

## **The Sunday Times, pg 23 21 June 2009**

### **How to get started as a consultant**

**Vital factors include strong business network and ability to generate ideas**

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Expertise, experience, reputation. You have these attributes, but may still want a break from the corporate world.

Why not try consulting?

Those new to the field may offer their service on a freelance basis to test the market first before registering their outfit as a business entity.

“If you plan to be a one-man show, you may not even need to set up a business entity,” said The GMP Group’s senior manager of corporate services Josh Goh.

“But if you aim to develop your business further, it would be more practical to register it to protect yourself from liability issues.”

The type of company you set up will determine the extent of your personal liability.

Another tip is to prepare an at-a-glance biodata for your prospective clients, rather than a lengthy resume.

Usually just a single page, it includes personal particulars such as birth date, religion, gender, race, nationality, residence and marital status, followed by a chronological listing of education and work experience.

It should also highlight recognitions received, well-known events one has spoken at or companies worked with. Such information helps lend credibility and build up one’s reputation, Mr Goh added.

A resume is usually more detailed, comprising up to five pages, summarising one’s employment, education and other skills. It may highlight specific skills customised to target the job profile in question.

For that added edge, a strong business network, passion for generating ideas, concepts to handle changing market dynamics as well as an understanding of industry and economic cycles are keys to success, said Mr Dhirendra Shantilal, senior vice-president, Asia Pacific, of recruitment firm Kelly Services.

Network as much as possible – such as by attending networking sessions, seminars or talks – to meet other business people, he said.

### Adding value

“It’s not about how many years of experience you have. That does not automatically give you that right to consult. It’s about how much value you can add to a company.”

DR LYNDA WEE, who started retail consultancy Bootstrap, on how consultants can help companies to look anew at what they are doing

company’s image, and to choose the staff

Other channels include job associations, university alumni communities, job sites and social networking platforms.

How about the consultancy’s name? Someone who has built up a solid reputation in his field may want to name his company after himself.

However, GMP Group’s Mr Goh said this may run you the risk of facing another company with a similar name, or having employees tarnish your name as your firm grows into a larger business.

His advice to anyone choosing this route is to be really “hands on” in developing the carefully.

Unless one’s name is already known for a particular expertise, Mr Paul Heng of Next Career Consulting Group Asia feels that consultants should pick a company name that “clearly tells people what business you are in”.

The present gloomy economic outlook does not make it easy for people striking out on their own.

Mr Heng said: “Businesses are reluctant to spend money. If there is no real need to engage external consultants, they will not do so.”

But the silver lining, he added, is that budget-conscious firms may now look to smaller consultancies rather than big ones.

Indeed, difficult times may lead companies to look anew at what they are doing.

“When one is in a business for too long, one may develop blind spots. Consultants can provide a fresh perspective,” said Dr Lynda Wee, who started retail consultancy Bootstrap after years of work in private and public institutions.

“It’s not about how many years of experience you have. That does not automatically give you that right to consult. It’s about how much value you can add to a company,” she said.

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