**Special Episode: The Top 3 Fundamentals of Getting Consulting Clients—with Deb Zahn**

Hi. I want to welcome you to this special episode of the Craft of Consulting podcast. This is Deb Zahn, your host, and it's just going to be me today. I want to talk about some of the fundamentals. The things that are absolutely critical for you to be able to get consulting clients.

On July 29th, I'm going to do a webinar training. It's a 90-minute training, and I'm going to dive deep into some of the specific strategies and techniques and the process for actually getting consulting clients.

But today, I want to talk about some of the fundamentals that if you get those right. Then you apply what I teach you, you're going to be able to get more clients, get them more easily, and get them more quickly. So let's dig into some of what this is. I've said in other podcasts, so I'm not going to go into depth, but some of what I'm going to be talking about today and certainly talking about in my training are based on what I've learned over the last decade. How I've built up clients. Now, as I've mentioned before, I had a rough start. I had months of delays before I started getting clients because I made a whole bunch of mistakes. I've said that many times before.

I don't want to focus on that today. What I actually want to focus on is what I figured out over time, and the three things that you absolutely have to get right. As I said, if you get those right, you're going to get more clients.

Let me start with the first one. And this is, again, fundamental. You have to understand that relationships are primary. That consulting is ultimately about developing, fostering, and nurturing relationships. Going along with that is the understanding that consulting is a long game, right? It's all about being able to build up a long-term successful, sustainable consulting business, and relationships are at the core of your ability to do that. So you have a short game that you also have to win, right? I know that. When you first start consulting or in your first couple years, you’ve got to get clients in the door, and you have to do specific things that are going to help you do that. That's some of what I'll talk about in my training. However, you want to make sure that when you're pursuing clients, particularly at the beginning, you're not doing anything that hurts what that long game is.

So you can still win the short game. Get clients in. But you need to make sure that whatever you do, you are putting relationships first. I'll give you an example of something that often happens when people first start out, right? Which is, they try and pursue clients. You're worried about getting income coming in, and so they can be too pushy, right? They can just harangue a client, email them too many times, call them too many times, and really trying to push for actually getting that sale.

Of course, the problem with that is, is that even if, let's say that even if you can get them to say yes, right? So you pushed and you pushed and you pushed. You maybe you could tell they were irritated. Maybe you didn't notice it. But you pushed, and you actually got a contract with them. The problem is, is you're going to be starting your relationship off with a deficit. You're going to have a deficit of trust. You're going to have a deficit of respect. And can you make that up? Is that something you can actually repair? Sure, but just as easily, it could really tarnish your relationship with them. So maybe you get that contract, but you don't get the next contract with them.

And, ultimately—and I'll talk more about this in my training—one of the things that you want to do is you want to build up repeat business because that means you can spend more time consulting and less time actually doing marketing and outreach. So you never want to tarnish relationships that you have just because you're trying to get some business in the door immediately.

Now, the other thing that you need to understand about relationships, and I had to come to understand, is you're not actually just forming a relationship with them. You're actually also forming a relationship with everyone who's in their network, right? Their immediate network of people they work with or within their organization or company. And then everybody that they're connected with. Because they will be asked about you and they will talk about you and you only want them to say good things about you, right? You never want them to say a bunch of good things about you and then end that with, "But…" And then they say something that's negative because it could be that one negative thing... because, remember, people weigh negative things more than they weigh positive things. So one negative thing is worth...I can't remember what it is, three...I think it's three or three to five positive things. So you don't want them to say, "but…" and then they say something negative about you because that's going to repel some clients. And that means that you're not going to get some of the business that you could potentially get. So you always have to recognize that your market is a network or a network of networks. But it's all about connections and relationships with the people that you interact with and then with the people they interact with. So you want to make sure that you know that anything you do with one person will reverberate throughout that network.

