

Lessons Learned & Ideas
from the
The Million Dollar Consulting®
Private Roster Mentor Program
Hall of Fame Members

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Lessons Learned

Dr. Cal LeMon

Other than my 1973 Dodge Dart, the best investment I have ever made is my mentoring relationship with Alan Weiss. I have completed nine, six-month stints with Alan and, during this time, my business has tripled. The nuances of Alan's imprint on my personal and professional life consistently seep out, especially in strategic moments of professional decision.

Here, then, is an emerging list of the lessons I have learned from Alan Weiss.

Never Apologize for Success

The first part of my life was wrapped tightly around a pulpit as the senior minister of a large Midwestern congregation. "Success" was suspect in my theology because one never knew when pride and arrogance would hitch a ride on coattails of the over-achievers.

I learned from Alan that success was not only desirable; it was endemic to a healthy ego. Alan's success, as a model, has always been quietly in the background. His intellectual and spiritual strength exude comfortableness with the process of succeeding. I needed Alan's role-model in order for me to pursue success without ending up with residual heaps of guilt. It has been a liberating ride.

Work to Live

Sure, the Bentley and \$1,000.00 bottle of wine on the Queen Mary 2 are a bit austentatious, but they are trappings of a savored life. Alan has taught me accruing wealth is not a worthy goal. Rather, accruing wealth to give it away and save some for special moments exhilaration behind the yoke of thundering B-24 Liberation Bomber, stroking the silken exterior of a Cayman Island sting ray or strolling the narrow, polished streets of Monte Carlo with someone you love...is rolling around life on the trained palate of a live-without-limits sommelier.

Anyone Who can Control the Language, Controls the Environment

All of the role-plays in the Mentor Summit and teleconferences have been worth their weight in gold. One of the enduring lessons I have learned is to appropriately represent myself and my value to an organization with the right words and the right tone.

Specifically, I was on a conference call with a Fortune 50 company when a VP in a some ivory tower, after listening to me describe the nature of my work, said, "Cal, I am having trouble allocating the funds to hire you to come in and do what I am paying some over-paid internal consultants to roll out."

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In that nanosecond a particular role-play in the last Mentor Summit backfilled my mind with this statement, “You are right, you are paying people to offer some of the services I have described but that is precisely my value to your company...I do not work for you...my skills have not been honed in your culture and I can see things your staff would not dare to put on the table.”

Silence.

The call ended without any commitment. Two days later I signed a six-figure contract with this well-known industry behemoth. I will be working again with them in 2009. And the beat goes on...and it all started with knowing the right words and when to say them.

Pleasantly Blow by the Gatekeeper to Get to the Economic Buyer

I regret the years I have spent “working the system.” My efforts resulted in minimal fees and equally minimal career satisfaction just because I successfully navigated some bureaucratic maze pockmarked with closed doors and nameless king-makers.

I have learned to ask my initial contact, “If we proceed, who are the people involved in making the decision to use my expertise?” If I find out the person in front of me is the gatekeeper, I will design language and agenda to make this person a quick ally on my road to see the Wizard of this Oz.

It is what is Up Front that Ultimately Counts

The first time I met Alan it was at the Odd Couple workshop in San Francisco. My first impression is still imbedded in my mind.

The clothes, the watch, the cologne, the shoes, the thin briefcase...Alan immediately put me at ease because he wears what he sells: competence. I have personally watched Alan with one of his clients at an annual sales conference where I was also presenting. This was Alan’s fifth presentation in five years with this client. He walked in and immediately created resonance with those who have become dilettantes of his wisdom.

As a result of watching Alan work, I now only buy a few very good clothes, take special care with polished, finely crafted shoes and never walk into a potential client’s office with a leather bag that is large enough to accommodate a nuclear device or three bowling balls.

It is not About Me

I used to believe my goal with a potential client was to sell me. When I started to listen to Alan's strategy, I found out what I had to sell was value.

Consultants have a character flaw. They believe they are God Jr. This acceptable narcissistic flaw, in my opinion, keeps us from achieving our potential.

