part of their brand is offering supreme value, or they only, as you said, focus on what's right in front of them and think that that fountain of work is always going to exist. I love the idea of the case studies and the testimonials, and the other things that you need to get. How do you suggest, beyond their network and including to those things, how do they get in front of other people so that they can display some of their values? So that they can get a meeting or they can get whatever that next step is?

Michael Field: Sure. Depending on what industry they're in, which markets they're servicing, they really need to get involved in that industry. So that can be attending industry events as a participant, or that can be attending industry events as a presenter. One of the things we've found to be really, really successful is to seek out opportunities to give presentations to group of people in the industry category that we work in. And that takes time, that takes trust, that takes some investment. There's a slight, I think, an imperceptible risk around "are we giving away our pay?" I

don't subscribe to that point of view. I simply think that if you turn up and give value, that value will come back to you.

So there's quite a few things that you need to do. You need to have a great LinkedIn profile. You need to be willing to publish content on LinkedIn. And I don't mean purely self-promotional content, I mean value adding content. Tips, worksheets, how somebody can tackle a problem. You need to be willing to display your thinking to other people and have that critiqued through the lens of something like LinkedIn and codify that into presentations. So for example, every month I would be doing a presentation to an industry group, and that would be a closed user group somewhere. Or that could be as small as 15 to 20 or that could be many thousands of people where we really present and showcase our capabilities in developing value propositions in highly-contested B2B markets. And we figure that if we continue to beat that drum and focus on what we're really good at, then the customers that we need actually self-select into our pipeline. We have to do very little chasing these days.

Deb Zahn: Yeah, and I like that. I use the term sort of generosity of value so that if I'm presenting or even if I'm at a conference and I'm in a hallway talking with somebody, I'm not holding anything back in hopes that they're going to sign a contract with me or pay me. If they never come back to me, my hope is that I've added value. Now generally they either do come back or they tell somebody else, "This is who can show up and help you solve your problem. I mean, this is what she told me in a hallway for goodness sake." So I really like that idea of generosity because again, I think mindset as well as developing those skills, developing clarity. Mindset is as important of how you approach this so that your potential clients have an experience of you before they ever sign a contract with you, that shows this is what it will be like to work with me. And that you're always showing, that you're always advertising essentially what the experience will be. How do you try and show the clients that you want to work with what it would be like to actually work with you?

Michael Field: Sure. We have a really strong set of values in the business that we run, and we believe in the value of helping businesses be more successful. There's a whole range of things that are just an undeniable part of our DNA and culture. And we feel that if we can speak freely to the clients around what drives us personally, what gives us satisfaction in the role of what we do helping the businesses, that they will understand that and respond to that. It is a challenge because people feel uncomfortable sometimes in self-promotion, but I think that you need to be willing, as you said, first of all see the world as really quite a good place.

Secondly, see your skills as being valuable. And, thirdly, be willing to go out into the market and say, "In exchange of these skills, with the opportunity we've got, we'll be good for everybody." And it is a mindset. We are incredibly generous with our time and taking the time to explain to a customer or a potential client what it is that we do, to really understand their problem. If we get to the point where we think that we're not the right fit or even if the timing is wrong, we would talk to many customers out of going ahead with projects. Because of timing or other things we thought weren't quite right for them.

The trust that that builds is incredible, and, like you say, whether they come back to us or not in time is not material. What matters is that we did the right thing and helped them at the right time or referred them to somebody who could help them. I find that we have a very good conversation rate, and I don't say that in sort of a brutal, transactional way. It's just a fact that from...If we're going to develop a relationship to a proposal, we are probably 80% confident on closing that piece of work. Because we've invested the time to understand it properly, and we won't create a proposal unless we feel there is a genuine opportunity to do work there. We're not in the proposal printing business, we're in the relationship and value-delivering business. So I think that's maybe another thing to think about.

Deb Zahn:

Yeah. And I like how you also said earlier, going along with that, that when you get to the point of giving a proposal, it's focused on, based on the analysis you've done previously. It's focused on what the result will be, and that's another mistake I sometimes find that new consultants make, is they talk about what they do. They maybe add how they do it, but they don't focus on ultimately, it's about giving the client what they want. And so I use the old phrase that when someone goes to a hardware store, they're not buying a drill. They're buying holes in the wood. And that's a piece where when I coach new consultants that are coming in is they're trying to buy relief. They want to sleep at night because they believe that you can solve their problem, because they think you understand what it is. Because you've shown it, not told them. You've shown it. And that you have a solution that is enough of a fit that they have some confidence that you can walk in and do that.

