

Not everything is as it seems

Yesterday, I wrote about the need to work with experts. Nobody knows everything and many times it is imperative to hire an expert to help in the areas where you are lacking in specialized skills or knowledge.



Twisted reflection in the fun house mirror by Little Koshka on Flickr

Keep in mind that not every expert has the same level of expertise. Let's take accounting. If you are someone that has few investments and a W2, you may be perfectly fine doing it yourself, using tax software or going to one of the big box tax advisers that we often see advertised around this time. However, if you are in a special situation (small business, self-employed freelancer, artist, etc.) you will NEED to find

someone who understands the tax implications of your situation, and can work with you on filing the proper forms. This is an area where expertise (or lack thereof) can have tremendous financial consequences.

How do you figure out if someone has the expertise you require?

First, figure out the exact problem you are trying to solve.

If you are having a slump in sales, is it fulfillment, customer service or your marketing/communications?

Second, start searching through your network first. Say you need someone to help you with a public relations issue, ask your network whom they recommend. Alternatively, use LinkedIn to search and see if you have connections in common. Ask your connections if they can give you some idea about the professional.

Third, interview the expert. Be prepared to ask a lot of questions such as “have you worked with this type of situation before?”

Fourth, see if the expert asks you questions. A real expert needs to get a handle on a situation. He or she should be asking you a lot of questions, including “why do you need an expert?” or “why have you contacted me?”

Fifth, be wary of pat answers or 100% assurances. Nobody, but nobody can solve any problem with 100% certainty.

Sixth, check with your gut. Do you like this person? Does this person seem genuine?

Unfortunately, there are great many people out there who are very good at talking themselves up. And as I said in my post yesterday, you don't know what you don't know so you are unable at times to ask the right questions.

For example, I had a client who was desperate to increase his

share of the market. He had hired a “marketing expert” to help. The client knew next to nothing about marketing and neither did the “expert.” By the time I came in and asked questions like “who is your target?” and “who is your main competition?” they had already set out a marketing destination that was not aligned with BASIC MARKETING PRINCIPLES. These questions had never been asked before because the so-called expert was not a strategic thinker but was really selling a package of tactics (put up a website, use a QR code, print a postcard, make a video) without a unifying message or idea of how success would be measured.

Could the client have avoided the situation above? Maybe yes or maybe no. He didn't know what he didn't know, but he also didn't bother to ask questions and study up on the topic.

My takeaway here is the old Ronald Reagan line: trust but verify. You should do your due diligence when hiring an expert because not everything is as it seems.

Thoughts?