



# 50 THINGS CONSULTANTS SHOULD REFLECT ON ENTERING 2022

*Ordinary consultants are asked to send a quote.  
Authorities get invited to solve a problem.*



THE  
VISIBLE AUTHORITY

*Dear reader,*

*Multiple times per week I am sharing consulting-related advice on LinkedIn. These short posts reflect my continuous thinking about becoming a visible authority in the consulting profession. I've mixed my own content with a few carefully selected quotes from experts I admire and you may never have heard of.*

*I'd like to thank you for your subscription to my mail list and I am wishing you and your loved ones a great holiday period.*

*Let the inspiration be with you (if you let it).*

*Kind regards,  
Luk*

## Ordinary consultants sell, authorities share

Ordinary consultants tend to have big egos. Authorities tend to be modestly brilliant.

The consultant archetype of today looks nothing like it did a decade ago. The new consultant archetype has the following qualities:

- ✓ Transparent in their approach
- ✓ Helpful, educative, and authentic in the knowledge and expertise they render to their audience
- ✓ Caring, empathic, and supportive in identifying and addressing their target audience's pain points
- ✓ Vulnerable and real in admitting past challenges, mistakes, struggles

If your personality cannot get in sync with this new archetype, you will struggle to become an authority!

## As a consultant, these 2 missions should be critical to you

### 1. Client self-sufficiency

WHAT? Making sure you inspire and teach your clients to do the things on their own in the long run.

WHY? Avoiding getting too much in a 'trying-to-sell-more-time' mindset.

### 2. The day after advice

WHAT? Making sure you always leave the client with very specific 'start/stop-doing-tomorrow' advice.

WHY? It will force you to stay grounded, to provide clients with actionable advice instead of telling abstract stories or consulting BS.

## I've built my visibility as a consultant on these 5 pillars

- ✓ **Niche:** I chose to focus on just one very specific expertise domain (people analytics) in the narrowest possible market niche (data-driven HR) with the smallest possible viable audience (people analytics professionals)
- ✓ **Educative content:** I consistently developed high-quality educative content with a pain resolution focus to build trust and visibility
- ✓ **Sharing:** I openly shared all my experiences, learnings, successes, challenges, struggles and failures
- ✓ **Lessons learned:** I always used the same formula to develop valuable content: 'Here's what you can learn from what I learned'
- ✓ **Helping:** I rewired my brain from selling to helping. I chose to focus on empathy with my clients/prospects and on being very generous in my working relationships, at conferences, etc.

## Scaling in consulting requires authority building

Do you know the cost of not focusing on the growth/scaling tasks for your consulting business?

I call it the 'Vicious-Loop-To-Hell-Tax' (VLTH-Tax) and it undermines your health, your wellbeing, your relationships, your sleep, and your business success: the FEAR TO SAY NO!

I've seen many consultants fear to say NO to ill-suited opportunities in order to please a client and/or earn an income/revenue. The tragic VLTH-Tax result: compromised market credibility, endangered future consulting growth, and exposed personal wellbeing.

The single piece of advice that will impact your consulting business the most? Avoiding the VLTH-Tax.

## Thought leadership leads to consulting growth

There is a direct link between sharing relevant, insightful content with your niche market and building up your pipeline of clients IF you consistently dedicate time to maximizing your visibility.

- ✓ **TL adds to your credibility: 89%** of decision makers believe that it can be effective in enhancing their perceptions of an organization they are interested in collaborating with
- ✓ **It is perceived as more authentic: 59%** of senior execs perceive TL to be a more trustworthy basis for assessing an organization's capabilities than its marketing materials
- ✓ **It helps you get noticed: 48%** of decision makers spend at least 1 hr/wk reading TL articles

*Source: Edelman's 2020 'B2B Thought Leadership Impact' study*

Your target audience is actively looking for TL content that's educational, relevant, and authentic. You are missing out big time if you are not supplying them with such content!

## The new consultant archetype

In his fantastic book 'Give And Take', Wharton Prof. Adam Grant provides scientific evidence that the GIVERS of time, knowledge, or resources to others will be ahead in the long run. Because they earn valuable trust and respect.

Grant explains that the TAKERS may enjoy periods of success but in his research he discovered such consultants often got 'punished' by what he calls the 'TAKER TAX' (spreading the word of a taker's bad behavior), greatly hindering their chances of continued success.

**Getting in the 'giver mindset' as a consultant is an unparalleled mental guiding principle.**

Not only does it result in developing better content to help your audience, but it also makes it way easier to embrace the marketing aspect (sharing educational content) in consulting.

## Are you accepting work outside of your focus area?

I see a lot of consultants accepting work outside of their acclaimed focus or expertise area. Because they are desperate to get the work. Or they have a big ego and believe they can crush everything as a consultant.

By accepting work outside of your expertise zone, you are telling your existing clients as well as your prospects that you are not really an expert.

When you got the project confirmation, you probably shouted 'YES' to yourself. But honestly, you just came up with another pseudo-story of fake expertise. Shame on you!

Instead of selling everything to protect short-term income or to satisfy your ego, you should consciously evaluate each opportunity against this criterium: will this project improve my reputation as an expert?

