Addicted to Consulting

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While many people want to be consultants, those in the industry agree that there is a level of addiction at play in their careers. The consulting world seems to be especially suited for those with addictive personalities.

An Addictive Nature

As any addict knows, if you're addicted to consulting, you always want more. While many people are addicted to work, this addiction is more personal. Consultants want more than just to finish a project or to meet a deadline or to look for that pat on the back. With each successive achievement, we feel nourished, and consequently, we grow as human beings. Soon enough, consulting overtakes our personal lives, and we find that our interaction with our friends and family is more and more often as a consultant, sometimes to their great annoyance.

^ Perhaps this sounds bizarre or a tad frightening both to those who do not understand the consulting world and present consultants who have not yet experienced this level of commitment. However, this has been our experience, and we contend that hardcore consultants generally share these sentiments.

The Tell Tale Signs of our Addiction

You are addicted to consulting or a candidate for consulting if you can say the following statements:

- I get bored easily.
- I consider myself a pioneer, renegade, and cowboy.
- I am a natural schmoozer, and I love to network.
- I am a social creature who loves to collaborate with my teammates, but I also value individuality.
- I feel great satisfaction when I witness my work come to life.
- I am entrepreneurial and eagerly hunt for new business, while adhering to my ethics.
- I am extremely curious and like to apply or practice what I learn immediately.
- I am part psychiatrist, scientist, and nurse: I am there to listen to my clients, to test my hypotheses with them, and to nurse them through the pains that come with changes - be they strategic, operational, technological, or whatnot.
- I am good at brainstorming, especially in a team.
- I am a glory seeker.
- I see every new client as new and unexplored territory, where I can exercise my influence and share my experience.
- I strive to connect with my clients beyond a professional level in order to gain trust.
- I need to be heard and taken seriously.
- I am nomadic in nature and have an appreciation for life on the road.
- I am not risk adverse.
- I am as adaptable as a chameleon.
- I operate best with freedom, autonomy, and responsibility.
- I am unconventional.
- I am an intuitive decision maker who thinks analytically.
- I always look for problems so that I can solve them.
- I like rules, but I like them best when I write them.
- I am always looking for more and asking what else.

This is a fairly exhaustive list, but believe it or not, the list is far from complete. Still, if most of these statements characterize you, then either find your way to consulting or consider yourself lucky to be working in an industry that is just right for you.

Analyzing the Addiction

A consultant's first priority is to grow our business. Although we operate somewhat conservatively in our business decisions for clients, consultants go out of the way to find more new business or build on existing relationships for themselves. Watching the markets keeps us abreast of the ever-changing investment and business climate, and we supplement this with inside information from clients within the industries and companies that are shaping the market. We combine their years of experience with our own to analyze the pitfalls or promises of e-commerce, business acceleration, or whatever the new buzz might be. We strive to be on the cutting edge, and so our client relationships are more than just business deals, they help us stay ahead.

Even tucked into our beds at night, we contemplate the form of the next wave. We ponder the unknowns and hope for new experiences, the project we “have to” do, the role we “have to” serve. We yearn for that one special and, until now, elusive engagement that will catapult us to consulting stardom. So we constantly look for new ways to engage our clients and our management to convince them we are worthy of being put on the front lines. We want to be there to reign in the glory. And one of the
best ways to achieve our goals is to be recognized for our creative problem solving. We examine every niche to uncover every problem and then rack our brains to provide the perfect solution.

As much as we like being singled out for the solo spotlight, we know our best work emerges from collaboration. So when we fail to think up a stellar idea ourselves, we rely on our colleagues for brainstorming and presentation ideas. We know the truth that "it's lonely at the top," and we continuously seek feedback from each other so as to put forth our best results - glory is most gratifying when shared. The same applies to taking joint risks and commiserating in common failures: While we can do it alone, we like it best when shared. This is why so many consulting firms are partnerships.

**The Cycle of Addiction**

Because we always want "more," we never stop seeking it. We do whatever it takes - even if it means briefly abandoning our ideals. If a client does not act on our recommendations, we accept this and await the next opportunity to repackage it into something more palatable. (We strongly believe we are usually right!) Or if we are assigned to a less than glamorous location, we go and contrive ways to bring that work to a more visible location.

Our payoff is when they take us seriously, and we know they heard us. Our payoff is when the client validates our mission as accomplished and asks us for more. Our payoff is when they ask us to perform that elusive project we envisioned just before falling asleep.

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