



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

5 Ways to Know Your Consultant Is an Empty Suit or Pantsuit

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Like some ignoble professions, consulting suffers from low barriers to entry. At least my children need to take a test to get a driver's license. But any adult can hang out a shingle and become a "consultant". Here are 5 ways to know that yours may be in over his/her head. If you ever hear your consultant say one of these, run away....very, very far away.

1: "Does that make sense?"

I can't think of anything more stomach-turning than to hear a supposed expert ask at the end of what is usually a long-winded monologue, "Does that make sense?"

I ask you, in what other profession, would the alleged expert ask you, "Does that make sense?"

Can you imagine your doctor, after giving you a diagnosis and explanation for your illness, saying "Does that make sense?"

What about your mechanic: "Hey Sal, what's wrong with my car?" "Well Dave, you seem to have a serious compression problem in one of your cylinders, which is ruining your acceleration....Does that make sense?"

Or your local dry cleaner: "I'm sorry, Mr. Harper, we couldn't get the red wine stain out. We tried washing it, dry cleaning it. We even tried several spot removers. And it still didn't come out.....Does that make sense?"



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If you ever hear one of your consultants ask you, "Does that make sense?", feel free to ask in reply, "Why do you ask me? Don't you know?"

2: "That's a great question. What do you think?" or "What does the group think?"

This is a classic. This is the modern day version of putting on your dancing shoes and buying some time. Instead of saying, "You know, I have no clue. I don't know, but I'll find out for you, unless someone else here might know", the slick consultant will take a question that he/she can't answer, and delay/sidetrack by throwing it back to the questioner or to the larger group, if in a group setting.

Please. If your consultant can't tell you that he/she doesn't know, how can you be certain that they're not faking it when they DO tell you something?

3: "My role is not to answer your questions; my role is to help YOU answer your questions."

This is another dancing shoes type response, typically offered when a consulting client or a coaching client asks, "What do you think?", "What do you think I should do?", or "What would you do?"

I can't tell you how many times I've heard consultants and coaches say that their job is not to give answers but instead to help their client find the answers.

Typically, this is accomplished by the consultant's using expression # 2 above: "Great question, Pat. What do you think you should do?" Or something worse like, "Oh my role is only to facilitate the process."

Again, how many other professions do you tolerate the alleged expert answering your direct, straight-forward question with a response that says, in effect, "I don't have to answer your question."

I appreciate that there is value in not automatically answering every question posed. But there are limits to that approach.



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Again, if your consultants ultimately don't know, they should say so. If they *should* know (because they've positioned themselves as true expert coaches and/or consultants), then what are they doing charging you for their services?

4: I name drop, using lots of popular leadership/management best-sellers.

If your consultants tend to use popular leadership/management books as their rationale for implementing or doing whatever they're doing to you or your organization, I hope you get the hair-standing-up-on-the-back-of-my-neck feeling.

Hey, we all enjoy reading about moved cheese and being like hedgehogs. But is this truly what your company or organization needs right now? Beyond referring to the popular (faddish) best-seller, how does your consultant know? What experience does he have with other organizations or situations that serves as better justification for the recommendation? If you probe the consultant, and she gets that deer in the headlights look, search for the deer repellent, and quickly.

5: "Value-added"

To paraphrase Margaret Thatcher, if you have to say it's "value-added", it's probably not. Certain things are truly value-added. Having a steering wheel in a car vs. no steering wheel: that's value-added. Having an electrical outlet that stops you from frying when you drop the hairdryer in the bathtub (and you're in the bathtub): that's value added. Having real coat hangers in your hotel closet and not those hook-less ones with the dinky-nob-on-the-top-so-you-don't-bankrupt-the-entire-hotel-chain-by-stealing-all-of-our-coat-hangers: that's value added.

It's simple: value-added is determined by the customer. It's not for the consultant to say. It's for the customer to decide. The customer determines what is and what isn't value and value-added.

And that certainly applies to the value and value-added of the consultant.



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What consultant double-speak and gobbledegook makes your skin crawl or makes you laugh with incredulity? Share your vivid examples with other readers on our [blog](#).

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Thanks for reading. And all the best to you for 2012!

Best regards,

*David*

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