### GENERALISTS CONFUSE THEIR CLIENTS

*The majority of consultants I meet don't end up where they had hoped. They aren't building a healthy pipeline or aren't working with the type of clients/projects they envisioned. They understand that being unfocused leaves them spread thin and disorganized, confuses their clients (they don't know what they are standing for), and burns themselves out in the long run.*



## We don't need a consultant

A consultant explained to me his prospect didn't need a consultant, they could do it themselves

Here's my take on this: I have been on the hard-core consulting side for more than a decade. Because of my **NARROW FOCUS!** (specific audience, specific problem, specific transformation), I did >100 **SIMILAR** projects.

My power as an external expert: almost **INSTANT DISCOVERY** of the client's **PROTOTYPICAL PAINS**.

When a client called me to talk about support, I was able to 'smell' their core problems (due to the **REPEATED OBSERVATION** and **PATTERN RECOGNITION** all those years) after a 10-15' chat, asking max. 4 to 5 targeted why-questions. Really.

As the expert with the outside-in view, I was able to quickly:

- 1.** shine a new and different light on the problem of the client (many hidden problems)
- 2.** picture them the transformational potential (a strong aha-effect)
- 3.** describe what my support process would be (picturing the transformation home run)
- 4.** advice what they could/should start/stop doing 'the day after' to anchor/embed the transformation in business as usual

With all due respect, no internal employee could do this: lack of pattern recognition, too much inside-in blindness.

Deep, narrow focus.

I never got the 'we-can-do-this-ourselves' objection.

## Do you publicly declare your expertise with 'packaged services'?

Publicly declaring your expertise in your 'service packaging' will help you with your consulting positioning and your focus, makes saying NO to non-ideal work way easier, makes it more obvious for your client what you're offering, and gives your services a higher perceived value.

As a result, your expertise and authority become a boost.

Creating standard packages for consulting services has helped me to regain valuable hours to work on growing my business. Here's why...

- ✓ It reduced the time to develop proposals & plans of action
- ✓ It reduced the time explaining the service & the pricing
- ✓ It reduced the time clients spent on decision making
- ✓ It reduced the time lost due to implementation scope erosion, typical for customized (non-packaged) approaches
- ✓ It solved problems in a time-saving repeatable way (leading to better pattern recognition, thus deepening my expertise)
- ✓ It reduced the time to train and align team members, freelancers, or colleagues who were supporting me in my work
- ✓ It reduced the overall amount of time I spent working on client accounts

What are you waiting for?



## What I've observed authoritative consultants successfully do

### 1. Client thinking shift

They help bring hidden problems and patterns to the surface, inspiring their audience to shift the way they think about their fundamental or underlying challenges. These consultants understand that their audience doesn't want to hear what they already know about their problems.

### 2. Picture transformational potential

They create a bold vision about the transformational potential of switching to a new, different approach. Their vision is contagious. They translate their expertise into the confidence they give their audience about the positive potential of a transformation.

Every consultant I am talking to has some kind of (big or small) ambition/dream to be considered and recognized as an expert

However, by accepting work outside of your acclaimed expertise zone, you are telling existing clients as well as prospects you are NOT REALLY an expert.

Unfortunately, I see a lot of consultants accepting work outside of their acclaimed focus or expertise area.

Because they are desperate to get the work. Or they have a big ego and believe they can crush everything as a consultant.

**PROTECT** your all-mighty expert reputation.

**STAY IN YOUR LANE. ALWAYS.**

## What will impact your consulting business the most?

Your focus on building the deep and unique expertise that clients are looking for and are prepared to pay a premium for!

Consulting clients are searching for brilliant subject matter experts and trusted advisors to help solve their problems. Clients have more options today than ever before - there are more consultants and experts and advisors than ever and buyers can find anything in seconds.

- ✓ Evolve from 'doing activities for your clients' to 'doing a pain-resolving transformation for your client'.
- ✓ Picture them 'The Promised Land'. Explain to them your distinctive 'vehicle' to drive them from point A (problem status) to point B (problem-solved status).
- ✓ Show them how you can secure a transformation home run, with process details. Show them how you can ensure stakeholder buy-in. Shift their thinking. Inspire behavioral change.

## Most consultants have too big egos.

When a prospect is calling and asks: 'Could you do this for us'? What is your answer? Reflect on that!

My experience: 95% of all consultants say yes. Because their ego cannot make a difference between an opportunity and a distraction.

When you say yes to everything to make a living, your yes is not credible. A prospect can smell that, you bet.

As a result, you get put in the bottom consultant quadrant: easy to replace, humiliating discussions with procurement, excessive discounts, poor day rates, disrespectful waiting times to get paid, malicious scope creep waiting impatiently, impossible to get a value-driven recommendation.

The unbearable default consulting model. If your ego and greediness make you say yes to almost every 'could-you-do-this-for-us' request, you are not an expert yet.

Experts fanatically protect themselves from getting distracted.

## Consultancy buyers are impatient and have a short-term focus!

The recent Grist Thought Leadership Study found: of all executives, **29%** are zeroed in on the next three months, **49%** have their sights on the 3-12 month period.

As a consultant, trying to access new prospects, you'd better be able to **CLEARLY EXPLAIN** in no more than 60" what specific problem you are able to solve for your specific client, and how:

- ✓ How does a typical project roadmap look like and how will you build such a roadmap?
- ✓ What is the typical TTR (time to resolution) of your roadmap? Agile approach?
- ✓ What are the typical outcomes or impact of your approach?
- ✓ Who should be typically involved in the project at the client's side?
- ✓ What education will you provide? Will you help the client to become self-sufficient over time?

