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Special Contributor

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“INSIGHT: Business Advice in an Age of Complexity” by David Wimer and Robert F. Everett (David Wimer Advisors, \$14.95). Real and imagined obstacles and hardships confront small business owners every day. The choices made can make or break their business. To make these choices, owners need a broader perspective than the one they have. Why? They’re so far inside the forest (i.e. their business,) they can’t see the trees – much less the landscape surrounding the forest.

While the team may provide perspective, they too look at situations with insider eyes. Family members, other business owners and colleagues can broaden perspective – but at a price. When relationships are involved, “honesty may be hard to come by.” There’s also the question of keeping things confidential.

Where can the owner turn for advice? Professional advisors, consultants and coaches. Advisors bring a fresh, broader, outside-in perspective. Their research and analysis of the landscape, not just the business, identifies choices and makes recommendations. They often assist with strategy and tactics.

The owner makes the decision, initiates action and leverages the strength of the team to drive results. The depth and breadth of their general knowledge makes them on-call mentors.

The consultant provides “in-depth experience and/or operating know-how in a functional area”. They’re subject matter experts (e.g. tax, legal, IT, production, logistics, sales, etc.) brought in to handle specific projects. When the project ends, they move on. Consultants often come from academia because professors strive to keep abreast of the latest thinking in their field.

Because the insiders lack the expertise, consultants are usually active in the implementation of the owner’s decisions. The consultants also act as teachers throughout implementation.

A business coach works hands-on to improve the skills of the owner and team. They often specialize in leadership/talent development and performance improvement. “Cultural development and assembling the team members with the right strengths is a valuable coaching role.”

The authors show owners that they’re not alone when it comes to building their businesses. Insight: Seek advice early so you nip problems in the bud.

“Powerful Phrases for Successful Interviews” by Tony Beshara (AMACOM, \$10.95). Candidates try to overwhelm interviewers with reasons they can do the job. On the other hand, studies of interviewers found that 90 percent of their hiring decisions are driven by a job seeker’s ability to “connect” with them. Once connected, they focus on selling the company to the applicant.

The interview typically starts with some questions about your résumé – which creates the first impression of your ability to connect. Your answers should focus on features (i.e. your skills) and benefits (i.e. how you used them to get the job done). The features and benefits approach validates the information in your résumé and allows you to move to the “connection” phase.

You begin to connect when you ask questions like: “What are the most important qualities necessary to do the job well?” “How would you measure success in the position?” “What’s the most difficult aspect of the job and how would you suggest handling it?” “How does the job interact with team members and other departments? This changes the tone of the interview from interrogation to conversation. Take cues from their answers. Take notes, too; they’ll come in handy when you speak to other interviewers, and in Round 2.

When you believe the job fits you, close the interview with two questions: “How do I stack up with other candidates you’ve interviewed? What do I need to do to get the job? While you can expect an artfully-dodged answer, you’ve told the interviewer, you’re a good fit and you’re interested.

Follow up with a *brief* thank you note (Beshara prefers email; I prefer handwritten.) that plays off the information the interviewer provided.

Remember: “While most candidates are trying to be ‘competent’ in the interviewing process, the successful candidates focus on being liked and remembered.”

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