

Strictly Come Consulting



Phoebe Dunn, UK Institute of Consulting's Consultant of the Year 2011 and a Director of Square Peg International shares her top five tips for successful consulting – with a little sequinned inspiration from her seasonal favourite: Strictly Come Dancing

1

Strictly Lesson : Be clear what you want to be known for

The successful Strictly Come Dancing contestant knows their core strengths and delivers consistently on that proposition. Whether it's technical expertise (Denise van Outen) or game-for-a-laugh showmanship (last year's Russell Grant took that to a whole new level) the point is to be clear what you want to be known for.

In a smaller consulting firm, and particularly as a sole trader, you are competing in a crowded marketplace against huge, sophisticated competitors. So your clients, or prospective clients, need to understand exactly what they'll get when they hire you. Make it easy for clients to buy by being very clear about how your services differ from the competition, how your offerings are unique and above all how they represent value for money.

2

Strictly Lesson : Success means building partnerships for the long-term

In Strictly Come Dancing it's the partnerships with the best connections that last the distance – think Chris and Olla, Harry and Aliona and of course, Kara & Artem... But it's not simply a question of chemistry; it's about trust. The best partnerships are based on hard work together, putting in the hours and the absolute commitment to shared success. And of course, contestants who are very clear what their professional partners expect of them are then best placed to meet – and even exceed - those expectations.

So it is with consulting: the more you get to know your client's business, the closer you work together towards a common goal. The more their success becomes your success, the sooner you will become a truly trusted consulting partner.

3

Strictly Lesson : You've got to put yourself out there

It's the dancers with edge who are prepared to take risks that really stand out – as Louis Smith is just beginning to learn this year. A good consultant should be ready to take risks – successful consultants are not yes-men, they push back on and challenge their clients, staking their reputations on the quality of their advice and delivery day after day.



Strictly Lesson : **The experts know what they are talking about**

Just as the judges' comments and scores inform the viewing public, so accreditation from an independent body such as the Institute of Consulting's Chartered Management Consultant designation will signal your quality to prospective clients. In a market flooded by professionals

recently made redundant and setting themselves up as 'consultants', recognition by an industry body can be a key differentiator.

But beware: Just as Strictly Come Dancing contestants are only as good as their last score, as a consultant you are in some respects only as good as your last recommendation. You will find clients with as high standards as judge Craig Revel-Horwood around every corner. They are looking for consulting excellence and their critiques can help you provide even better value.



Strictly Lesson : **The show must go on**

As Victoria Pendleton recently found, even in the event of a wardrobe malfunction the show must go on. The best dancers confidently deal with the unexpected and maintain their performance levels. A good consultant will actively 'court disaster': planning for success but preparing for every eventuality of a bumpy landing.

Star quality means having the flexibility, agility, and professionalism and – yes – the sense of humour to deal with whatever comes your way.

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To read Phoebe's article on 'Courting Disaster' [Click here](#)