



# ARE YOU STARTING IN CONSULTING?

5 TIPS FROM 50 PARTNERS IN TOP FIRMS

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I asked 50 Partners from top consulting firms what advice they would give to new starters. I've grouped and analysed their answers (all quotes are attributable to the person, not the firm).



### 1 SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

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Your happiness, health and reputation are more important than your bank account and seniority. Consulting is hard work and will often take you away from your loved ones. This is one reason why the average graduate lasts 7 years in the industry.

You should review why you are doing what you are doing every year to ensure that you are doing what you love. If you don't enjoy the job, it's simply not worth it. Your ability to balance the different demands between you, family, and work, will vary over the years, but it's important to know why you are doing what you are doing.

Consulting can often pressurise you to pretend to be something you are not: more confident, competent, or successful. In the end, the people that matter, including clients, will see through the pretence, but will also appreciate you more if you are yourself. Getting to the top has several different routes and everyone has the right to go at their own pace, in their own way.

// *Never neglect your well-being or harm the well-being of others. Work for the right people rather than the attractive organisation //*

**- Sean Pepper, Deloitte Partner**

## 2

### GO SLOW TO GO FAST

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You have a 45-year career ahead of you. Taking time to build a solid base of skills in the short-term, will do you much more good in the long term. This may mean being less concerned about short-term promotions and pay-rises, and more focused on filling your skill gaps, and getting diverse experience in a number of industries and services. This may also mean NOT specialising too early. Specialisation is great LATER when you know what you want to do, as it builds value and expertise. If your firm won't allow you to do this, then you may be in the wrong firm.

*// Don't become a specialist too quickly: the first 3-5 years should be an accumulation of diverse experiences which broaden your perspectives //*

**- Robert Browne, KPMG Partner**

## 3

### EMBRACE LEARNING

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If it was ever true that the world is changing faster than ever, it is true now. This means that your cutting-edge insights today may well be faded and irrelevant next year. To give value to your clients, and your colleagues, you need to scan the horizons and learn continuously: what are the trends, technologies and new entrants that will disrupt the market over the next five years? At a personal level, this means that you need to take the advice that you give clients about embracing change. You will need to reinvent your specialisms and skills, and take opportunities when they come along, or be in danger of becoming redundant (literally).

*// The pace of digital transformation in the industry is huge, and all consultancies have to keep pace up with this pace of change //*

**- Colin Light, Strategy&**

## 4

### NETWORK FOR THE FUTURE

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Succeeding in consulting is primarily about building trusted relationships. Whilst you may not know the CEO of a client, it is likely that you might know a future CEO. For this reason, you should network with everyone you can. Yet, networking isn't (just) about adding a classmate on LinkedIn or Facebook, it's about adding value to them so that, over time, you become a trusted advisor: introduce them to people you think might help them, send them articles you think they'd like, occasionally meet them for a coffee.

But networking isn't just about business development with clients but also about ensuring you have access to role-models and experts who will guide you. Use your network to find mentors who will support and advise you throughout your career. Consultancy is primarily an apprenticeship, but not everyone makes a great master or mistress. This form of network is also about the teams you work with, both internally, and with clients: keep in touch and add value wherever you can.

*// Find mentors who you like and trust to help you navigate your career //*

**- Daniel Pearson, Partner EY**



## DELIGHT YOUR CLIENTS

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Without the client, there is no consultant. But it is easy to alienate a client by thinking you have all the answers, know their firm better than them, or just simply treating them as an income source. Only 48% of clients say that consultants provide them with value for money, and this figure halves when you move further down the organisation. So....

First and foremost, delight your clients by delivering value beyond what they expect. Focus on delivering benefits to them. Clients don't have time for pure advice anymore, even from strategy consultancies, so ensure that you focus on practical, tangible benefits.

You also need to be humble as hell. Many graduates, blinded by their new MBA and their great job, spend too much time talking, and not enough time listening. That last word cannot be emphasised enough: listen carefully to your client, really understand their issues, and communicate with them throughout the project. When projects go wrong, it's not because the work wasn't good enough, but it's because the work isn't what the client wanted.

*// Show your enthusiasm for your client's business. It goes a long way and is very much appreciated //*

**- John Lockton, Partner, BearingPoint**



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