Alan has taught me, ad nauseam, the conversation with a client employs much more listening than speaking. Asking effective questions and listening carefully for the "stop and go signs" in the client's workplace is the essence of this hard work.

Leverage and then Laugh

I watch the way Alan runs his business. Those of us who have spent any time with him will know that he does not put forth any effort unless he can leverage the tasks he has just completed.

If Alan leads a teleseminar, the content will end up in an eight CD learning album. When he writes an article it will reappear in one of his books. When he spends two days with us at his home or some fantastic water-view five-star resort, his ruminations will be used in a future keynote address.

This is one of the most productive parts of my association with Alan. I am constantly asking myself, "After spending your time and effort designing this leadership development module, how can you morph your labor into print or a podcast or a CD or a blockbuster movie?" (Yes, grandiosity does show up in my MMPI).

After six years of following the work of this man, I have watched Alan cast his bread on the water and then enjoy the moment when it washes back up in his bank account.

Beat Your Competition with FedEx

It is so simple, it is profound. Alan turns around a written proposal in usually one day. The template is predictable but the content is customized. And, Alan knocks the socks off his potential clients by having this crisp, professional document in their hands by the next business morning.

If you have ever sent Alan an e-mail you know what I am talking about. Normally, on the same day you sent your technological missive, you will have a response.

In a work environment plagued by delays and procrastination, Alan has taught me I can beat my competition to the finish line by doing it now.

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“Nice” is not in This Program

There have been times when I have found Alan’s responses to be probing, confrontational and openly skeptical. I have never experienced this mentoring relationship to be disrespectful.

I heard, “Cal, you will fail if you pursue this course,” “You said what!”, “You need to dump that assumption,” and “Sure, that is an option, but it is the wrong one.”

I have never heard, “Cal, you will never amount to anything in this business if you continue to think idiotic thoughts like the one you just stated.”

Alan, on several occasions, made it clear to me that he will always be respectful...and honest. That is what I paid for. And, I have never been disappointed.

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Lessons Learned From Running My Business

By George F. Phares, President, Strategic Direction Resources, Inc.

I started Strategic Direction Resources in the fall of 1994, and incorporated in February, 1995. Like so many others before me, I wanted out of the corporate environment, but more importantly, I wanted some control over my life and my future. And like so many others before me, I didn't know what I didn't know. The first book I bought on consulting was Alan's Million Dollar Consulting. I never looked back.

Lesson #1 - Build a support system.

It is possible to be an army of one, but you need a strong support system. Find a good computer technician that makes house calls. Get to know the good folks at Kinko's. I am on a first name basis with just about everyone at my local bank. You will need a graphics person to help develop your logo and printed materials. Don't skimp on the graphics development as this will be one of the constants over the years.

Join organizations and get involved. When I was just getting started, I got on the program committee of every organization with a membership that would benefit from my presentations. Eventually there would be an opening in the schedule and I would volunteer to help out. Being a sole proprietor can get lonely and local organizations provide an opportunity to meet other like-minded people to network. If speaking is part of your marketing, program committee participation is an excellent way to develop opportunities.

Lesson #2 – Build a solid foundation.

It is as important to learn the business of consulting as it is to maintain your subject matter expertise. Successful companies keep good records, pay salaries, market their services, have separate phone lines for fax, internet and voice communications and so should you. Your level of technology should be at least equal to that of your client industry. Invest in a good computer, printer, phone system, battery backups, and a comfortable desk chair. You will be spending a lot of time behind your desk so take care of your back.

Learn how to write a proposal. Develop an invoice process. The first time a prospective client told me "That sounds great, send me a proposal and include the initial invoice" I had no idea how to write a proposal or generate an invoice. There are some great books on proposals including the one Alan has developed. I developed an invoice template in Excel®, but there are many options and approaches. Find a format that works for you.

Get good insurance. It isn't cheap, but I consider disability, health insurance and business insurance as business necessities. Add life insurance, savings programs

and other financial vehicles as soon as the revenue flow permits, but if you get hurt and can't work, need hospitalization or your computers get fried because of a water leak the financial impact may be more than you can recover from without adequate insurance.