## "But I have to pay the bills, Luk!"

The #1 objection I get explained by consultants when we discuss narrowing their consulting focus: the fear to miss out on opportunities and income.

FOMO, big time.

I know it's very counterintuitive, going narrow and growing the number of opportunities. "How's that possible, Luk?", they ask.

Trust me, it happens again and again (and again), consultants feeling much more fulfillment focusing their attention, going deep on a single subject matter, and gradually becoming way more attractive to prospective clients.

You don't need to narrow your focus overnight, you can do it step by step, applying lean principles. Carefully fading out 'the old'. Keeping the bills paid in the meantime.

It requires courage but **HYPERFOCUS** changes the way consultants experience every moment of their lives.

## **The biggest temptation in consulting? Keeping all the options open.**

“We can scroll through life and stay in the shallows, or limit our options and connect on a deeper, more satisfying level”, says Astra Taylor, US filmmaker.

I consider myself as a member of the ‘counterculture of committers’ (a term coined by Pete Davis in his book ‘Dedicated’) who have made it to ‘the other side’: focusing on ONE single expertise domain for a longer period of time (maybe forever), going all the way, building the deepest possible knowledge, mastering my craft.

Every consultant I talk to has some kind of ambition to be recognized as an expert. But by keeping their options open all the time (out of fear of missing out), they won’t be able to look back in 10 years from now and feel the kind of satisfaction that comes from focus and true dedication.


Your restless and indecisive brain is keeping you stuck in the infinite browsing mode. Switching to this vicious browsing mode may seem difficult, but, in relative terms, it’s short-term pain (for long-term gain).

Getting stuck in it will haunt you for the rest of your consulting career. Think about that.

### **ARE YOU ADDING VALUE OR 'DOING ACTIVITIES'?**

*Ordinary consultants do project work. Authorities transform their clients.*



 **If consultants aren't focused, the laws of marketing won't apply.**

Marketing in consulting is about BUILDING VISIBILITY AND TRUST. If you aren't focused on a specific expertise domain, you won't build a sustainable reputation in the long run.

The laws of marketing only work if you focus on a SPECIFIC AUDIENCE, WITH A SPECIFIC PROBLEM, AND A SPECIFIC PROBLEM SOLUTION.

That's hardcore VALUE PROPOSITION DESIGN, a skill all consultants need to master. Only very few do. Unfortunately.

Without focus, you will remain invisible in a crowded consulting market.

Nobody will come across your profile, Google won't care (the E.A.T. algorithm searches for Expertise, Authority, Trust), WOM (word of mouth) doesn't work (people don't know how to recommend you), thought leadership is meaningless, pre-qualification of ideal clients doesn't make sense.

Most consultants tend to behave inside-in, crying for attention to their great skills. Unfortunately for those consultants, prospects are looking for the outside-in view of THE EXPERT CONSULTANT, with a transformational solution to their prototypical pain points.

The law of marketing: specific audience, specific problem, specific problem solution.

One word: **FOCUS**.

 **By the time of writing this, I have talked to >200 consultants. I've plotted them in my 'Visible Authority Quadrant'.**

Inactive struggler: **63%**  
Ineffective enthusiast: **12%**  
Hidden genius: **23%**  
Visible authority: **2%**

The quadrant definitions:

- 1. The inactive struggler:** Low visibility in the market and low authority due to (most of the time) covering multiple expertise domains and being unfocused. Saying YES to everything to protect income.
- 2. The ineffective enthusiast:** Very active (often hectic & chaotic) on social media leading to trivial, Instagram-like, and ineffective visibility not translating into systematic pipeline growth, nor reputation.
- 3. The hidden genius:** Very strong expertise level developed over the years by focusing on one specific expertise domain. Saying NO to almost everything outside the focus area to protect expertise. Too busy 'in the lab' to articulate thought leadership causing low/no visibility.
- 4. The visible authority:** Strong visibility and reputation as an expert and thought leader. Expertise flows from a narrow focus and repeatability of work. Saying NO to protect time to build visible thought leadership in the market. Openly sharing insightful learnings, market trends, and their impact. Excess opportunity, low/no sales effort.

## Consultants tell me they have NO TIME to do their marketing

Is this really a time issue?

IT IS NOT !!!

Consultants say: I don't HAVE the time.  
I reply: you don't MAKE the time.

Most consultants aren't able to MAKE the time because they say yes to all sorts of inquiries and end up in the vicious loop of not having the time to improve their visibility and expertise. This feast and famine cycle is burning out consultants in the long run.

Not MAKING the time is a FIXABLE ISSUE. Believe it or not.

During a full decade, I made 25-30% of my time available to do my marketing: building/growing my visibility. I did it. You can do it.

How? Focus! It's that easy!

### CAN YOU GIVE INSTANT ADVICE AS A CONSULTANT?

*As a consultant, you should be able to advise your clients with: "If I were you, dear client, I would do these 3 things differently tomorrow". If you can't give such instant advice, you are not an expert yet.*



## **Finding the time to get visible as a consultant, is NOT BY THE CLOCK!**

Marketing in consulting is about building visibility and trust. If you don't get visible, nobody will come across your expertise. Like it or not.

