**SPECIAL EPISODE: Getting (Enough) Right When You Become a Consultant—with Deb Zahn**

Hey folks. I'm going to welcome you to this week's special episode of the Craft of Consulting Podcast. This is your host Deb Zahn. I want to talk a little bit more about that big question that I keep getting over and over and over again, which is how do I become a consultant? And with that, I've also been getting from new consultants, "Oh my gosh, what do I need to have in place so that I can do this right and I can be successful faster?" And so I am going to be giving a free training on July 22nd on essentially that question: how do you become a consultant and what do you need to have in place? What are those absolutely essential steps that you need to take to nail down your consulting business and set yourself up for success?

I want to talk about a few of those on this podcast. So if you're still dreaming of being a consultant and you haven't done it yet, this is relevant for you. If you've already taken the leap, but you're still trying to figure things out, this is also going to be relevant for you. The reason that I'm doing this free training, other than I keep getting the question over and over again, is I want to help either would-be consultants or new consultants avoid some of those common mistakes. The same exact ones that I made and the same exact ones that I see consultants make over and over again, those mistakes that either cause you to fail, get nervous and run back to employment, or flounder and just spend a lot of time trying to figure things out instead of focusing on what you ultimately want to be focusing on, which is working with clients and doing your best work.

I also want to make it easier because there's a whole lot of things that you could do to set up a consulting business and to take that leap or to start to grow your business after you take that leap. So I want to help you prioritize because you don't actually have to do everything. I'm going to help, in this training, prioritize those things that are absolutely essential so that again you can get those in place and then you can focus on what you most should be doing, which is getting clients, delighting the heck out of them, and ultimately building your business. Because that's really probably why you want to get into consulting. You want to get the basics in place, but you absolutely positively have to focus on the business side of consulting. It's not just the wonderful things that you can do for clients, you have to have the business set up right. And I'm going to focus quite a bit on that.

Now, the other reason that I'm going to be giving this free training is I want to safeguard your reputation. Because your reputation is what your business is going to be based on. And it starts the minute you step one foot into your market. That's why it's so important to do it thoughtfully and to get everything in place so that your reputation starts off on a strong foot. And then you can just build from there. And why does that matter? Why does reputation matter right away? Well, here's the deal. And I say this all the time, which is every experience that anyone has with you in your market tells them what it's going to be like to work with you. And they will remember that when they're telling other people about you. And they will remember that when they're deciding whether or not they want to reach out to you or whether or not they want to work with you. And that happens immediately. And again, your reputation is based on that, which is why you want to get it right.

Unfortunately, if you take missteps at the beginning, like for example, if have a really unclear and unfocused message about who you are and what you do for clients, what that does, unfortunately, is it signals to folks in your market that working with you is going to be unclear and unfocused, which is the last thing you want anybody to think. The other thing's example is if you think about marketing. Marketing, you absolutely have to do marketing if you're going to have a thriving consulting business. That's part of that business side of consulting that is so critical. And I'll get more into it when I give the training. But if your marketing messages come across as too salesy and slick, or they come across as unclear, that's telling people in your market who you are. And they're going to use that to make a decision about whether or not they want to work with you, or whether or not they want to recommend you. That is obviously essential to you being able to grow the robust business that you want to grow. That's why getting it right from the beginning matters. So if you have the luxury of doing preparation before you enter your market, that's great. If you don't, you still want to make sure that you take the right steps.

If you've already been in your market and you took some missteps, don't worry. It's not fatal. But you now need to backtrack and think about the things that you need to do and get in place so that you can, hopefully, try and erase some of the reputational hits that you already might have taken and get off on a better foot. And it can be repaired. It absolutely can be repaired. It's not like I haven't made mistakes. I've made tons of mistakes. And I now have a great reputation in my market. But you need to do it thoughtfully, and you need to do it purposefully.

The other thing I'd say is you don't have to do everything. And you don't have to do everything perfectly. As I said, you really don't. What you have to do is you have to do enough. And you have to do enough right so that you set yourself up for success. For example, I'll go back to marketing because that's a big one. And that's usually depending on the type of consulting you do, that's usually new for a lot of consultants who are just starting out. So as I said, you have to do it absolutely essential to the business side of consulting, but you don't have to do everything.

