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## **CHANGING CAREERS: WHICH CAREER PATH SHOULD YOU TAKE – CONSULTANT OR CORPORATE EXECUTIVE?**

Every time the economy expands or dips, executives who are tired, bored, displaced, or in search of above-market earnings come out of the barn in droves looking for “greener pastures”. They frequently assume that their experiences running a “real” company qualify them to provide insight and expertise as a consultant to other companies.

Meanwhile, consultants looking for financial stability have thoughts of going corporate. Consultants are often confident of their abilities to lead organizations. Who could be better qualified than them to run a company from the inside? After all, they have been the guiding hand for many companies strategic, financial and technology direction. They have been trusted counsel for their top executives.

Unfortunately, grazing in the other “greener” pasture is more complicated than it seems on the surface.

### **What Life as a Consultant is Like**

The defining characteristics of the consulting environment are remarkably similar from firm to firm, regardless of whether it is a large global firm or a small local firm. First and foremost, at a senior level, success is based on the generation of sales revenue. Dollars equal power.

As a consultant, engagements are driven by thought leadership and strategy. Your clients typically have a list of problems that need to be solved -- and the list changes frequently. Corporate decision-makers assure that consultants have special access to people and resources. After all, they have already or will shortly write a very large check for their services.

From a delivery perspective, work is often standardized and methodology-based. Engagements have a beginning, an end, and a defined scope. Often little or no responsibility for implementation or outcomes is specified.

But, there are some exceptions. Certain contractual arrangements have shared responsibility for results and that is reflected in the fee. Secondly, the consultant handles implementation of a system or process. However, once it is “done,” the consultant still leaves and doesn’t have to live with the consequences. Supervision and personnel responsibility is usually limited to performance on the project by the team members.

### **Should You Be a Consultant?**

- Are you energized by smart people doing interesting work?
- Do you enjoy a continuously shifting landscape of new problems to solve?
- Are you easily bored?
- Do you like providing “advice and counsel” with little responsibility for operational activities or outcomes?
- Is selling fun? Do you like the thrill of the chase?
- Do you enjoy socializing and building a network of contacts?

## **What Life as a Corporate Executive is Like**

In corporations, whether public or private, profitability and shareholder value are the bottom line. For most executives, success is based on contribution to operating results.

Organizational leadership, from vision to planning through execution, drives performance. Decision-making and risk taking, with accountability for choices, is fundamental. Outcomes are everything. Activities are heavily implementation and results driven. Few projects are intellectually stimulating.

Most of the work of the organization is continuous and predominantly operational. Much is policy and procedurally based. There is a broad distribution of people in a corporation, with a tendency to gather around the mean in intelligence, motivation and interest in their work. Comprehensive personnel management is required by line and most staff executives to maximize the contribution of all employees in the company.

## **Should You Become a Corporate Executive?**

- Do you like being on the front lines, directing others, making choices?
- Do you like to see things through to the end?
- Do you gain personal satisfaction from positive, measurable results that you had a significant role in delivering?
- Can you keep focus on the long-term while dealing with tactical and operational concerns?
- Are you willing to stand behind your decisions and be accountable for and part of outcomes with continuing consequences?
- As an insider, can you gain the respect of others for your business acumen?
- Are you energized by motivating and leading groups of people to successful achievement of common goals?
- Do others follow you and support you?

## **How to Align Yourself with the Career Choice You Make**

If you are a *consultant* and still think you are a candidate for a change to a corporation, consider whether you are most suited for a consulting-like role or for an operating leadership position. Your business acumen, facilitation ability, and communication skills are key skills that will be valuable in a corporate role.

If you are an *executive* and still want to try your hand at consulting, consider whether you are most suited for a partner (translate that sales) role or for delivery management (translate that project or multiple projects). Your experience of making things work in the real world and your ability to negotiate complex organizations will be helpful in a consulting role.

Remember, both consulting and executive roles have challenges and rewards. Neither is as easy as it looks from the outside, looking in. As long as you find the one that works for you, you will be where the grass is greenest.