So one other question I had is as you're giving advice to new consultants, and they've done the homework. They've done their work to figure out what their value proposition is, they've done their homework to say, "This is the type of work that I'm best suited to do. This is the type of work that isn't a fit for me, and I'm willing to say no." And it's still taken a

while to get things moving quickly enough. And that's that time period, 6 to 18 months, sometimes a little bit longer, where hope might start to diminish a little bit over time. What type of advice would you give consultants to try and speed up being able to be successful?

Michael Field:

They really need to get the foundations right in the first 3 months. My honest view is that if they're at that position in the 12 to 18-month mark, although there will always be peaks and troughs in pipeline and project opportunities, that there are some foundational pieces that may not have been done in the first 3 to 6 months. So I will answer the question in terms of what I think they can do then. But right at the outset, they need to build their online profile. They need to build their network. They need to have a good CRM system for follow up. Many opportunities dissipate purely because the consultant didn't follow up, and 12 months later, 18 months later, they say, "Oh yeah, we were going to do that. What ever happened?"

So I think that good business disciplines at the outset are important. And if you're at that sort of 12- to 18-month mark and it's not happening quick enough, I will also suggest you don't have strong enough strategic alliances and partnerships. We get an enormous amount of work referred to us from even some of the big consulting firms, which surprises and flatters us in equal measure. But we find that we've got exceptional relationships with big consulting firms, with accounting firms, with law firms. With other suppliers of parallel services who might focus more on brand or customer experience. And the vast majority of our work at this point for us is actually referral from existing customers.

So, in the first 12 months, any work you do you should convert to a case study and be willing to have a conversation around the referral. Is there anyone in your network that you feel would benefit from the services? Would you be willing to share their name? I know these things sound very simple, but they're incredibly effective. Once you get past that point and you've got enough case studies and testimonials in the bag, then that work does itself in many ways. So, referral partners, strategic alliances, and referrals from your customers. Another thing that's worth thinking about is that revisiting customers that you may have done some work with, and there's an additional opportunity within that work. Because you've completed and delivered a project, that relationship hasn't ended and their business needs would've evolved since you did that work.

So quite often just staying in touch. I'm habitually calling people back maybe every 3 months, just reconnecting with them with a valid reason to talk to them. I don't just ring and say, "How is everything going? Do

you want a coffee?" I ring them up and I make a comment on a recent news release or a new warehouse that they've opened or a new product that they've developed. And I am genuinely interested in the progress of their business, and I find...In fact, prior to this call I was having a conversation with a client. We did work for about 18 months ago, and it uncovered two opportunities that I'd like to progress with us. And I didn't know that this morning when I walked into the office, but just by following up and having a chat with them, some opportunities were developed from that.

Deb Zahn: Right, and the key is that you truly do care. Because they can tell the difference. They can tell the difference between an upsell random call because you're not as busy as you were before. And you really care about how they're doing and want to see if you can help them in some other way.

Michael Field: I rang them purely because I was interested in what happened with some work that we're doing actually in the U.S. They were doing some export and I was kind of curious about it, so you're right. It's very rarely driven by a gap in our project pipeline. It's primarily driven by interest and curiosity. And that keeps our pipeline full, so it's a virtuous circle.

Deb Zahn: That's great. Yeah, I was fortunate. I had a client who I've now worked with for 7 years periodically. There's some gaps in between, but she said that she has a new opportunity, which I reached out to her about and said, "This is a perfect fit for you. Let's talk about it. We can strategize and then see if we can be helpful." And she said, "It's so nice to work with someone that I don't have to start from scratch every time we talk and explain who we are and what we're doing?" So there is a benefit to keeping in touch with your clients because every time they have to onboard new consultants when they need something, or struggle to try and do it themselves, they lose valuable time and energy that you could help them with. So I can immediately step in and help her because this opportunity is related to something that was a twinkle in her eye 7 years ago that we helped them create. And now there's an opportunity to bring it to fruition, and she doesn't have to wonder if I care. She already knows.