I've had lots of guests on who are amazing. They do every imaginable type of marketing. They've got books, they've got these really fancy websites, they've got videos, they do podcasts, they do all kinds of really amazing marketing things that I'm amazed that they actually do. I don't actually do all of those. And it can be hard to sift out what the priorities actually are because it can feel overwhelming. And if I were thinking of being a consultant or I were a brand new one and I listened to one of those podcasts, it would scare the heck out of me because I'd think, "When am I going to have time to do that and go be a consultant and generate income?" Because marketing is for the purpose of getting income. It is not generating income in and of itself. So it can be a little intimidating.

Don't worry about it. One of the things that I'm going to do on my training is I'm going to prioritize those things that are absolutely essential and talk about how you make the decision so that it's not overwhelming. You can actually get it done and it is actually going to help you grow your business. So I'm going to talk about how to get those basics in place. Another example I'll give is I'll talk about on the training system. Systems are really important. And you have to have all these systems in place that support your consulting business.

Now, I've seen one or two things when folks enter their market or as they're preparing to. One is they either spend way too much time fussing over getting everything right or getting the exact systems in place in super-fancy ways of doing it. And if that's who you are, that's totally fine. If you don’t want to spend the time doing that, you don't have to. There are some basics you need to have in place. I'm going to talk about what those essentials are.

Now, I've seen the other version, which is where folks just hang up a shingle, and they don't have anything in place. Nothing in place. And then they try and build it as they go along and often build it because suddenly they need it. The problem with that is that you can be caught not being able to be really timely with your clients because you don't have the systems in place.

Invoicing is a great example of that. If you don't have already automated your system for invoicing—and I'm a big fan of automation, and I'll talk about that on the training—if you don't have that, you could have delays in getting your invoices to clients. You could have delays in getting them contracts and proposals if you don't have those automated systems already set up that support that. And the problem is, one of the things that you absolutely want to do as a consultant is demonstrate timeliness. Because again, you're signaling to them what it's like to work with you. And if they see delays, they're going to assume that's what it's going to be like to work with you.

And that's a common mistake. I've absolutely made it myself, and I've had to revamp some of my systems to make sure that I can be much more timely because I want to signal that in my market. And the only way I signal that in my market is if I do it very, very deliberately. So again, I'm going to tell you, "Here's what the absolute priorities are. The things that you have to have in place to have a smooth and efficient and timely business system that's backing up what your consulting business is."

Those are just a couple snippets of some of the things I'll talk about. But you'll get the eight absolutely essential steps that if you want to become a in demand profitable consultant, you got to have these things in place. I'm going to also talk about some of the things that are absolutely essential. Like if you don't have these, then you really shouldn't be a consultant. But if you got them, absolutely you can be a consultant and you can succeed. And then I'm also going to give some examples from my own world. Again, I'm an extremely successful consultant right now. I've done a lot of things right. I've done a lot of things wrong. And I'm going to share some of those examples.

Hopefully, you can learn from me, avoid my mistakes, avoid the mistakes that other consultants make, and figure out what the priorities are from the get-go. And figure out what shortcuts you can take to get to your market and get clients much faster.

Hopefully, you join me. If you check out the show notes, you'll be able to register for the event. As I said, it's free. There's a limited number of seats. So you want to make sure that you get yours.

And then if there are folks that are like, "Deb, I'm already a consultant. Help me get more clients." That's what I need to do. I've not forgotten about you. July 29th I will have a training that I will be doing specifically on that topic. Now that's a paid one that's going to be $97, but you'll also get a free bonus actually worth $49. So it's a pretty good deal. And I'm going to share with you what I've learned about the best ways to get clients and what things you should be focusing on, and again, prioritizing so that you're not trying to do everything or not paralyzed because you don't know what to do. I'm hoping that these will be really helpful for folks, and this will help you live your dream of being a consultant.

Thanks for joining me on this episode. I hope to see you on these trainings. It's going to be live so you'll get an opportunity also to ask me questions. And I'm really excited actually to talk with folks, give you some of the basic information to help you prioritize what you should be spending your time on, and be able to answer any lingering questions you might have.

Thanks so much. And I'll see on the next episode.

So thanks so much for joining me on this episode. I will be back again next week with a wonderful guest where we're also going to talk a little bit about this topic. Thanks so much. Bye-bye.

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.