Lesson #3 – Maintain your subject matter expertise.

Change is a constant in consulting. Attend key conferences and seminars. Submit your name as a speaker. Read, talk with others and watch for trends. I allocate about 25% of my operating budget for travel to conferences and seminars. These are also great places for networking and to build in some vacation time on either end of the conference. I learned very early on that if you want to market yourself at a conference, purchase exhibitor space. Soliciting at conferences is tacky, amateurish and tells the world you are desperate. Swapping business cards and following up on contacts made is appropriate, but remember that you came to learn.

Lesson #4 – The first sale is to yourself.

This one came from Alan. If you do not believe you are worth what you are charging or that the product/service you are offering is not of value, then neither will your clients. See yourself closing the deal, getting paid and delivering knock-your-socks-off-service. Practice saying "That's what I get." You don't have to wash your client's car or paint their house to land the project. Do your research, learn what is going in the industry you are working with, know the current trends, what has worked and what has not and how your approach will generate value for the client.

Lesson #5 – Never talk money or quote fees at the first meeting with a prospective client.

Here's another one from Alan. He made me write it down and put the note on the dashboard of my car as a last minute reminder before I would enter the client's office. I added 25% to my revenue the very first year I quit quoting fees prematurely. Tell the prospective client it would not be fair to them or you to quote a fee without giving it adequate thought and review. Everyone can wait at least 24 hours to get the written Agreement and fee structure. If you find yourself lacking confidence, re-read Lesson #4. Then re-read Lesson #2. You are presumably in business to make a profit.

Prospective clients approach me believing that they need me to write an affirmative action plan for them. In reality, they want peace of mind that their federal contract will not be jeopardized. They don't want to admit being overwhelmed. They want someone who they can trust with their confidential data and they want it all done yesterday. Let them talk about their personal war stories with government agencies, how their job is getting harder, not easier. Ask them how it will feel to have one

less burden to carry around. Economic costs will become secondary if you respond to their concerns and fears.

Lesson #6 – Consultants are not hourly workers.

I have had many jobs over the years that paid an hourly rate, and I am not knocking hourly workers. However, hourly workers are generally supervised by people who see them perform the work and my clients never see me working. If I were to submit an invoice for 20 hours of work, the person receiving it may question if it was really 20 hours or just 5 hours with padding because that is how they perceive hourly work. If they are presented with fee structure they can concentrate on the end result and not how long it took. There are a finite number of billable hours, but the value we deliver is limited only by our vision. Learn to think in terms of value rather than billable hours.

There are many fee structure options and some work better with different types of engagements, types of projects and services delivered. Regardless of the approach, make sure that both you and your client will be able to know when the project (or project phase) is complete and be able to quantify the value delivered. Project delays are common but your agreement should specify payment at agreed upon intervals regardless of delays that are beyond your control.

A final lesson on fees: Always expect timely payment. Frequently there is a disconnect between the person who approves the invoice and the person who cuts the check. Don't be ashamed to tell your client the check is late. Don't let them tell you their policy is payment after 90 days. My policy is payment upon receipt of invoice.

Lesson #7 – Don't chase variables.

You might try something that works extremely well the very first time only to discover it cannot be replicated after that. If the same level of success cannot be achieved a second or third time without significant effort it is time to move on. There is rarely just one "right" way to do something. It may take some practice but learn when you are beginning to chase a variable that will take 80% of your effort to produce 20% of the net benefit.

It is easy to get mired in busy work that does not add to the bottom revenue line, make you a better subject matter expert, or add to your play time. The concept is very simple: if you are not producing revenue you are not going to stay in business. Busy work will not pay the bills or make you a better consultant.

Lesson #8 – Giving is receiving.