So, you will need to MAKE the time to build and grow your visibility. However, whenever you manage your time by the clock to (try to) do your marketing, you will never have enough time and you will be chasing your tail every single day.

The lack of time to develop your consulting business is a mindset problem, not a time problem.

## **The 3 biggest bottlenecks to specialize in consulting...**

**1. The fear to lose income** (by far the biggest fear): afraid of leaving revenue/incentive on the table when they would focus/specialize. To a certain degree, I understand. But in the long run, if consultants don't deal with this fear, it'll burn them out.

**2. The big ego of many consultants:** the big egos say yes to almost everything because they feel they can crush everything (and have a big need to let everybody know about that). Being very busy at the expense of the craft. Unfortunately, their yes is not credible anymore in the long run. Prospects can smell this.

**3. Lack of confidence in expertise:** narrowing your focus as a consultant and saying no to distractions, requires courage and confidence. As I always say: if you don't have the confidence yet, you are not focused enough, you are not expert enough yet.

“The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do.” (Michael Porter)

STRATEGY IS FOCUS.



## Here's what I focused on in year 1 of my new start

My new clients often ask me what I focused on when I started my new consulting business in March 2020. That's a rather easy question to answer.

- ✓ **Laser-sharp positioning:** focus on a specific (minimum viable) audience, with specific problems & challenges (standing out in a crowded consulting market to grow an organic pipeline of projects) and an upstream, packaged, fixed-priced problem resolution approach.
- ✓ **Validation of problem-resolution approach:** I commissioned an external agency to research a substantial group of ideal clients to test & validate my service value proposition. The main reason: rapid value proposition iterations, avoiding uncertainty and risk in year 1. Get growing fast and reliable.
- ✓ **Fast development of a body of work:** (thought leadership) with the objective
  - to build my visibility and grow the trust in my expertise quickly
  - to deepen my expertise (writing/speaking is learning)
  - to develop 'my voice' (not developing my voice quickly enough is a learning from the past)
  - to start building the best possible pre-qualification content: clarifying my prospects what my expertise is and what I can do for them (to avoid non-ideal prospects eating my time)
- ✓ **Build and grow my new email list:** as I always say, the ROI of thought leadership is in the growth of your subscriber's list. Your entire network should be on your mailing list and you should nurture your network with your unparalleled thought leadership in a consistent way.

## When I audit consultants, these are the 10 struggles I can uncover immediately

“Luk, I need your help. I’ve been a consultant for 12 years and I’m still struggling to build a consistent pipeline of clients. I feel exhausted!”

Most of the clients that come to me are generalist consultants and, upon auditing them, I discover that they struggle with one or more of the following challenges:

- 1.** Confusing market positioning: no clear audience, no/vague value proposition
- 2.** Inside view: the big we-we-we show, client pains (outside view) aren’t visible
- 3.** Multiple expertise domains, keeping all the options open, saying yes to almost everything to protect income
- 4.** Service offering ‘as a catalog’, downstream ‘order taker’ profile
- 5.** Poor market visibility, no/low trust-building ‘body of content’ (demonstrating expertise), no consistent nurturing of prospects, former clients, existing clients
- 6.** No authority background information: the missing ‘YOU’ that cannot be copied by competition
- 7.** No/Low organic pipeline growth, feast and famine profile
- 8.** Low traffic to the website (if at all) or profile page
- 9.** No systematic lead generation (no T-L-C approach, Traffic to Leads to Clients)
- 10.** Inefficient social media use

## **Tech consultants shouldn't talk about technology**

I was writing an audit report for a tech-based consultancy. The core of my report: stop bragging about your technology!

Counterintuitive? I get that. But it's not. Because technology consultants are NOT in the business of selling technology but in the business of solving client problems.

When I audit consultants and consultancies with technology at their core service, I see way too much focus on the technical features and solutions. They use technical jargon to death, trying to demonstrate how fantastic all their features are.

Wrong! **Use business language.**

Talk about your unique expertise in solving client problems and how tech will help to (in business language) speed up, de-complex, improve processes, lower costs, improve revenue, reduce risk, etc.

As a prospective client with a problem, I am not looking for technical features first. Tech is important, don't get me wrong. But you need to tell problem resolution stories of your other clients, how they have solved their pains, what lessons they learned your prospects can learn from.

Inspire them about the transformational potential of your approach, picture them 'The Promised Land', help them to think differently about their problems or challenges. That's how you will make a difference.

**YOU ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF SOLVING CLIENT PROBLEMS. PERIOD.**

**DOING YOUR MARKETING AS A CONSULTANT IS A MUST!**

*If you consider marketing as 'beneath you' or as an annoying distraction on top of the 'real work', you won't get anywhere in your consulting business development these days.*



## I only work 4 days a week

Thursday is my cycling day at the borders of the Isar mountain river close to Munich (where I live). I do take pictures at the beautiful river side. Often.

We are all looking for ways to grow our consulting business, but it's vital to remind ourselves WHY we are in business in the first place, which is ultimately to have the life we want.

And, of course, it's sometimes difficult to know what decisions we need to make to move to our ideal life, and that's why we should take and watch our very own 'Thursday-free-cycling-day pictures'.

Protecting my freedom and my mental health is the foundation of my business model as a consultant, and that's what you could (should) reflect on too.

