



Making The Change: A Consultant's Guide

by Stuart Corrigan



How to get more change, more respect and more authority as an internal (or external) consultant

"Internal and external consultants need to get change, but are typically unable to get sufficient authority and respect to make that change. This report gives a step-by-step approach to getting more change as a consultant."

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Why consultants get no respect



It's sad but true that the life of an internal consultant can be tough. You have all the responsibility of getting change but none of the authority to make it happen, and to make matters worse you don't get paid the money that the external guys get.

Which begs the question: can you change your reality?

Is it possible to remain an internal consultant, get taken seriously and create long lasting change?

Yes is the answer, and this report contains everything you need to know to become a top flight internal consultant.

Last week I took a call from a consultant working in a local authority, here's how the conversation went:

'I'm sick fed up' he said 'no one takes me seriously, I have to literally beg for a meeting with anyone with power, I try to talk them into making change and at best I'm allowed to try to sniff out a few quick wins and write a report that never gets read!'

Does it sound familiar?

I asked the consultant the following questions:

Think of the last time you needed really important advice.

1. Who or what made you aware that you needed help?
2. Who did you call?
3. Why did you call them?

After a bit of coaxing he explained that he'd recently got into a bit of debt, he wanted some advice about how to solve the problem and break the cycle before it became a serious problem.

He became aware of the problem over a period of time, little things like always being short of money, constantly using his credit card and never carrying cash built up until one day he opened his credit card bill and bang he's up to his limit on his card.

Then he called a trusted financial adviser. He called the adviser because he had a relationship with them. He'd never actually met the woman in person but he'd been reading tips and advice from her on-line for a while. He wrote to her, she wrote back and eventually offered to help but only if he agreed to follow her plan.

Let's analyse this a bit further because the clues are in there.

1. He became aware of the problem over time. **He** became aware of the problem, the adviser didn't turn up at his door and say "hey, you've got this problem, you need my help."
2. He called the adviser because she'd established a relationship.
3. They agreed to work together on her terms, she didn't plead to do business with my friend.

Now think of the parallels for internal consultants. Isn't it the case that even though most of your potential clients may need your help, most of them simply don't realise it, and turning up at their door with the newest thing won't matter a jot if the client doesn't think they need what you're selling?

Second, even if they do realise that they need help, do they have a relationship with you where you are seen as a figure with status and authority? This is important so I'll re-state it using an analogy: I don't care how bad my tooth is hurting, if you're not wearing a white coat and have a certificate of dentistry on your wall you aren't getting to pull it out!

Hence to answer the original question; internal consultants get no respect because they lack status, authority and have not built a strong enough relationship with their potential client before they ever speak to them face to face.

The good news is that if you're willing to put in a bit of effort you can change how you're seen in your organisation, create amazing results for your clients and in turn take big leaps in your career. And all you need to know is how to enhance your status and build a relationship with a client, and having a bit of the X-factor always helps.



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The importance of status



People do crazy things in the presence of authority figures. In the book 'Influence: Science and Practice'¹ an American psychologist, Stanley Milgram, posed the question, 'To what extent would people comply with requests, no matter how outlandish, if the request came from an

authority figure.' What he found shocked him and the rest of the world.

Milgram invited students to take part in what they thought was an experiment to test the circumstances under which people learn best. The participants sat on

one side of a glass window through which they could see what they thought was another participant. In-fact their opposite number (named the confederate) was in on the game.

The confederate was asked to spell words. If they got one wrong, which they inevitably would, the participant was to administer a small electric shock. Standing next to the participant was Milgram dressed in a white coat and clipboard, in other words all the trimmings of an authority figure.

The experiment got underway and soon the confederate started to make mistakes. Milgram asked the participant to administer a shock, everyone complied. This continued and the shocks increased until almost 60% of the participants were administering lethal doses of electricity and despite the confederates screaming and begging for mercy the shocks continued.

The twist is that there was no electric shock, the confederates were acting. It will come as no surprise that the participants were distressed and emotionally shocked when they found out that they'd administered what would have been lethal doses of electricity.

What does this teach us you might ask? It's not that you can manipulate people into doing things they don't want to do by becoming an authority figure but that unless you are first perceived as an authority people won't trust you to let you help them do things outside of their comfort zone, like making change. Without the perception of authority you will simply not be taken seriously and so many of us simply get the basics wrong. For example if you want to be taken

seriously by chief executives and directors then you must start by dressing and acting like a senior manager in your industry. What about you, do you have the basics in place?

And think of what's been achieved in the world as a result of an authority figure taking on a cause. Would Sir Bob Geldof have raised billions for starving children in Africa had he not had industry/public status? What about the late Princess Diana, would she have been so successful in raising awareness of landmines had she not been such a revered public figure? Being an authority figure and acquiring status is a good thing which can and should be used to achieve great things.

But in order to truly influence people and help them make long term change you need to have more than just authority, you also need to be seen as a trusted adviser, which means you need to establish a relationship.

¹Milgram (1974) cited in: Robert B Cialdini. [Influence: Science and Practice](#). 4th Edition. Published by Allyn & Bacon, 2001