Now, I also want to say, I'm not saying that the only reason that you should cherish and nurture relationships is because you'll get something out of it. Actually, I do not suggest that ever. That's because clients can tell if you're being genuine or not. So you really want to be genuine. You want to be a good person. You want to actually care about the relationships that you're building not just because not caring will harm you or caring will do something for you. But that if you do that, that's going to create a perfect, wonderful foundation for you to build a lasting business on. So that's one of the fundamentals.

Let me talk about another one. And I've mentioned this in other podcasts before. I'm going to talk about it on my training, but I want to go a little deeper today into what I mean.

So another fundamental is that every experience that anyone has with you in your market is telling them what it's going to be like to work with you. So you are sending, whether you know it or not, you're sending signals to your market, to potential clients, whenever you take an action. Whenever you do something. And that's happening all the time. So if, for example, you're really responsive and you're respectful and hopefully interested and eager to help them and really genuine about that, that's the signal you're sending that once they hire you that's what it's going to be like to work with you. And that really attracts folks. So you're going to get more clients out of it if those are the signals that you're sending into your market.

Now, conversely, and sadly I've seen this, is if you're unresponsive or I've seen combative or arrogant or inauthentic or any of those things that will actually repel clients from you. Then again, you're sending that signal out into your market and you're going to get less business because of it. This can be a tricky one because... Let me take arrogance as an example. So when you're meeting with prospective clients, you certainly want them to understand that you know your stuff. That you can make good things happen. And you want them to feel confident that if they hire you, that's a really good choice because you're going to make something happen for them.

But that's a fine line between instilling that confidence and jumping or stepping over that line into arrogance as if you are the expert and they are not. You know what you're talking about and other people don't. That can leave a really bad taste in people's mouth. So even if they're confident that what you're saying is true, most folks don't want to work with someone that's arrogant. That's not actually fun. It's not interesting. They may already have people around them that are that way, and they're not looking to fill a slot.

So you have to pay attention to things like that and make sure that you are instilling confidence, being responsive, doing all of the things that you want to signal in your market but you're not jumping over the line and doing things that now would actually repel people.

So the last fundamental that I want to talk about is, it relates to all of these because it's really what will enable you to make good choices, and that is the importance of self-reflection.

So the best consultants I know, the ones who are in crazy high demand and do really incredible work for their clients and their clients turn into their best marketers even without them asking, these are the folks who are really self-reflective. So self-reflection is basically your ability to reflect on yourself. So your thoughts, your actions, your motivations, really understanding what makes you tick, and what makes you do or not do certain things. I place this probably or easily in my top one or two of ability for successful consultants. The reason is, is because it drives so much of what you're going to do. So it drives your mindset.

Your mindset can either help you or prohibit your ability to actually get clients. If you don't self-reflect on, "Wait a minute, how am I thinking about things? What are my habits of thinking that are either getting in my way or helping me?" Then you might be tripping yourself up and not knowing that you're doing it. It also drives your choices. So when you start consulting and as you build your business, you have to consider, "Well, what can I really do and what can't I do? How do I price myself? How do I potentially think about changing my price? How do I engage potential clients? How do I figure out how to change course when I need to?"

All of those require a high degree of self-reflection to do them extremely well. I'll take the example of what you can and can't do. So many new consultants when they first start off sort of fall into two categories. OK, it does fall in the middle, but often it's two ends of the continuum. So on one end of the continuum is, "I can only do what I've ever done before." Right? So very limited notion of what you could actually potentially offer clients and therefore that limits your ability to actually get clients because you're operating within a very narrow range that you have defined for yourself.

If you have self-reflection, you can look at that and say, "Wait a minute, is that narrow definition, is that box that I put myself in actually true? Or do I have skills and knowledge that's transferrable to everything? And oh, then my band just got a little bigger," as I call it, your zones. Maybe it's not just your comfort zone. Maybe now you can stretch more and do more for clients and now you can go out and target other clients who you may not have thought of before. On the other end of the continuum is, "I can do anything for everyone." Right? So that's the more of the arrogant version of, "No, no, no. I can do everything."