We all have a legacy of doing things in a certain way, often keeping us stuck in routines, in hamster-wheel-like being busy-busy-busy.

In those moments, you need 'river-side-pictures' to help you navigate and ask yourself if you are moving towards your desired life or not.

As a consultant (and it really doesn't matter being a solo consultant or working within a big or small consultancy firm), it's not that difficult to move to your 4-day week or even less.

The recipe I have been using and which I am teaching my consulting clients:

- 1.** Radical focus on 1 single (vertical) subject domain (but with broad contextual business understanding) and become the go-to expert;
- 2.** Upstream consulting value proposition (strategic advisory, no downstream hamster-wheel-like client 'activities');
- 3.** Productized (or packaged) services at high-end pricing (because of delivering high-end value, because you are THE expert, because of your radical focus).

Think about your desired life picture. Every day again.

## Don't worry about your competition stealing 'your secrets'

I am an avid proponent of openly and generously sharing expertise as a consultant.

While my clients and readers understand the benefits of this strategy, many wonder whether it's a double-edged sword.

"But Luk, aren't we just giving away all our secrets to our competitors?"

While I can certainly understand where this concern is coming from, it's not something you, as an expert-consultant, should ever be worried about.

### **BE THE LEADER AND LET YOUR COMPETITORS BE THE FOLLOWERS!**

Honestly, I never really thought about my competition when building up my own visibility the past decade. My goal was and has always been to share my expertise as generously and frequently as possible.

I did it because I wanted my target audience to see me as a trusted voice on the market, as a highly knowledgeable and experienced advisor and partner.

It had a massive business impact!

The only way to build up your own reputation as a go-to expert on the market in a way that helps you grow your business is by sharing expertise that's:

- 1.** Authentic (what did YOU learn others can learn from - no competitor can copy 'the YOU')
- 2.** Transformational (solving real-life client problems, picturing and inspiring the change/improvement potential)
- 3.** Consistent (endless learnings to share)

By being consistent in your pursuit of sharing an abundance of 'lessons learned', you will, brick by brick, build up a rock-steady readership and achieve a loyal target audience.

## As a consultant, you ARE 'the product'.

You ARE the marketer and the sales rep of your expertise, your approach, and your unique blend of experience and delivery. If you sit in front of your prospect, nobody is coming to rescue you.

It doesn't matter how good of a consultant you are. Nobody will come across your expertise without these characteristics:

- ✓ **Visible reputation:** you are known for what you know, for your subject matter expertise. You are top of mind when prospects reflect on their problem(s).
- ✓ **Specialisation:** you have deep vertical expertise, you have discovered all the patterns of the prototypical client problems. You combine this with broad contextual understanding. The T-shaped consultant, remember?
- ✓ **Trusted advisor:** you get trusted for solving 'their problem', for bringing your clients from point A (problem status) to point B (problem solved status). You can credibly picture them 'The Promised Land'.
- ✓ **Influencing skills:** you shift people's thinking about their problems. They don't want to hear what they already know (about their problem) and ultimately you are able to inspire behavioural changes (to get the problems solved).

Let me conclude with a great quote from author Jonathan Stark: **"If the people whose condition you can improve don't know you exist, then you can't help them."**

### WHAT KNOWLEDGE CAN YOU START SHARING?

*Content-driven visibility is the only thing that is going to make you stand out in a crowded and competitive consulting world. More than ever before! The more you open up, the more your clients and prospects can relate to you as a consultant.*



## I meditate almost every day

I got a burnout in 1998, and stayed in intensive care. Totally overwhelmed.

Ever since then I have changed my life.

Being a consultant can be an exciting and rewarding career. It was and still is for me. Unfortunately, I encounter too many consultants who feel overwhelmed, overburdened, and overworked. Over-servicing and under-charging their clients.

They struggle with a work-life balance, they are scared of missing out on opportunities, keep all the options open, love variety at the expense of depth, and don't see consistent business growth as a result.

If you can relate to this, it's probably time to re-evaluate your approach to be a consultant.

The prospect of working in this chaotic, unpredictable, overburdening manner should scare you more than the prospect of changing your business model.

Start doing less. Like me, working 4 days per week. It will force you to prioritize what you do and how you do it. Choose quality over quantity. Strive to maximize the value you deliver for each client as opposed to maximizing the number of clients and opportunities.

Focus. Reduce. Reflect. Meditate. Depth is your superpower.

Variety is consulting hell.

### GETTING BACK IN CONTROL

*We must simply choose to take control, first by specializing and shifting the power back from the client toward us, and then we can begin to shape our future as consultants. (Blair Enns)*



## **Why do some consultants generate 5x or even 10x more revenue?**

A few of my clients are generating revenue multiples of 5x or even 10x compared to other consultants doing pretty much the same thing.

Why is that? These consultants freakingly obsess about these 3 approaches:

### **1. Radical focus (or commitment)**

One single audience with one prototypical pain point with one specific value proposition. They say NO to anything outside their narrow focus or expertise domain.

### **2. Upstream positioning and pricing**

Providing C-level strategic advisory, performing highly specialized diagnostic or audit-based services, developing roadmaps for transformation/change. No downstream, activity-based, implementation work.

