



Hiring an L&D Consultant

How do you choose your consultants? They proliferate in the training and development field today. There are consultants to help us set up Web-based training, to help us move into videoconferencing, to help us build computer-based training solutions. And let's not forget those who stand ready to help us outsource, set up learning organizations, measure return on investment, and finally (at least for the moment) to train and certify our trainers. So how do you choose a consultant for any given project? How do you know you need one at all? These three simple steps have served both me and my clients well during my career.

STEP 1: Start with questions. Here are some questions I suggest you ask yourself, others in your company, and prospective consultants, along with some tips that may spare you pain and embarrassment. Start with Stephen Covey's admonition: "Begin with the end in mind."

Ask:

- Why do we want to do this anyway?
- What do we expect to achieve?
- How will this help people do their jobs faster, better, easier?
- What benefits will we gain?
- What losses will we avoid?
- How will we measure the results so we know whether we've gained the benefits and avoided the losses?
- Who will do the measuring? How?
- How will we know the methods for measurement are valid?
- What will happen if we don't do this at all?

Also, ask your prospective consultant for some references. Always ask for at least three and check them out! Here are some questions to ask them.

- How long have you known Bob?
- What kinds of projects has Bob done for you?
- What were the results?



- What is the largest group that he has worked with for you?
- What is the smallest?
- Describe a challenge that occurred in one of the projects and how Bob handled it.
- What would you say Bob's strengths are?
- How about his weaknesses?
- When are you planning to use him again?

Almost any consultant has three people who will vouch for them, there is no need to tell the references about the project, and the above questions make it difficult for references to know the scope of the project. The only thing they can do is answer the questions honestly—which is exactly what you want..

STEP 2: When possible, start with a pilot project. Can you do something small, fast, and inexpensive that helps show the value, cost, and time it will take to do something larger and more comprehensive?

STEP 3: Once you've decided on a project, ask yourself: How many people do you need for assessment, design, delivery, and evaluation? How many must participate in the pilot to measure its value? How quickly can you expand the pilot if results are positive?

What about certification? For anything with the word, "certified," attached, consider the following questions:

- Who is certifying? How are you measuring and demonstrating competency?
- Is a certification program based on trainers attending X number of courses really a certification program?
- How will you show that your trainers now know something more than they did before?
- How will you know what they now can do?
- How do you determine that the competencies they develop and demonstrate are the ones to do the jobs you need done?



Knowledge tests are fine for testing knowledge. They don't necessarily show that learners can apply the knowledge. What projects and demonstrations will show the knowledge and skills in action?



Regardless of the type of project, ask yourself:

- How competent are the people who will work on this project?
- Who says so?
- What background and experience do they have to qualify them for this assignment?
- If you bring in a consulting firm, who will do the work? Talking to well-qualified people in the decision-making phase leading up to the engagement doesn't mean they will be the ones working on the project.
- What are the guarantees that the project will be done on time? That it will succeed?
- What are the penalties for missing deadlines?
- What are the remedies for missed deadlines or unacceptable results?

Asking many questions and being much more cautious in the beginning phases of a project can save many headaches later and ensure that the project will flow much more smoothly