If you don't self-reflect on that and think about truly what I call your “no-go zone” is. That's the things that you shouldn't be doing because you can't deliver the excellence that's going to create a good experience for the client, get them their results, and build the reputation you want to build in your market. Self-reflection is key to being able to understand that. The problem with that one is, is if you try and do work within your no-go zone, these are the things that you are not best suited to do or can't do well, then you're going to ultimately hurt your reputation in the market and that's going to reduce your ability to actually get clients because they're going to hear, "Oh yeah, I hired them, and I couldn't get the result."

So that's one of the reasons self-reflection in terms of your choices that you make about your consulting business is so important. But it also really is about, can you learn from your mistakes and your missteps? Can you get better? Can you offer more value over time? Because you're able to reflect on what you know, what you can do, and all of the other things about yourself that lend itself to a successful consulting business. I could go on and on about how important self-reflection is.

I want to give another example of it because this is one I have painfully been a part of many, many times. That is, every consultant at some point in their career is going to have a bad initial meeting with prospective clients, right? Whether you do it yourself or you have a team of folks with you, at some point in time, it's not going to go well. You could easily walk away from those experiences, and lots of consultants have, and say, "Whatever. Whatever with them. They didn't want me. I'm not going to think about it and I'm just going to move on and try and get meetings with other clients." Now, the problem with that is, is then you miss an opportunity to learn and to get better.

So in the best circumstances, it is to be able to reflect on, "OK, that didn't go well. Ouch! What went right? What went wrong? And what do I need to change in order to actually improve it so that the next time that goes better?" Or even know, "Is there a way to salvage this? Is there a way to actually make this work?" You have to have self-reflection to be able to determine that. So if you cultivate anything, cultivate self-reflection as much as you can.

I want to do a little caveat because what I don't mean is sort of the full self-reflection. So the fake version of just beating yourself up because you made a mistake, which I don't think is actually self-reflection. I think that's something else. That could be a lot of different things, but it ain't self-reflection. Self-reflection is really about being honest with yourself, but also to be able to do it with a kindness and gentleness so that it really is about actually helping you get better and not just feel horrible and then you go out and you repeat the same mistakes again. Or you beat yourself up and now you're too afraid to do anything and it stops you in your tracks. That's ultimately going to inhibit your ability to get clients, or it's going to scare you and you're going to run back to employment even though that's not what you really want. So avoid that version.

Those are the three of the most important fundamentals to getting clients and to building a profitable and sustainable consulting business that is going to last and that you can really rely upon for your income and for your livelihood. So that's: relationships are primary. Every experience that you give people in your market signals what it'll be like to work with you. And then the last one, self-reflection is your superpower. So cultivate it as much as you can.

Now, the training that I'm going to give on July 29th is going to go into more of the nitty-gritty of the house; so the strategies, the techniques, the processes, and the things that you should be prioritizing. But again, if you have these fundamentals in place and then you apply the things that I'm going to be teaching you, you're going to get more clients. Because it's the combination of those things that is so extraordinarily powerful.

I do want to say a little bit more about my training so you have a sense of whether or not it's right for you. So the training very simply is called How to Get Consulting Clients. Right? Because that's what we're all trying to do. And these are the strategies that I use and other really successful consultants use to get clients and ultimately build up a robust pipeline of consulting business.

So my goal in this is, I don't want folks, particularly who are new to this to wonder, "How do I get clients? I don't get it. I don't understand what I'm supposed to do." Or they're struggling because they're in this wretched feast-and-famine cycle of consulting business, right? Sometimes they have a ton and then they have absolutely nothing, which is absolutely unnecessary. You don't have to be in that. So I want to talk about how to get clients, and not just get them, but have a steady stream of clients ultimately to build up that sustainable consulting business that you want.

So it's a live, 90-minute webinar training. It's $97. There's going to be limited seating, so you definitely want to make sure that if you register, you show up on time to make sure that you get your seat. But essentially, the idea is, by the end of the training, you're going to know how to overcome some of those mindset traps that I talked about earlier. The things that could actually get in your way of getting clients. You're also going to understand how important it is and how to articulate what you can offer and to do that in a way that actually attracts and doesn't repel clients and you're doing it in a way that's going to get them to hire you more.