### **3. Packaging, productizing, standardizing their consulting services using value pricing.**

Offering highly customized services would be the biggest draw on their time they could think of. Wrapping their services up into clever packages also makes it easier for clients to understand what they are offering and it helps clients to make faster decisions. And by packaging consulting services, they also clearly and deliberately showcase their area of expertise and help others to easily recommend them.

My final, somewhat provoking thought...

Whichever 'other system' you will try to create as a consultant to boost your revenue will most likely fail. Maybe not tomorrow, maybe not next month, but it will come down crashing in the long run.



## Why do consultants end up with 'bad clients' so often?

Because they create 'bad clients' themselves by...

- ✓ over-servicing and under-pricing their consulting work (out of fear of losing the client)
- ✓ accepting vicious scope creep such as endless extra meetings and calls
- ✓ accepting to be in cc in 100rds of mails (getting dragged into useless downstream activities)
- ✓ accepting to be managed/controlled by lower-level team members (who consider you as an 'order taker')
- ✓ accepting to be measured on 'hours worked' instead of on the output you deliver
- ✓ accepting a horrible delay in getting your invoices paid
- ✓ showing your desperate mindset by sending endless reminder mails to get your proposal approved
- ✓ accepting to offer immediate discounts when asked by procurement, etc., etc., etc.

I could go on and on and on...

### **BAD CLIENTS DON'T EXIST, YOU CREATE THEM...**

- ✓ by accepting bad behaviors or processes
- ✓ because you didn't say no to the wrong client profiles
- ✓ because you are afraid of losing income
- ✓ because you chose to be a downstream 'order taker'
- ✓ because you are not perceived as an expert yet

## You have been fooled, you are not unique

There are 1000s of other consultants doing exactly the same thing as you. Some might be better than you.

I looked at 20 randomly chosen consulting/consultancy profiles this week. Zero, yes 0%, understands how to develop a client-driven value proposition. Amazing.

20 Consultants talking about how unique their expertise is. The inside view.

To be honest, I am struggling to understand why this is such a blind spot in consulting, with all the information around. Articles, books, conferences, you name it.

After my iNostix/Deloitte exit, I started from zero again (March 2020, in the middle of the lockdown) with client-centered (the outside view) value proposition design as my driving force. Here's what I focused on:

- ✓ laser-sharp positioning (the focus of the business) and a clear value proposition, client-driven of course (the outside view);
- ✓ a bold and inspiring point of view (often gets forgotten but is an essential component of a value proposition);
- ✓ visible and consistent thought leadership (writing-sharing-writing-sharing)...openly sharing all my learnings to demonstrate expertise, build trust and help others to learn from it.

Result: fully booked after 12 months.

I am 100% convinced every consultant can do this when it's well-executed.

**SUCCESS IS A SIDE-EFFECT**, an output of doing positioning and value proposition (combined with stand-out thought leadership) extremely well. Everybody can do it. Starting from scratch.

Don't fool yourself. It's not what you think it is. It's what it does to your client.

## Keeping the options open as a consultant will burn you out

At first, keeping all your options open might bring you joy and new experiences in your consulting work. It might even seem exciting and enriching.

But after a while, lots of open doors only lead to dissatisfaction and burnout. In the long run, variety in consulting comes at the expense of your long-term health and well-being.

As humans, we're constantly surrounded by choices and options. Every day, you need to make hundreds of mini-decisions, even if you're not aware of them.

If you can create boundaries and set a specific focus in your work as a consultant, not only your work but your entire life becomes easier.

### BEING FOCUSED IS NOT ABOUT LOSING OPPORTUNITIES !!!

- ✓ Focus is about using your most valuable resources (your time, energy, and expertise) in the best possible way.
- ✓ Nothing is more satisfying in the long run than providing client value in your narrow 'zone of genius' and becoming recognized for it.

While most consultants are trying to be everything, depth and specialization are superpowers.

Variety is consulting hell.

### STANDING OUT IN A CROWDED MARKET

*The problem is not the crowded consulting market, the problem is the consultant. In a world full of self-acclaimed experts, don't ever think that your consulting services are what you think they are but what they do for your client.*



## Specialisation in consulting is a superpower

Here's the beauty of commitment to 1 specific target audience, with 1 prototypical pain with 1 laser-sharp upstream value proposition to solves that prototypical problem:

- ✓ You will have much more time to grow the business
- ✓ You will move to a higher-quality life, instead of running in the downstream treadmill
- ✓ You will be able to charge premium prices, and you won't be challenged a lot
- ✓ You will get recognized as an expert, your infinite energy supply
- ✓ Depth becomes your superpower, you know everything, you can answer all the questions, always, anytime
- ✓ Countering client objections is a walk in the park
- ✓ Consistent organic growth is your ultimate reward, you don't have to sell, persuade, negotiate
- ✓ Your love for your craft, will let you sleep well and protects you against stress or burnout

Yet... Why the heck is it so difficult to commit? Why is it not leading to more radical choices in consulting? Why are consultants keeping the doors open (almost) all the time?

Variety in consulting is hell. Specialisation and focus are superpowers.

### MARKETING IN CONSULTING

*If you want to transform your consulting business for the better, you need to focus on getting better at earning visibility and trust. (Philip Morgan in the book 'The Positioning Manual For Indie Consultants')*



## The intriguing story of meeting with an HR Director...

A few years ago, I gave the opening keynote speech at an international conference. The learnings I'd presented had intrigued this HRD. She asked me for my contact information and promised to call me to discuss a collaboration.

