

Chair's Corner:

Two Years of Continued Service to IEEE Independent Consultants

BY CHARLES LORD, P.E.



It is time again to change leadership of the IEEE-USA Consultants Committee. In my two years of service, I take pride in building on the accomplishments of past chairpersons of this committee. I would like to make note of two recent accomplishments. First, we have started an annual tradition of meeting with local network chairs, which had provided this committee with ongoing communications with these local groups. Also, we have built on the success of our in-person workshops to now we are branching out

to partner with conferences outside of IEEE to bring in new consultants into the IEEE membership.

Of course, this committee has continued its leadership and guidance to IEEE consultants through our newsletters, webinars, and reports. While I pass the mantle of leadership onto Mohammed Billoo, long time IEEE-USA Consultants Committee member and embedded software consultant; I will remain as an active member of this committee. I want to thank all those who have supported me through my two-year term. ■



It's Time to Renew Your Subscription to the IEEE-USA Consultant Finder

Just a friendly reminder to renew your subscription for the [IEEE-USA Consultant Finder](#), powered by IEEE Collaboratec.

This service's key features include:

- Simple and advanced search features
- An assignment placement portal

- A full consultant profile for paid subscribers

The main purpose of the IEEE-USA Consultant Finder is to let clients, project managers and HR professionals search for consultants to hire — for free!

If you have any questions, please contact Daryll Griffin at d.r.griffin@ieee.org. ■

3 Essential Tips for Starting and Growing a Consulting Business in 2025

BY JACOB BENINGO

Starting and growing a consulting business offers incredible opportunities to free yourself from corporate America, gain financial independence, and live the life you always dreamed. However, if you aren't careful, you can end up overworked, underpaid, and struggling to find the free time you deserve. It doesn't need to be that way! Whether you're just starting out or looking to grow your existing practice or small business, these three tips will set you on the path to success.

TIP #1 - NICHE DOWN TO STAND OUT

One of the biggest mistakes new consultants and business owners make is trying to appeal to everyone. Stop for a moment and ask yourself:

Who is your ideal customer?

Were you able to answer confidently, or did your mind jump to: "Well, it depends. I do a little of this and a little of that. It might be a director of engineering, a small business owner, or maybe an enterprise . . ."?

In today's crowded marketplace, success lies in specializing in a specific industry or service. Consultants and business owners aren't Swiss Army knives—trying to do it all dilutes your value. Clients seek experts who deeply understand their niche, not generalists.

If you're realizing you've been a generalist, that's okay. I spent my first 10 years as a generalist consultant. I survived, but I was overworked and underpaid. Only after I niched down did I consistently see double-digit growth year after year.

Here's how to ensure you niche down and stand out:

1. Identify industries or problems where you have unique experience.

2. Research your target audience's most significant pain points.
3. Position yourself as the expert who solves those specific problems better than anyone else.

For example, I don't offer "business consulting"; I specialize in "helping engineers become consultants and successful small business owners by following a simple, 6-step plan to professionalize their operations." When you narrow your focus, you attract the right clients, deliver greater value, and command higher fees for your expertise.

TIP #2 - FOCUS ON VALUE-BASED PRICING

One of the first questions a client will ask is, "How much do you charge per hour?" It's a trap. Trading time for money is not what a consultant or a small business owner should be doing. That's a recipe for driving yourself into burnout.

Clients are less interested in how much time you spend and more focused on the outcomes you deliver. For example, I was coaching an engineer who kept complaining that a company he had previously worked for overcharged customers. He mentioned how the client had paid a million dollars to have a store locator feature added to their website. He proudly explained how he could finish the job in a week for only \$120 per hour.

He was missing the point. He wanted to trade his time for money. The client and his employer wanted to exchange value for money. At that time, adding a store locator to a website would result in \$10's of millions of additional revenue per store for this client. They understood the value of the feature to their organization and were willing to pay a hefty fee for it.

Continued on page 3 ►

Hourly billing can undervalue your work and lead to haggling over rates. Instead, adopt value-based pricing, where your fees are tied to the tangible benefits your services bring to the client.

