

WHEN TO CONSIDER RETAINING A CONSULTANT

I have recently read a number of articles and advertisements offering advice regarding when to consider retaining a consultant. Most are informative. All are wordy. A few are, perhaps, misleading. In my professional experience there are three basic considerations in determining whether or not to retain a consultant:

- **Experience:** Does the consultant have considerably more experience than you or your colleagues? Is this experience I with a number of comparable organizations in area(s) you would like to examine and/or improve?
- **Objectivity:** Would your organization's leadership be more receptive to certain conclusions and recommendations if they were presented by an experienced outside professional who can provide the neutrality and a broader perspective that people closely connected to the organization lack?
- **Time:** Do you and your colleagues not have the necessary time to focus on the area(s) you would like to examine and/or improve? "A consultant can focus and not be distracted by the organizational meetings, issues, or upcoming events.

Any one or all of those basic considerations should aid you in determining whether or not to retain a consultant. I also encourage organizations to consider the following:

- Deciding to retain a consultant requires that the organization has determined it is ready for change.
- The organization's leadership is ready and willing to work closely with a consultant, and to consider seriously resulting recommendations.
- At the outset the consultant's assignment goals, working relationships and role are clearly articulated.
- The organization should provide the consultant with all appropriate background information and understandings of the assignment.
- While the organization should monitor the consultant's work, don't micromanage the work. Let the consultant do what is being paid for.