Months went by, without a single call from her. However, she kept receiving my new case studies in the background as she was subscribed to our email list. Six months later, her assistant called for a meeting.

It was one of those many meetings where I sat in front of the 'buyer' with a printed stack of my case studies and articles on the desk.

She apologized for the delay in getting back to me. She had to prepare a business case for consultancy investment, and that took her a while.

"Your case studies and articles have been my best source of information to prepare the business case for your support," she admitted to me with a big smile.

The HR Director finally got the approval from her boss (just before we met), and at the end of our meeting, she gave me the go-ahead for one of the most rewarding consulting projects I've ever done. Amazing!

This project with the HR Director was born out of having openly shared all my learnings. That's what the client told me, at least.

The collaboration 'pitch' (the 60' meeting in her office) was nothing more than a friendly handshake to get started right away.

No need to explain, persuade, sell, or negotiate.

**That's the reward of openly (and massively) sharing expertise!**

## 4 Impactful ways to grow your consulting business

I get this question almost every week: what are the most impactful ways to radically improve consulting success?

Here you go again...

1. Laser-sharp positioning, narrowing down your focus and expertise, to understand all the patterns of the prototypical pains of your (narrow) target audience and to become the top-of-mind go-to person in your expertise domain;
2. Design an upstream, productized, client-pain-centered value proposition, sharply positioning your (packaged) expertise to prospects;
3. Allocate 25-30% of your time on a consistent basis to:
  - become visible in your target market(s) and
  - to build trust in your expertise;
4. Learn to say NO to incoming opportunities outside of your narrow area of expertise to protect your TIME and expertise deepening.

It's not a sprint: it takes patience, courage and dedication! It's playing the long game.

But it always works! I did it. I am doing it again. You can do it.

### SAYING NO AS A CONSULTANT

*What consultants need is the confidence that "the void" that is created by saying no, becomes an opportunity to do things that bring them further and closer to what they want to do. And with that comes the confidence that something else will come along, because they're worth it. (David Ducheyne, founder of Otolith Consulting)*



## Never sell self-developed software tools as a consultant

A consultant explained to me that she was selling her clients licenses of the tool she had developed. She developed the software tool for herself in the past years, to improve the quality, speed, and pricing of her consulting service.

It was her way to productize her expertise. Well done!

But now she started selling user licenses for this tool to her existing clients. I consider this a big mistake.

What happened? She already lost 2 important clients who used her (productized) services in the past. They are now using the tool and told her they will be doing the work themselves.

The price of the license, that's what I was afraid of, was way too low to compensate for the client loss.

She asked for my advice. My answer is quite easy, there are only 2 ways:

### 1. Productized consulting

You use your self-developed tool as your productized consulting approach and deliver higher quality consulting, faster, and at a fixed (high-end) price. It's a perfect way to scale your expertise and consulting work.

### 2. Product development

You build a product 'the startup way' and you stop doing consulting with it. If you believe you can make money with scaling such a product, you will need to hire developers, build a tech stack, hire a sales team, maybe get investment money (or a bank loan), etc. That's a new space for any consultant and a very different business model.

**Conclusion:** never get into selling (some) licenses to please (or impress) a few existing clients. Don't let them use your clever software because you are giving away years of expertise without the right return.

You either do productized consulting with it (better, bigger, faster, more expensive) or you scale it the startup way (selling 1000s of licenses).

## Why you should delete your consulting service catalog

Most consultants keep adding new services to their service offering because they believe that more services will lead to more opportunities and revenue.

As Francis Bacon once said, 'The human understanding, when it has adopted an opinion, draws all things else to support and agree with it'.

Unfortunately, you are fooling yourself because adding more services means more competition, more price erosion, thinner expertise, poorer thought leadership, less time to get visible, more gatekeepers to deal with, more objections from more stakeholders, substandard project processes, more energy draining (unpaid) proposal writing, and probably 100 more fallouts.

It creates a negative chain reaction, a downwards spiral. Your reputation will go down the drain in the long run.

'Everything you've ever wanted is just on the other side of the decision you're not prepared to make', said author Paul Gough.

Stop being the 'service-catalog-consultant'. Radically reduce your services. Delete that damn catalog. Become the go-to expert in something for a small group of dream customers who admire you for your single-expertise depth.

Personally, I'd rather fail at developing one single expertise domain than fail at implementing a long list of services poorly.

### BE DIFFERENT!

*"Don't forget that your experiences, your communications style, and your unique perspectives all allow you to be different from everyone else in your industry". (Michael Stelzner)*





## How Visible Authorities can help consulting firms grow.

The past 12 years I moved from being a solo consultant in my early years, to building a small team in the later years and by being part of big consultancy firm Deloitte in the final years.

The 5 key roles of an authority are not depending on the size of the consultancy.

- ✓ **The trojan horse:** you would be surprised how easily visible authorities can get access to prospects in their network to open the door for new projects (and for having a consistent pipeline of new projects).
- ✓ **The pricing multiplier:** visible authorities should be able to get at least a 2,5 multiple for project rates (compared to market averages), or even more. A few of my clients are even getting multiples of 5 because of their reputation as experts.
- ✓ **The trusted advisor:** all the authorities I know, are receiving a consistent flow of personal invitations from C-level executives because they get trusted to help them with solving their challenges.
- ✓ **The thought leader:** the visible authority is the driving force behind the generous sharing of expertise. The best consulting authorities I know, are also considered as excellent teachers.
- ✓ **The network nurturer:** although easy access to the market, authorities don't rely on their network and relationships only. They make sure the network is 'systemized' (as I always call it) to consistently nurture it with new learnings, insights, research outcomes, trends in the market, etc.