Nature abhors a vacuum. As fast as you can give something away the abundance of the universe will rush in to fill the void. Don't confuse giving with being in

business to make a profit, but keep in mind that everything is essentially energy and energy is only of value when used. There is an infinite amount of consulting to be done in this world and I believe the best way to give is to help others who are just starting out as consultants. I was fortunate to have received help when I was starting out (and am still getting help from others) and believe it my duty to give back whenever and as much as possible. If you give your clients more than they anticipated, it will come back to you. Never nickel and dime a client. If you set your fees properly to start with you will never feel the need to cut corners or that you were not adequately compensated. Holding on too tightly to anything (including money) is an expression of fear, not abundance. When we give of ourselves, our time and our money, it always comes back to us.

Lesson #9 – Develop a vision statement.

Have a vision of where you want your practice to go, what it will look like and how it will feel. Everything that was ever created by humans started with a vision. Vision becomes action and actions become deeds. We are defined by our deeds. Define what success means to you. That vision will create the energy and action to draw the right people and opportunities to you to manifest your vision. Mission statements can be binding and inflexible. Vision statements are grand, flexible and without limit.

Lesson #10 – Generate marketing gravity.

I have to confess it took me a long time to really comprehend this one, so I saved it for last. Gravity pulls things to it, it does not go out looking for objects to attract. For me, marketing gravity is very much like a lighthouse beacon that offers a safe haven for ships to travel towards. It is necessary to have support systems in place and to be ready when the business arrives, but if you don't attract it to you, your phone will not ring and your mailbox will not fill with checks. I see myself as a farmer planting seeds. I make presentations before audiences that will benefit from my level of expertise, plant the seeds and eventually some of the attendees will have a pressing need for my services, the seeds will sprout and I will be ready for them when they call. It is much easier to operate by generating marketing gravity than it is to scurry around trying to find individual clients one-by-one. A positive self image will create positive actions and positive actions create a positive attraction (marketing gravity) for those who will benefit from your services. Be the positive force in your area of expertise and that energy will draw business to you. How you create marketing gravity for your practice is going to depend on your specific talents and your vision statement, but the concept is the same: it is easier for many people to find you than it is for you to find many people. Create gravity for your practice and they will find you.

Bottom Line – Life Was Never Meant To Be A Struggle

This one came from Stuart Wilde, author, publisher and warrior sage. If one jumps into a fast flowing stream and expects to swim directly to the other shore, you will become exhausted and still end up down stream. If you go with the flow, and gradually work your way to the other side you will eventually reach the other side, but will have enjoyed the view as you floated by and will have plenty of strength left when you arrive. If you are struggling with your consulting practice, you are swimming against the current. Take a breath, re-visit your vision statement and make the necessary correction(s). If it was easy everyone would be doing it. If we didn't have mountains we wouldn't learn to climb and if we don't fail every now and then we aren't trying hard enough, but it doesn't have to be a struggle. Enjoy the adventure and create your own lessons learned.

Sincerely,

George

George F. Phares



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Working with Alan Weiss – My Personal Lessons Learned

Dr. Guido Quelle, Managing Partner, Mandat GmbH, Dortmund, Germany

I am in the consulting business since 1990. Having accomplished more than 200 projects with about 80 clients, some people call me an experienced consultant. So, what could an “experienced consultant” learn in doing better business or at least in doing the business better? Here is the answer: A lot!

It would be impossible to mention all the learning points without either repeating Alan’s books or at least, boring the readers.

Let’s give it a try with a few. But first, some important background ...

How Did I Get to Alan?

We had our best year ever in 2003. In 2004, our most important client left the company and our business was decreasing rapidly, because we made more than 85% with this client. So, after some very successful years, the direction was “down” in 2004 and “faster down” until fall 2005.

I never heard of Alan before I read “Million Dollar Consulting” in 2005. It was the title of the book that inspired me. A few weeks before, I bought out my former partner, the founder of my company. From one day to the other I was responsible for dramatically turning around the business, getting the most out of my staff, reducing debts at high speed and running some projects to bring bread on the table. The good news: With my staff I had very good, bright and smart people on board.

There are no coincidences: 2005 was probably the best time I could have read “Million Dollar Consulting”. I instantly knew that this book would change the way we would act in the future, especially since I guessed that only a few German consultants would give the model a try. Consultants really love daily rates here in Germany (and this is fine for us ...)

