

This article first appeared in *The Advisor* – a publication of the Consultants Practice Specialty of the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE); Vol. 5, No. 1 (Fall 2005)

The Ten Books that Should Be in Every Consultants Library

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Continuing education. As a safety professional working for someone else, you knew the importance of staying abreast of the latest developments in the profession and made a point to regularly read a variety of books that would enhance your knowledge base. Those books included typical safety texts that focused on a particular topic like ergonomics or safety management. If you were forward thinking, your choices also included books that helped you understand the world of business so that you could be a better manager and make certain that safety in your organization was viewed as an essential business activity, not just an overhead function that supported production. Now that you are in business for yourself, either in your own private consulting practice or a small partnership with several others, you recognize the value of continuing the habit of regular reading as you try to advance your own business.

This article presents a list of the ten essential books that I believe every consultant should have on their office book shelf. Even though this list is mostly my opinion as well as that of several other Advisory Committee members from the Consultants Practice Specialty who contributed suggestions, it will hopefully present a “jumping off” point to assist those who are newer to the practice of consulting by giving you some suggested books you might want to get started reading.

The list is divided up into two sections; there are five books that are designed to provide information and assistance on the “how-to” process of being a consultant and what it takes to run a successful practice, and there are five books that will help provide a consultant with comprehensive safety reference information. The business-related books are those that you will turn to when you need a fresh idea for marketing or need to evaluate your cash flow. They will give you ideas and inspiration as they teach you how to have faith in yourself and your ability to run a successful practice by whatever measure you have established.

The latter books are the ones you can turn to when you have a question that you might have previously asked the colleague in the next office or your boss. Now that you are on your own, you are probably finding that you need to find the information quickly on your own. Having the right set of safety reference books can be a lifesaver and a timesaver and, by extension, a money-saver. This is not to discount the incredible amount of information that is available on the internet; certainly that resource plays a critical role. But since the focus of this article is

about books that you can feel and touch, the internet discussion will be left for another time.

Please note that this list is in no order of importance or priority.

“How-To Run a Consulting Business” Books

1. The Consultant’s Calling; Bringing Who You Are to What You Do

Author: Geoffrey Bellman
Paperback: 238 pages
List Price: \$21.95
Publisher: Jossey-Bass - 2001

This is a revised edition of a classic book highly recommended by fellow ASSE and Consultants Practice Specialty member Richard Lack. In his note of recommendation to me he said: “This book is an excellent read for anyone who is considering entering the consulting field. It is also an excellent reference for those in the field who may be looking for ways to expand their business.” In addition to the philosophical points covered in this book, Mr. Bellman provides some great practical advice on how to manage the day-to-day aspects of running a consulting business.

This book will also help the reader understand what it is “really” like to be a consultant as well as how to make a living at it. As with almost all of the recommended books in this section, Mr. Bellman focuses on helping consultants find reward in what they do both professionally and personally as well as how to balance work and family life. This is a theme that frequently reoccurs in conversations between my fellow consultants and me and being able to successfully manage this aspect of self-employment is essential to in order to make the successful transition from working for someone else to working for you.

2. Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used

Author: Peter Block
Hardcover: 420 pages
List Price: \$47.00
Publisher: Pfeiffer (2nd Edition) - 1999

This book is one of the priciest in the “how-to” list and is only available in hardcover, but it is well worth the purchase price and is widely available used through many sources. The original edition was published 15 years ago.

This book is probably the best and most well-read of all of those on this recommended list and for good reason. Mr. Block has created a real “working” book that helps any consultant enrich their practice by analyzing the process of

getting consulting work; from finding a client to the first meeting, from submitting winning proposals to building long-term relationships. This process is essential to the long-term success of your practice and ought to be the general model for how you operate if you intend to be at it for the long haul.

3. The Consultant's Quick Start Guide: An Action Plan for Your First Year in Business

Author: Elaine Beich
Paperback: 272 pages
List Price: \$24.95
Publisher: Pfeiffer - 2001.

If you are looking for a "workbook" type of book, look no further. And don't be misled by the title; even if you are beyond your first year, this is an excellent guide that helps you create a real working plan that you can use on a daily basis to get you through the initial stages of establishing a consulting business. The step-by-step approach laid out by Ms. Beich is easy to follow and includes sample letters, worksheets, action lists, promotional ideas and other tools that you can revise as needed or simply personalize to make work for you.

The tools and references in this book make it more than worth the price and help focus your efforts more heavily on the business side of your business rather than some of the more work-life fusion issues that are covered in the other books that are recommended in this section.

4. Making a Living Without a Job: Winning Ways to Create Work That You Love

Author: Barbara Winter
Paperback: 272 pages
List Price: \$15.00
Publisher: Bantam - 1993

This book is not as much of a how-to book for consultants as it is one that helps you to begin to "think like a consultant". Ms. Winter's message is not geared directly to us in the consulting field but her message is quite applicable. She focuses her writings on how to more create what she terms "multiple profit centers" as opposed to depending upon a single source of income. This theory is very helpful if you apply it to diversifying your consulting business instead of relying on just one type of work or one big client to be responsible for your success. It releases you to think about creative marketing strategies for your business.

The other important message in this book regards developing the work-life fusion that is crucial to successfully negotiating the transition from a regular job to a

successful business owner. Being able to move smoothly between your business and personal world and not trying to place barriers between them as you could when you worked for someone else, makes life as a consultant more peaceful and fulfilling. It can also help you make the leap into consulting with less fear and anxiety. Ms. Winter believes that we often confuse fear with bad ideas; just because you experience some anxiety while running your consulting business doesn't mean that you should give it up.

