

Top Tips When Hiring a Restaurant Consultant



Those of you who enjoy two-wheeled adventure will appreciate this illustration of a motorcycle rider who has been surrounded by a large herd of sheep. If you're contemplating hiring a restaurant consultant, you may find yourself feeling a bit like this rider – surrounded by a lot of consultants who all look and talk the same. How do you know which consultant is the right one for you and for your project? It's not easy, and the ten tips that follow are intended to provide you with the

insights you need to make the right choice, the first time. For many, there may be no second chance to hire a consultant if you're in dire straits, so due diligence in selecting the right one is a wise investment of your time and energy.

TIP #1. Restaurant Consultants are not regulated by any State or Governmental agency and licensing is usually not required to become a restaurant consultant. For you, this means that the recently terminated assistant manager of the QSR down the street can, within just a matter of hours of being fired, hang out his/her shingle promoting restaurant consulting services. For this reason alone, it is best to always hire a company and not a “one-man show” or freelancer. Sure, there are many qualified freelancers out there, but do you have the time and inclination to vet their background, check their references to insure that this single person can handle every aspect your project? Save yourself the effort and go with a respected company.

TIP #2. When you engage the company, you'll usually have all of the resources of that company available to you. If you get a consultant on your project that you don't care for, usually the company can replace that consultant without too much difficulty. Also, you'll enjoy a “structured” relationship as the consulting company probably has extensive experience with people that have probably had the same issue that you do and they have completed many projects over the years. Lastly, the established companies want your business, so they're inclined to charge fair market rates as opposed to the widely varying and frequently unreasonable fees commonly quoted by freelancers or sole practitioners.

TIP #3. Look for likability, competence and confidence. These are the practical keys you'll need for working with any consultant or consulting firm. Over the years, we have seen many consultants in the marketplace that usually lack in one or more of these characteristics and you won't be happy if any of these attributes are missing. Likewise, we won't retain or engage a consultant to work with us unless he/she has 30+ years in the industry, has prior ownership or C-level experience, displays confidence, has a record of achievements – proof of competence, and who is a joy to work with. There's a lot of talent out there and we work harder than anyone else to work with only the best and our clients can count on a great project with outstanding results.

TIP #4. Do you know what work you want the consultant to accomplish? Strange as it may sound, some clients don't know what their real issues are, especially if they are newcomers to the hospitality industry. What they commonly see are the symptoms of an issue, not realizing that the root cause may be elsewhere. As the old saying goes, "You don't know what you don't know." Clarity in what you'd like to see as the final outcome or goal is helpful when talking with consultants. What is the path to accomplish the goal? Frequently, the consulting firm will tell you what needs to be done (called "Scope of Work") and what it will cost. If you're wishy-washy or lack clarity on what you need, it can easily lead to unnecessary consulting fees. If you need help in identifying your needs, we can walk you through this as well.

TIP #5. Look for a great communicator who will listen to what you're saying and responds appropriately. It's common for many consultants to jump to conclusions first without listening to the details and it's a character trait of many who hold strong opinions. Strong opinions are fine, but not at the expense of a satisfied client.

TIP #6. Does the consulting company principal and the consultant that will be working on your project have prior personal ownership experience? If not, go another direction. You should make this a requirement for any consultant that works on your project because there's nothing quite like the experiences gleaned from being responsible for your own 941 tax payments, the purchase/sale of the business and being in the shoes of an employer. Even years of executive-level, multi-unit experience can't replace the pressures and rewards of being an owner/operator and for you as a client, this ownership experience that your consultant has is of great value in many ways. Why would you want to work with a consultant that has never owned a restaurant?

TIP #7. Can the consulting company handle every aspect of your project? This is especially important for new start-up ventures, because so many things need to be accomplished before opening. Consider that over 400 tasks will be completed before you open. If your consultant has never owned a restaurant, how can he/she possibly know what work needs to be done? Sure, a checklist helps, but nothing replaces personal experience. You're looking for massive talent in a wide variety of industry aspects.

TIP #8. Does the consulting company have the business acumen to keep your project on track, on or under budget and have a track record of accomplishments? Can your consultant negotiate the best deals on your behalf and have the industry contacts you may need?

Years of hands-on experience from a seasoned industry veteran are worth their weight in gold, especially if you're experiencing operational or financial difficulties. When you're having problems, don't risk your business investment with a beginner or sole practitioner who may not have the experience or resources that will benefit you.

TIP #9. A good agreement between you and the consulting company is a good way to help insure a successful project. Only what is written into the agreement matters both to you and to the consulting company. It's easy to gloss over the big issues or bury the small ones, so make sure that everything you specifically want accomplished is in writing including: The scope of work, completion date, fees and expenses, responsibilities of both parties and other detailed terms of the agreement. Again, a good agreement helps insure a successful project.

TIP #10. The right consulting firm should be able to take your project from start to finish in a fun, pleasant way. You already know that the business is tough and there are many risks. You may have much to learn and your ongoing relationship with the company might very well last for an extended period. Take your time to vet the company and the consultant you'll be working with. A qualified consulting company will make you more money than you'll ever pay them. You're making an investment into your own future when you select a restaurant consulting company so choose wisely.

Want to know more? We welcome your confidential phone call or e-mail inquiry.

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