Implementing Alan’s model in combination with a continuous improvement process lead to a significant growth. Our revenues grew by 200 percent (sic!) in 2006. The company earned more at the bottom line than our revenues were the year before. So, 2006 was our best year ever. 2007 was even better with double-digit growth in revenues and profit. Within a year we converted every client to value-based fees. Today my company and the way we work changed dramatically having better and more trusted relationships with our clients. And we are still improving.

Among others, here are five areas in no specific order where Alan's model, philosophy and thinking were of particular help for me:

- Area 1: The "Sales" Process
- Area 2: The Consulting Process
- Area 3: My Business Model
- Area 4: Marketing Gravity
- Area 5: Life Balance

Area 1: The "Sales" Process

There is no sales process

One of the most important things that I learned was that there is no "sales" process. The discussion about objectives, measures and value is an opportunity to examine whether or not a collaboration could be valuable for both parties. I try to avoid any sales pitch and we do not respond to RFPs since 2005. The knowledge that we as consultants can say "no" as well lifted us from being a vendor to being a partner.

Only the economic buyer is important

I do not know how much time I wasted with gatekeepers in the past, not only in sales situations, but also in socializing, having meals together, meetings at the bar, or whatever. Today, I am very selective about these kinds of interactions. I rather invest time in finding the true buyer and I focus on meeting him or her.

The insight that it is essential to meet the economic buyer in order to close or even get a guess of the business, and Alan's strategies to circumvent (or to ignore) gatekeepers saved me a lot of time. Yes, it is not easy to get to the buyer, but it is not rewarding to meet the other guys. It's better to have free time than to quarrel with wasted time.

There is a reason why we have two ears and only one mouth

Whenever I talk too much, there is an exponentially growing risk that I won't close the business. I learned – and this is very tough learning – to listen more rather than to tell people how good we are.

I learned to ask the "Why"-question to get from the client's WANTS to the client's NEEDS (what Alan calls the "value distance") more often and I try to remind myself to get some "Yeses" along the talk in order to reach conceptual agreement.

Proposals: No methodology, and: cite fees here for the first time

In the past, our proposals contained a very detailed description of our methodology that we intend to use during the project. This often made us replaceable. We did not talk enough about outcomes, but we talked about the process, instead.

Today we most often follow the proposal structure that Alan suggests. And sometimes we just write a letter of agreement instead of a proposal.

Especially the focus on objectives is very powerful, though the distinction between objectives and measures is not always easy when I write a proposal. On the other hand, it is very easy when I read proposals from colleagues, of course. I found out that it takes some time to focus a buyer on the value of a project, at least here in Germany, because often the buyer thinks that our fees are based on success, then.

What I also learned is to cite fees in the proposal for the first time. Ranges sometimes, fees never before.

Area 2: The Consulting Process

Tools: Thinking of the future

Being almost 19 years in the business, we have access to a lot of useful methods and tools for almost any consulting situation we are currently facing. What I learned, though, was that I am well advised to think about tools and methods that could be applied to situations we are currently not facing, but that we want to be facing in the future. Today, the strategic question “Which tools will we need in the future in order to develop our business?” is at least as important for us as the question “Which tools do we use to implement this project?”

Remote business: reducing labor intensity

I learned to know that it is not necessary to do everything at the client’s site. This correlates with the life balancing aspect of reducing labor intensity. I learned that a teleconference or any other adequate remote approach not only saves time and money, but could deliver the same or even a higher value to my clients.

However, while traveling a lot and still being present at the client too often, the implementation of the simple phrase “You have to reduce labor intensity” is one of my most important challenges.

Success reports: Providing good news

In the past, I too often talked to my buyers about problems that occurred during the implementation of a project. Today, I'm aiming at reporting good news as soon as they occur. This was one of the easiest things to implement.

Additionally I came to the conclusion that such a "good news session" is also a good opportunity to ask for referrals and/or testimonials. We currently still don't ask often enough and when we ask, we do this too often after the completion of a project instead of using the positive mood that good news create.