For example, rather than billing \$150/hour for operational consulting, offer a \$15,000 engagement that guarantees a 20% reduction in operational costs within six months. This approach highlights your value and builds trust with clients who see you as an investment rather than an expense.

TIP #3 – WORK ON THE BUSINESS, NOT JUST IN THE BUSINESS

Consultants and business owners often fall into the trap of spending all their time working *in* the business—managing client projects, solving immediate problems, and putting out fires. While this keeps things running, it doesn't move your business forward. To truly grow and succeed, you need to carve out time to work *on* your business.

What does this mean? It's about focusing on the bigger picture: refining your strategy, building systems, and positioning your business for sustainable growth. Without this focus, you risk stagnating, no matter how hard you work day-to-day.

Here are three ways to start working *on* your business:

1. Set Aside Time for Strategy

Block out time regularly to think about the future of your business. Are your current services aligned with market demand? How can you scale without overloading yourself? Use this time to review goals, identify growth opportunities, and adjust course as needed.

2. Systematize and Delegate

Document repetitive tasks and either automate them or delegate them to someone else. This could mean hiring a virtual assistant, using tools like Zapier to automate workflows, or outsourcing tasks like bookkeeping or scheduling. Freeing up this time allows you to focus on high-value activities like client acquisition and thought leadership.

3. Invest in Your Brand

Your brand is your business's face to the world. Invest time in building it—whether that's through creating content, improving your website, or enhancing your social media presence. A strong brand attracts clients while positioning you as a leader in your niche.

Working *on* your business is what turns a consulting practice into a thriving enterprise. It ensures that your efforts today lay the foundation for long-term success tomorrow. Don't just manage the day-to-day; design the future of your business.

The Future Is Bright for Consultants

Starting and growing a consulting business in 2025 is both a challenging and rewarding journey. By niching down to stand out, focusing on value-based pricing, and dedicating time to work *on* your business, you can avoid common pitfalls and build a practice that's not only profitable but sustainable.

These three tips aren't just strategies—they're a mindset shift. Success as a consultant comes from positioning yourself as an expert, aligning your services with the value you provide, and taking a proactive approach to shaping your business's future.

Remember, your consulting business is more than a job—it's your vision, independence, and legacy. Take the steps today to ensure that vision thrives tomorrow.

Jacob Beningo helps engineers transition into successful consultants and small business owners with a simple, 6-step plan to professionalize their operations. Jacob fosters a collaborative environment through his mastermind groups where consultants and business owners can share insights, overcome challenges, and accelerate their growth. Ready to take your business to the next level? Are you seeking more help beyond your local network to grow your business? Reach out to jacob@beningo.com to learn about Mastermind groups that are forming now to help you get your business started and growing in 2025. ■

WAR STORIES #12

Presenting Yourself as a Professional

BY LARRY G. NELSON SR PE.

Consultants need to focus on a few key things to convey professionalism and make a strong impression on potential clients.

Establish a Solid Online Presence

You need to have a clean, user-friendly website that highlights your expertise, services, and experience. This can serve as a powerful first impression.

Use LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, and other forms of social media. Maintain an updated, professional LinkedIn profile. Use social media to share insights and relevant content in your field. Writing articles, blog posts, or sharing brief insights online can showcase your knowledge and commitment to the industry. While you do not want to give away the store you want to avoid fluff and me-too types of content.

Present a Polished Image

Your appearance is important. Dress in a way that fits your industry and meets the level of formality expected by clients. The days of a programmer appearing in shorts or jeans with a graphics T-Shirt are gone if they ever really existed.

You need to have attention to detail. Ensure all materials, like proposals or presentations, are error-free, clear, and visually consistent. It helps to create templates to ensure consistency. Use quality technology for virtual meetings to prevent distractions from technical issues. Practice using these tools before using them with a client. Having issues with video, audio, or sharing presentations detracts from your message.