Michael Field: We find that to be true also, and one of the most intriguing things for me is the number of direct individual clients that we've worked with. And this is the second or third company we've done project work for them because they've moved to a new company. Because we know their work style and they know our values and our work style, they say, "Even though this is a completely new business and I've just taken over the role of X or Y or Z, we're going to get EvettField in here to come and do the

work because we know that they've got a workflow that we work well with." So you're absolutely right. Staying in touch with people and building that network. It's not a chore. If you are genuinely interested in people and their success, and their careers, and their lives, and you just maintain that interest, it has a curious way of paying off even though that's not your intention.

I just personally have an insatiable curiosity around how people tick and what makes a business work, and particularly what makes one successful. And when you show that level of interest, people seem to like having that energy around.

Deb Zahn: Yeah, another can-do person.

Michael Field: Yes.

Deb Zahn: That they know that they can trust. And I think that your point that you've made a few times about the importance of trust and building trust, and maintaining trust, is critical for new consultants. And I see often new consultants try and skip that because they just want to get to the work. How do you, again, when you're talking to new consultants, help them understand that the slowing down piece from the perspective of you are building a relationship. And as with any relationship, that takes time.

Michael Field: I think the difficulty for new consultants is purely the cashflow burn. So, for example, if they've taken a redundancy and they're looking at their bank balance. And they've got commitments at home, and they may have children in school and these sorts of things, that very often it's driven by the practical reality of watching their bank balance go down. And think, I need a deal to get across the line. So it's kind of a mixture of hunger and scarcity mindset. Helping people surrender that is a challenge, and not everyone wants to do that.

I think that if you can help them understand how to plan the difference between long-term sustainable revenue and potentially some short-term projects that they might need to do for cashflow purposes while they're building their business. Just stay the course on knowing your skills and driving at the places where you add most value has got a very long-term payoff. And I think the issue around this, in my observation, is that some people do head into consulting with a short-term mindset. "I'll just do this for a while until something else comes along." And if that's the case, it simply won't work. The customers know that because the customer wants somebody who's going to be there for the long haul. If they're

going to invest time and money and effort, and, as you said, downloading that sort of intellectual capital around the project and the business, they don't want to repeat that with someone else. They want you to be around.

I found that in the third year, we've been doing this for over 10 years now, I found that in the third year of our consulting business was actually the most successful. And I think...although I don't think people would say it out loud, I think that there's an element of some businesses and people where they'll say, "Well, we'll see if they stick at it. And if they stick at it then we'll work with them. But if this is just a temporary thing, I don't really want to engage with that." So there's a real value in that stick ability, and there's a real value in enduring some sort of challenges and personal pain in that early stage to say, "I'm committed to this as a career. This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to develop the skills and assemble myself in the right way to be successful, and not just give up and sort of, I don't know, fall short because of a few short-term challenges."

Deb Zahn: That's great. I'm sure when you started consulting or when your firm started, there were challenges that you faced that you had to figure out how to tackle over time. What's one of sort of the big ones that you think you've gotten a handle on?

Michael Field: Sure. I do think it comes back to what we were saying earlier where it's really defining, what is your superpower? Getting crystal clear and continuing to whittle down and narrow the focus of what you do and where you add the most value. The temptation in the early stages is very much to be a generalist consultant and take on the work that's available. But as I said earlier, we grew our business by the work that we declined. The second thing I think is scale. How do you build a team behind you? How do you get not so much the administrative side, although that's important, you need good project management capability, invoicing, proposal writing, and all of those sorts of things. But in terms of separating out the tasks in the business to say, "Well, we do need quality people who can do the work to the same standard that we can." While someone like myself is probably at the front of the business being the rainmaker and the relationship builder, the networker, and finding those opportunities, how do you codify those skills that are required to deliver on the promise that we're making to the market? And how do you do that in a way that's scalable and delivers a consistent quality standard? I think that's a challenge for any business where the founders are passionate and capable and invested, and they've got decades of

experience in a particular category. And then building a capable team behind you. I say this in a respectful way.