Scope creep alarm: avoiding too much work

Well, we are not through with this scope creep thing, but at least we learned to keep an eye on it. First, we try to establish objectives and measures that are precise enough to avoid scope creep. Second, if scope creep seems to occur, we have a look into the proposal and talk to the buyer.

To be able to act immediately I keep a printed copy of the particular proposal in the project folder that I take with me, and I have an electronic copy on my laptop.

Area 3: My Business Model

Unbundling: A powerful tool

For me, one of the most impressive sessions at the "Million Dollar Consulting College" was to "unbundle" everything that creates value for our clients and that could be "sold" separately instead of being bundled.

In our working group at the College we explored about 50 different items within half an hour or so. It was surprising for most of us how often we just do something at the client's site while we are (or were) there. Do you know this situation? Client: "While you are here, could you just facilitate the kick-off of the marketing project? It only takes two or three hours." My preset- answer since November 2007 (the date of the College): "No". Or, more politely: "That's an interesting topic. Have you already thought about your objectives? Shouldn't we talk about them and I put a proposal for this project on your desk within a day?" Is this procedure successful? I don't know yet, but I know that I do virtually nothing "on top" since then.

The Value Statement: focus on output

The definition of a value statement helped me to think about the results of our work, instead of focusing on the process of consulting. In the past, our value statements, tag lines or whatever, have been too focused on ourselves doing something rather than focusing on the output of our work.

Driving forces: An opportunity to focus

An aspect of strategy and business modeling that was discussed during “The Strategist” was the model of the Driving Forces. I am still not sure if my company is driven by market needs or by our products and services, but

a) I will find it out

b) I will adjust our strategy and our business model accordingly

c) I know for sure that we are not driven by “production capability” any longer.

Having staff: It works, though

Since I’m not a solo practitioner it was quite a challenge to convince my employees (consultants and consulting assistants) of the new approach. No more daily rates, no more time wasting with gatekeepers, focusing on OMV, etc. We were used to all these things for more than 15 years. Daily rates were part of the DNA of my company, since we claimed to have a transparent billing system. It was an error ...

However, I could (and still can) count on my colleagues and so we implemented the new business model together. Side effect: As I had to explain all this stuff to my staff, I must have internalized it before.

Area 4: Marketing Gravity

Marketing is work as well

As a consultant I am working in order to improve the client’s condition. Doing project work, I feel that I am “productive”. The other side: One of Alan’s phrases is “If you don’t blow your own horn, there is no music”. This reminded me that “blowing my own horn” is work, too. Now there are days when I sit at my desk at home or in the office “just” writing a press release, an article, creating contents for our newsletter or working on the structure of our new presskit. A side effect: My view sharpened and I increasingly see opportunities to publish something.

THE business book: It doesn't exist

I have to admit that my new book is not yet finished. But that's another story. More important is my learning point here: My intention to write a book, then finding a publisher, etc. would not have lead to the desired result. I learned that a book is not a mystical thing, that THE business book does not exist, that a book proposal is the key to raise attention at a publisher. I learned how to write such a proposal. Thanks also to the teleconference with Alan and Jeff Herman.

The Switch: From push to pull

Something I instinctively was aware of for quite a long time is that there has to be a more effective way to get business than writing letters to people I don't know, sending out mailings to a variety of people who throw these kind of letters into the trash or taking part in pitches where the cheapest consultant wins.

I knew that we had to create a "pull" instead of pushing our services. And I knew that this might happen with the help of publications. We also published quite a few articles, research reports, etc. in the past. What I was not aware of is the need be persistent in order to publish regularly and frequently. Alan provides a very clear and easy process of having articles circulating, breaking down complex publications, like a book, into smaller activities, etc.

Learning these things in terms of "knowing" them was the first step. In the past, we published occasionally. Now I'm on the way to professionalize our publication process in order to increase our Marketing Gravity.

The Website: Output oriented as well

The days of our current website (March 2008) are counted. The talk with Chad Barr during the "Million Dollar Consulting College" in addition to Alan's suggestions showed me that our website was more about methodology than about showing that we are able to improve the client's condition. We will change that in 2008.