## **Sleazy sales hacks in consulting don't work**

The past weeks I talked to 2 consultancy firms, both using a call center doing cold calling sales.

OMG!

I was flabbergasted. It doesn't work. Why not?

In 99% of the cases, prospects - if the call agent can reach the right decision makers at all (likely NEVER) - are not in a need to buy consulting services. And potential buyers cannot be inspired by a call agent who has no clue (with all due respect).

**YOU will need to become a magnet of YOUR expertise !!**

How? Effective selling requires YOU to build TRUST in YOUR expertise. Share, teach, share, teach.

Inspire your prospects with an abundance of 'trust stuff'. Nurture them with the latest insights, trends, research, lessons learned, use cases. Consistently.

Once you get in the trust-building flow, your 'sales life' will radically change. You won't need call centers again.

Unfortunately there are no trust-building hacks, it takes time. A year, two years, maybe even more. It's a long haul play.

Ooh, I almost forgot to say: and it never stops! But I am damn sure you'll start getting a flood of prospects coming through.

It happened to me twice. Starting from scratch.

**Stop your useless consulting call center practice! You can't delegate trust-building to a call center !!**

You are fooling yourself. And you will be destroying your reputation.

Stop now! YOU are the trust-building marketer of YOUR expertise! YOU only.

## Consultants often tell me I am crazy.

Why? Because I always openly share all my expertise.

They tell me: “Luk, your clients will learn how to do it themselves and your competitors will steal your know-how”.

Here are 4 important thoughts for all my friends in consulting:

1. Competitors can steal my content but not my journey of 20 years in consulting in multiple roles;
2. Sharing expertise sends a powerful message that you have a lot more to offer because of how freely you share your knowledge;
3. Sharing is trust-building. If you never share your expertise as a consultant, your content-rich competitor will get the next job;
4. Even if you'd share step-by-step instructions 'the IKEA-way', your content will never be THE solution to your prospects. But YOU are!

“The ultimate test of your knowledge is your capacity to transfer it to another”, said Nobel Prize Winner Professor Feynman.

Am I really crazy?

### KEEP TRACK OF YOUR MISTAKES

*An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field. (Niels Bohr)*



## Ordinary consultants are getting stuck selling 'THEIR AVAILABILITY'

They became order takers, 'DOING ACTIVITIES' for their clients...

...instead of having a transformational impact..

It gets them caught in a downstream, non-authoritative positioning as a consultant and as a result, they...

- ✓ get considered as mainstream, without negotiation power in a crowded consulting market;
- ✓ say yes to almost everything to protect their income;
- ✓ get beaten up by the procurement gatekeepers who dictate painful discounts;
- ✓ over-service and under-charge out of fear losing the client;
- ✓ are working at low rates with zero perspectives to upgrade;
- ✓ are working themselves to death to earn a living, without time to grow the project pipeline;
- ✓ have to wait disrespectfully long to get their invoices approved and paid;
- ✓ are considered as order takers, risk-free to get replaced;
- ✓ are unable to get distinctive testimonials to help grow their expert reputation

If you are able to:

- ✓ focus on 1 single expertise domain
- ✓ move UPSTREAM (strategic advisory)
- ✓ develop a transformational VALUE PROPOSITION as an expert...

...you will never have to deal again with that vicious downstream, non-authoritative consulting approach again and become irreplaceable.

Start tomorrow! Right? Step by step. Fade out the old. Fade in the new.

## Do you have a useless 'Mission & Vision' statement?

Why don't you just delete that from your consulting website?

Here's a tip if you are not convinced it's a useless thing:

Make your Vision/Mission statement to a separate page on your consulting website and check the traffic to that page over a longer period (e.g. 6 or 12 months).

Here's what you will find: **ZERO TRAFFIC!!!**

Nobody really cares about visions and missions on consulting websites. Prospects care about getting their problem solved.

What they are searching for:

- ✓ Do these consultants understand our problems and context?
- ✓ Can they solve our problems? And how are they doing that?
- ✓ Do they show social proof of having solved such problems before?
- ✓ What is their point of view with regards to these problems?

"We are passionate, result-oriented, innovative, teamwork-focused, purpose-driven,...". HELP!

Everybody says that! Zero differentiation! I don't want to be rude to you but leave all that old school, useless nonsense for the amateurs.

The game has changed.

It's not about what you think you ARE, but about what you DO to your client.

**FREE WEBINAR**

# MY LEARNINGS FROM 2021



January 12, 2 PM CET



[thevisibleauthority.com](https://thevisibleauthority.com)

- ✓ My biggest learnings from 2021 in the world of consulting
- ✓ Top 5 challenges consultants had to overcome in 2021
- ✓ The key lessons to take away for 2022
- ✓ Predictions for consulting trends in 2022

**RESERVE YOUR SPOT**



# CONNECT WITH ME

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about my services, email me at [info@thevisibleauthority.com](mailto:info@thevisibleauthority.com).

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