Set Clear Expectations

Clearly outline the scope of services, timelines, and fees to avoid misunderstandings. You need to be honest. If something falls outside your expertise, say so. Clients appreciate honesty and will trust you more for it. Take

responsibility for your work. Handle any mistakes with transparency and provide solutions to maintain client trust. Your reputation is your greatest asset.

Demonstrate Subject Expertise

Share case studies, testimonials, or metrics that speak to your past successes, especially those that relate to the client's industry. Only share information you have permission to divulge. You never want your prospective client to worry that their proprietary information may be shared in the future without their approval.

Highlight any relevant certifications or memberships to reinforce your credibility. If you are a member of a professional organization, it is important to participate, not just join.

Share specific insights or trends in your field to show your understanding and add value to initial discussions.

Adopt a Client-Centered Approach

You need to understand your clients' needs. Go beyond surface-level conversations. Ask about the client's goals and challenges. You must communicate effectively. You need to use language that is concise, both in writing and verbally, to convey ideas. You should be an active listener. Respond to inquiries and follow up after meetings promptly, reinforcing your reliability. Arrive punctually for meetings, respond to messages promptly, and keep conversations focused.

Focus on Continuous Improvement

Follow trends and updates in your field to ensure your advice is relevant and current. Attend conferences, pursue certifications, and take courses to build knowledge and demonstrate commitment to your craft. Your learning never ends. After a project is completed, ask clients for feedback to improve and refine your approach. ■



AROUND THE WEB

A VIEW FROM MANAGEMENT: SIX MISTAKES COMPANIES MAKE WHEN HIRING INDEPENDENT TALENT

As most independent consultants know, it is not always easy working with full-time staff to solve a problem. There are things companies should be doing to help integrate independent consultants into an organization's culture. Read this [article](#) from Consultancy-me.com on what companies can do better in incorporating independent consultants into their work environment.

UPDATE ON THE CORPORATE TRANSPARENCY ACT (CTA)

A Texas federal judge blocked the Corporate Transparency Act on December 3rd. Judge Amos L. Mazant of the Eastern District of Texas issued the order calling the CTA likely unconstitutional and blocking the Treasury Department from enforcing it. The order came weeks before the law's original 1 January 2025 deadline for existing U.S. entities to file disclosures of their beneficial owners' identities to the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network.

The Federal Government appealed the ruling while also appealing another, separate, narrower CTA halt order from the Eleventh Circuit of Appeals with arguments in that appeal occurring in September 2024. This appeal hearing came after, earlier in 2024, an Alabama federal judge deemed the CTA unconstitutional because its disclosure requirements for business triggered upon an entity's incorporation, not when it started engaging in commerce.

To recap, the CTA is a mandatory compliance regulation that came into effect on 1 January 2024; the following [story](#) outlines reporting requirements for the Act.

As we go to press, the courts have made further rulings regarding the CTA. Please review this [Bloomberg Tax update](#) for the latest developments.

MORE PEOPLE ARE CHOOSING TO BECOME INDEPENDENT CONSULTANTS

[Entrepreneur](#) reports that from 2020 to 2024 the number of people choosing freelance or independent consultancy has doubled. In a related news, the Consultancy.eu reports that [6 out of 10 freelancers in Europe are not looking to return to salaried employment](#). Evidence is certainly pointing to more people, including engineers, turning to consultancy as a career option. IEEE-USA publishes the [IEEE-USA Consultants Fee Survey Report](#) each year, which is a tool that can help consultants set their rates and understand the profile of a technology consultant. The 2024 report is out now.

NOMINEE FOR SECRETARY OF LABOR SUPPORTS THE PRO ACT

[Politico](#) is reporting that President-Elect Trump has nominated outgoing Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer (R.-Ore.) to lead the Department of Labor. Rep. Chavez-DeRemer is one of just three House Republicans to support the PRO Act (HR 20). The PRO Act is of interest to independent consultants because it includes a test for determining if a worker is an independent contractor or an employee of a given company. In 2025 IEEE-USA will monitor to see if the PRO Act is reintroduced and begins to move through Congress. To read more about the PRO Act, please check out our [IEEE-USA Consultant Newsletter Archive](#).

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