Area 5: Life Balance

For me, this is the most important area to develop myself since I used to prioritize work matters rather than private matters for quite a long time in the past. These are my key learning points in this area, basing on some of Alan's phrases:

1. "There is no 'private life' and 'business life'." It is one life that I am living. And that should be a good one.

2. “Wealth is a function of discretionary time.” More money at the cost of more invested time is the wrong balance.
3. “Life’s about success, not perfection.” The Pareto-Model (20 percent input equals 80 percent output) works. Today I try to move as soon as I am ready by 80 percent.
4. “Tuck your ego away.” I try to improve in not taking things personally. Tough times ...
5. “Move On”.

So, what can an “experienced consultant” still learn? Did I answer this question? I have a lot of pleasure in learning permanently, I try to keep a curious view at new things and this is a key for me to develop.

Alan provides new insights, it is not rocket science, but applicable and the results speak for themselves. Beside all these rational things: I do not know how often I laughed about a comment or a story from Alan and I am taking my one percent improvement almost every day from the members of Alan’s Forums. I learned to know quite a few brilliant people from all over the world through this community. Thanks Alan, thank you all for your inspiration!

Ah, yes: Since I am a German, here’s my final point for consultants from outside the United States who are tempted to say something like: “Well, it might work in the US, but here it won’t”:

Shut up and listen!

Dortmund, March 2008
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Amanda Setili's Lessons Learned in Independent Consulting

- Choose high-performing clients and make them even better. Inspire. Bring new ideas. Make the client the star.
- Put client value first. Base your fees on value, not time. It's more efficient for you and better for your clients. Everybody is happier.
- Stay in touch with people you like and work well with, even if you don't know them well, or if it's been years since you saw them. On the flip side, if you aren't meshing well with a client, or you aren't adding value, move on.
- Be patient. Let relationships develop over time. Never "rush the sale."
- Set minimum and maximum objectives for every meeting. It's powerful.
- Be systematic about asking for, and following up on, referrals.
- Make every engagement a learning experience. Think big. Stretch your capabilities. Keep adding to your product line.
- Get help.
 - Form a Mastermind group, tapping into the best minds and experience you can. Use the group for motivation, reviewing proposals and plans, and as a sounding board for decisions.
 - Hire a mentor. Five minutes every week or two with Alan Weiss has been immensely valuable in changing my business for the better. I've found that the crazier his point of view initially sounds to me, the more brilliant the insight actually is.
 - Reach high in choosing great subcontractors, amazing people whom you can learn from. They make the work more fun, allow you to achieve better client results, and can become clients or referral partners.
 - Hire help for any task that is not your highest value. I have a great virtual assistant and have strong support on marketing, customer and competitor research, editing, financial modeling and more. Keep your fixed costs low.
- Leverage technology. Get a card scanner and keep your contacts database well organized and synchronized with your phone/PDA. Subscribe to a mobile broadband service. Set up your website so that you can add articles and information easily. Keep your electronic and paper files well organized and backed-up.

- Stay fit. Exercise gives energy and lets the mind wander to new insights. Don't just work out, do something really fun. I water-ski regularly, and race catamarans with my husband. These give me a totally different venue to practice competitive strategy and are exhilarating experiences that nudge me out of mental ruts.
- Spend time with your family and make them a business asset. My kids keep me current on technology, marketing and trends. My parents share their insights on the consumer experience. My husband is invaluable in too many ways to list.
- Expose yourself to new things. Live overseas if you can. Travel. Read. Stay curious. Explore.



Amanda Setili is managing partner of Setili & Associates, a firm that works with Fortune 500 firms to improve business performance. Her clients include The Home Depot, Delta Air Lines, Wachovia, Coca-Cola and Wal-Mart, as well as growth companies. As an experienced thought partner, Setili & Associates helps clients leverage their distinct assets and capabilities to produce lasting competitive advantage, zeroing in on key actions that will improve profit, performance and growth. For more information about Setili & Associates, visit www.setili.com, or reach Amanda at Amanda@Setili.com.