

Consulting behaviours: Why 'earned right' is very different to 'entitlement'

Confidence is a prerequisite mindset for a successful management consultant and is an essential trait when meeting a CEO, senior stakeholder or potential client who will test your knowledge to the full.

However, in order to justify a level of confidence, consultants need to have **earned the right** to 'be in the room'.

How do experienced consultants earn the right to be in the room?

They do their homework and prepare answers for certain critical questions before any meeting. They accumulate knowledge from past experiences and practice, prepare and role-play the expected scenarios so they can stay both calm and demonstrate the right behaviours, and formulate challenging points of view at the critical moments of the conversation.

In order to 'earn the right', consultants will seek to answer the following key questions before any meeting:

- Do I understand the client's context and their current issues?
- What is unique about their situation?
- Have I correctly framed their situation?
- Have I determined what is most important to this particular client at this time?
- Do I know their values and future goals?
- What experience can I draw upon from my track record that will help today?
- Have I formulated a credible point of view that will resonate?
- Have I established what stories I could tell that would directly relate to this client?
- Do I know which behaviours are critical to this particular client and how will I demonstrate those behaviours in the meeting?

The problem for consultants is that occasionally confidence can be superseded by a sense of entitlement.



Instead of having confidence from knowing that the right to be in the room has been earned, the consultant believes they are '**entitled**' to be in the room.

The consultant's perceived entitlement is often based on the value they attach to their own job title, a reliance on and expectation that the client will have heard of their past accomplishments or an overconfidence based on their firm's brand name. As a result of this perceived entitlement, consultants can form unreasonably high expectations about what privileges and respect they should be afforded by the client.

In the context of a meeting with a CEO, a sense of entitlement could manifest itself in a number of ways, for example:

- i. Overt and pushy 'selling' – "I have decided you need this and here's why you should buy it..."
- ii. Being quick to judge and provide answers without exploring the situation as equals
- iii. Not listening to questions but instead believing you have the right to speak and be heard

A sense of entitlement can also breed complacency. Consultants start to simply go through the motions, often in the belief that whatever they say will be met with agreement and perhaps even adulation.

A complacent consultant doesn't prepare, has a closed mindset and misses opportunities.

To compound the problem, keen and experienced observers such as CEOs or senior stakeholders can sense the consultant's overconfidence and will judge the interaction accordingly. Rather than gaining status as a valuable advisor, the consultant maybe guilty of demonstrating behaviours that not only damage their own credibility and personal reputation but also the consulting firm's status by misrepresenting its desired brand and values.

In conclusion, confidence is vital for consultants if they are to succeed at critical moments during client interactions. Confidence for consultants can be justified if it stems from a self-belief that they have earned the right to be in the room.

An 'earned right' comes from clearly understanding the client's context, doing the right preparation, defining the client's values and future goals, building a portfolio of experience, formulating points of view and simulating the interaction in advance.

But earned right is very different to entitlement. For consultants who believe they are simply entitled to be in the room the client will have earned the right to very quickly show them the door.