Engaging Millennials, there's new things to think about when recruiting Millennials and making a workplace a valuable experience for them. But also being able to deliver on the promise that we make to customers where the vast majority of our customers are over the age of 55. They come from a different sort of era of thinking in terms of how you communicate and these sorts of things. So I think that those are some of the challenges that we're still working through. I think that we've largely nailed them, but every so often we discover something new and interesting.

The other thing I think that is really important, and again I feel that it's one that I can confidently say we do very well now, is what I mentioned earlier. And finding those strategic alliances and partnerships, so how do you actually approach another party? How do you develop a relationship with somebody who, depending on their mindset, may see you as a competitor? They may see you as somewhat of a market threat rather than an ally. So being able to have, manage, facilitate meaningful strategic alliances and partnerships in my view is a key attribute to success in consulting.

Deb Zahn: That's fantastic. Yeah, I get a lot of business actually from other consultants or lawyers quite a bit. And I hold those relationships as sacred as I do my clients. There will never be a time that I will do anything that will put them in harm's way. I will send them business as well. I will think about opportunities for them and they do the same thing for me. And through that, I've probably gotten at least a quarter of my business if not more through those types of alliances. So that's a great strategy to point out.

So, I want to end with the question that I like to ask all consultants, and it's always that tricky one at the end, which is, knowing that everybody has things that they do in their life besides consulting and besides the work, one of the reasons that some people are drawn to consulting is that it gives you that flexibility or the hope for flexibility. So how do you balance other things in your life so that you get to enjoy the rest of your life as well?

Michael Field: It reminds me of an old consulting joke that I was told many years ago. That there's 3 burners on the stove, there's health, there's family, and there's money. Choose any two. I have a very simple philosophy. For me, it's a 3-legged stool. It is health and family and business success, and

they're all intrinsically intertwined. I have a young family. I have a 6-year-old, a 3-year-old, and a 1-year-old. It's a demanding home life and I really, really value that. I've always had a strong view around social contribution and creating value. So I found really meaningful ways to do that within those boundaries, so within my family life, my business life, and maintaining health. And that's a healthy mind and healthy body.

So for example, I'm on the Parents & Citizens (P&C) committee. I'm the President of the P&C committee for my son's school, and that keeps me very engaged in school life. And I find that that's a way that I can keep balance, contribute, and still feel that I am behaving in a meaningful and appropriate way with raising a family. So I say to people that I live a very small life as in those are really the priorities. I've got, at this age and stage, I've got no interest in any exotic travel or anything else.

Deb Zahn: Right.

Michael Field: I'm really just focused on building the business; spending time with my family; and staying happy, healthy, and fit.

Deb Zahn: That's wonderful, and you then get to bring that happiness and that fitness to your work life as well, which is always great in client engagements. And they sort of tell the difference when a balanced person is actually in front of them.

Michael Field: Yes, it's amazing the level, the depth of relationship that you build with your clients over the time is very much based around common values. Common hopes and aspirations, and in family business particularly, they're doing the same thing. They're putting the children through school. They're spending time away from home because they've got travel commitments and work commitments, and we need to be, as consultants, as empathetic and supportive and understanding of those personal issues for the client as the business issues. We can't simply go in there and just do the work and leave. That's a very short-term view of things. And although you can never really solve somebody's personal problems, whether you like it or not as a consultant. But if you're a good one, you'll hear about them.

Deb Zahn: You sure do. Absolutely. And that's also part of being a good consultant, is recognizing that that comes up too, because your clients are people.

Michael Field: Yeah, absolutely.

Deb Zahn: Well, Michael, I want to thank you very much. This has been fantastic, and again, it's one of those podcasts that I listen to and I think, if I had only heard this 10 years ago it would've saved me some turmoil at the beginning. Again, thank you very much.

Michael Field: I'm delighted to be part of the podcast. Thank you for the invitation, and I look forward to hearing many more of the podcasts that come out of this program. Thank you for the opportunity today.

Deb Zahn: Thank you. Thank you for listening to episode eight of the Craft of Consulting Podcast. So, click subscribe. I want to make sure that you get access to all the new episodes that I will be putting out weekly. And don't forget you can always find a wealth of other resources at CraftofConsulting.com. Thanks for joining me this week, and I look forward to having you on next week. Thanks, bye bye.