5. The Passion Plan

Authors: Richard Y. Chang and Ken Blanchard
Paperback: 320 pages
List Price: \$7.00 (hardcover available for \$25.00)
Publisher: Jossey-Bass - 2001

This last selection is offered for those consultants who want to read something that will help them evaluate their whole life, not just their work life. Its focus is on discovering the passions that exist in all of us and helping to develop a purposeful plan to realize them while create a fulfilling life, both personally and professionally. As with the Winters book above, this book promotes the idea of work-life fusion with a bit of a twist; it helps you focus on using your personal passions throughout your life. We all hope that our work fulfills us and is something we feel passionate about and this book not only helps you to discover your passions but also learn how apply them as you live your life *and* earn your keep.

Mr. Chang and Mr. Blanchard have also written a companion workbook to this book (List Price: \$10.00) as well as a newer but similar title called *The Passion Plan at Work: A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing a Passion-Driven Organization* (List Price: \$24.95). The former is more of the workbook type of book discussed above while the latter book might appeal to you if you are in a small practice with other consultants or are about to branch out and hire others to work in your practice.

Technical Reference Books

1. Accident Prevention Manual for Business and Industry: Administration and Programs, 12th Edition

Editors: Philip E. Hagan, John f. Montgomery, and James T. O'Reilly
Hardcover – 836 pages
List Price: \$142.95
Publisher: The National Safety Council; 2001.

2. Accident Prevention Manual for Business and Industry: Engineering and Technology, 12th Edition

Editors: Philip E. Hagan, John f. Montgomery, and James T. O'Reilly

Hardcover – 877 pages

List Price: \$142.95

Publisher: The National Safety Council; 2001.

Hopefully, somewhere along the way during your pre-consulting professional career or safety professional education, you picked up one or both of these classic reference books. There's a good reason why they are on their 12th edition - because their value to any safety professional's day-to-day work life is unparalleled. They are also regularly required reading for many college and university level safety classes. That's good news, since picking up both of these used and in good condition is easy.

These are the two books that I turn to most often when I need a quick answer to a question or need to refresh my memory on a specific topic that I may not deal with on a regular basis. I also use it frequently to enhance my proposals and bids as well as give some weight to training presentations I might be doing for managers and supervisors. (Sometimes just taking it into the training room and lifting it up once or twice in front of the class gives your credibility a bit of a boost!!)

3. On the Practice of Safety – Third Edition

Author: Fred A. Manuele, CSP, P.E.

Hardcover – 488 pages

List price: \$159.95

Publisher: John A. Wiley and Sons; 2003

I'm not trying to be lazy, but I think what the ASSE website has to say about this classic book says everything I want to and then some.

“This completely revised and updated Third Edition of the benchmark On the Practice of Safety thoroughly covers subjects that must be mastered by anyone seeking to attain professional status in the safety field. Like its predecessors, the Third Edition provides a solid foundation for the study of safety in degree programs. In addition, it serves as a basis for self-analysis for those who seek to improve their performance and gain recognition from management for providing value.

The book's distinctive essay format provides exploration of a variety of subjects not possible in a standard reference. This edition expands on the content of the previous editions, adding updated statistics to reflect recent trends and developments. The author has included four new chapters:

- Heinrich revisited: Truisms or Myths
- Addressing Severe Injury Potential
- Acceptable Risk
- Behavior-Based Safety

On the Practice of Safety continues to be an unparalleled resource of best safety practices.”

I can only add that I think you will find the money spent buying this book to be a sound investment.

4. Safety Management – A Human Approach; Third Edition

Author: Dan Petersen
 Hardcover: 392 pages
 List Price: \$79.95
 Publisher: ASSE, 2001

Dan Petersen’s books have contributed much to the body of knowledge available to safety professionals and if this one doesn’t appeal to you in particular, I would suggest you look at his other titles to see if another one strikes a stronger cord. This is another book that is often called a classic and has also been recently updated.

A particularly helpful aspect of this book is that it gives me ideas about how to try and balance the technical approach to safety that businesses like to hear from me with the “human” side of safety; the part that gets non-management employees to buy-in to safety in their workplace. It helps me be a better consultant when I can appeal to both sides of the business of safety and bring both “sides” closer together to achieve common goals. There’s a lot of good information in several chapters that have also helped me focus on worker motivation as it relates to behavior changes as well as learn to spot barriers to safety improvement.

5. Developing an Effective Safety Culture: A Leadership Approach

Authors: James Roughton, CSP and James Mercurio, CSP
 Hardcover: 520 pages
 List Price: \$54.99
 Publisher: Butterworth-Heinemann; 2002

Here’s a final book to consider for your library. At just under \$55.00 and over 500 pages, it is probably the best value of all of the hardcover books on this list. Like Dan Petersen’s book above, this text will help you help your clients develop an effective safety culture, regardless of what task you are being paid to do at the moment. It also covers general safety management principles in a way that will

be useful in all of the work that you do. I also like the case studies in this book as they really helped me think about applying the principles in the book to real-life clients I work with now.

So that's the list. Perhaps there are two or three on it that make you want to go out and buy them right away or others that have helped you think about what types of knowledge gaps you are currently facing. In the end, it isn't as important that you buy this specific set of books; it's that you recognize that the need to commit to continuing education is as crucial for you now as a consultant as it was in your life before consulting.