You're also going to learn and various techniques for raising your visibility in your market and to do that in front of the right clients. So there's lots of ways that you need to become known in your market so that people come to you or when you approach them it's not the first time they've heard about you. I'm going to talk all about different techniques for that, and then get into some of the details so that you'll know how to cultivate prospective clients and get in front of the right ones so that you're not using a scattershot approach to outreach that is going to be hit and miss.

We want it to be a very targeted approach, and I'm going to teach you how to do that. Then the other is, OK, so if you get in front of the right clients, well, then what? So this is really about how to navigate those conversations with clients so that you get them to ask you for a proposal and ultimately be able to craft proposals that are going to win you more contracts. Then, ultimately, my favorite thing and the thing that I'm known for, which is to close more deals by making your value obvious and helping them get past whatever inactions they might have or objections they might have.

Then, as I mentioned before, a good chunk of your business should ultimately be not just repeat business but also preferred business. So folks you've worked with that are going to tell other people, "Oh no, no, no. That's who you should work with." I'm going to talk about how to do that and how important that is for building your business and getting and keeping clients. Then of course because I can't resist, I'm going to talk about some of the common mistakes that many new consultants, including me, have made that stopped us from getting clients so that you can just skip right past those and you can get to the fun part. Which is getting clients and then doing the work for them and having a great time doing it.

So the last thing I want to say is, I want to incentivize you to come on this training and learn the things that you need to learn to build your consulting business. So I am actually going to offer a free tool. This is a tool that is going to help you develop your value proposition as a consultant. So your value proposition essentially describes what your value is in the market and it describes your value to prospective clients. And it's absolutely essential for getting clients because you need to be clear and not confuse them about why they should hire you.

So I have a tool that's going to walk you through a process, so by the end of it, you'll be able to describe what your value is and you'll have a nice crisp and clear value statement that you're going to use as you start to introduce yourself into the market. Now, I also love to reward fast action because fast action is one of the things that's actually really important for being a successful consultant. So if you register for this training by Friday, July 24th, just before the stroke of midnight, 11:59 PM, that's Eastern Time, you're also going to receive a free workbook. So this is an 18-page workbook called, “Know Your Zones: The Consultant's Guide to Describing What You Can Do.”

I referenced that earlier. So that's you knowing exactly what zones you can and should be operating in and be able to describe that. This is going to help you win more clients because what it essentially does is by the end of it, you're going to be able to describe to clients, “Here's what I can do to help you achieve these results and here's essentially how I've done it before,” so that you have examples in your pocket. Now, this workbook, I usually sell this for $49. You act fast, you're going to get it for free, which of course makes the overall training less than $50, which you should make up in less than a minute in your first engagement.

So I think it's definitely worth your while. I'm really excited to share what I've learned about how to get clients, to make your life easier, and to make your path faster. So hopefully I'll see you on the training and I'll be back with my next podcast, a great guest, where we're going to talk about all things related to being successful as a consultant. So thanks so much.

Thanks so much for listening to this episode of the Craft of Consulting Podcast. I want to ask you to do actually three things. If you enjoy this episode or you've enjoyed any of my other ones, hit subscribe. I got a lot of other great guests that are coming up and a lot of other great content, I don't want you to miss anything. But the other two things that I'm going to ask you to do is one is, if you have any comments, so if you have any suggestions or any kind of feedback that will help make this podcast more helpful to more listeners, please include those.

And then the last thing is, again, if you've gotten something out of this, share it, share it with somebody you know who's a consultant or thinking about being a consultant, and make sure that they also have access to all this great content and all the other great content that's going to be coming up.

So as always, you can go and get more wonderful information and tools at craftofconsulting.com. Thanks so much, I will talk to you on the next episode. Bye-bye.