

MANAGEMENT CONSULTING NEWS

all things consulting . . .

Meet the MasterMinds is an exclusive interview series brought to you by [Management Consulting News](#). Feel free to distribute this interview to others, but please respect our [terms of use](#).

If you'd like to subscribe to our free, monthly email newsletter, sign up at www.ManagementConsultingNews.com.

Comments are welcome, so please send them along to the [editor](#).

Enjoy the interview!

Meet the MasterMinds: Doug Hall



Inc. Magazine has called Doug Hall “America’s top new idea man.” Hall, a self-styled inventor, entrepreneur, and author, helps companies build their businesses with new ideas and strategies. He is the founder and CEO of Eureka! Ranch, which is a corporate innovation, research and training center. Big name clients include American Express, AT&T, Johnson & Johnson, Mattel and Pepsi-Cola, to name just a few.

Hall also has a passion for helping the small business owner. He co-hosts a live show on public radio station WVXU in Cincinnati and the affiliated stations in the X-Star network. The show provides on-air consultations on sales and marketing issues for small business owners and entrepreneurs using an “artificial wisdom computer” invented by Hall and his team called Merwyn Technology.

In his most recent book, *Jump Start Your Business Brain*, among other things, Hall shares with small business owners his “Three Laws of Marketing Physics.” MCNews talked to Hall about how those ideas might be useful for management consultants.

MCNews: What are the “Three Laws of Marketing Physics,” and how might they help a management consultant be more successful?

Hall: These three laws apply equally to marketing for **all** business endeavors: **Overt Benefit**, a **Reason to Believe**, and, **Dramatic Difference**. Clients today demand to know precisely what’s in it for them, why they should believe you will deliver, and what sets you apart from the competition.

My first challenge to a management consultant would be, let me see your business card. Does it say on the card what the overt benefit is that you offer to clients?

Now, some might say, you don’t understand, I’m really smart. OK, say it—I’m smarter than you, so hire me. Do you believe your own hype or not? If you can’t tell a client what your overt benefit is, why should they listen to you about anything? So, we need to get on the business card that line that says exactly who and what we are.

Because, here’s the deal: in a world where nobody’s being overt and specific, if somebody says I’m 20% cheaper, bam, they get the work. So, if you want to justify your fee structure and, I’m all in favor of that because I’m a capitalist, then you need to be overt and specific. What is the “it” that clients get from you?

MCNews: The current market is tough for many service providers and management consultants. If you were going to say, here's one thing you ought to think about to help your practice, what would it be?

Hall: First off, I've never seen a better time. Business is spectacular. Many companies have downsized to the point that they have no people, so this is the greatest time in the world to be a consultant.

But, the world of business has changed dramatically since last September 11th. Even though most people say the economy is bouncing back, it's not coming back the way it was before. Clients are much more challenging with regards to what they are getting for their money. Partly that is just a continuation of the end of the go-go times, but we also went through a period when it was kind of un-American to talk business.

Some people trivialize the concept of overt benefit. They say, I know, benefits vs. features. But, do they really? They need to drill down as I did with my team and ask what is it that you do better than anybody else? Take your practice and answer the very simple question: we are the first company that offers what? The only consultant that offers what? If you can't answer that question, then figure it out.

If you're not a monopoly, the first or only to do X, then you're just a commodity and you will sell for commodity prices. The only question is, how cheap will you go? Articulating absolutely what is the dramatically different benefit you provide has the power to make your business succeed.

MCNews: But, then you have to support that with everything else, the features, you bring?

Hall: Of course, you support it with all the data, research, the market systems, the quality flow-charting, your pedigree, successes with past clients and all that kind of stuff. But, first you've got to get their attention. What are you doing to get their attention?

I sure don't recommend the old-boy network. If you rely on clients to say, oh, I know you so here's all our business, your success will be limited by your rolodex.

MCNews: And, that's often held up as being the end all in terms of getting new business.

Hall: That's because some people don't understand the world of business. Business is about selling somebody a benefit. It's not about getting buddies to give you money. Think about it. Would you go to a client and say, the key to your success is to become buddies with all your customers? I think not.

The old-boy thing is painful and it's outrageously expensive. I don't do dinner, I don't do breakfast, I don't network, and I don't play golf with clients. There's no leverage in it. And, besides, you're at the whims of the economy. If the economy goes bad for a client, they have to say, hey, we love ya baby, but we can't afford you anymore.

Instead of lunching with your clients, do great work for them and your business will thrive. All I'm asking you to do is live the talk.

MCNews: That is a different approach than a lot of consultants take.

Hall: But, it's exactly what they tell their clients to do. When you're trying to sell something to somebody, deliver a benefit, not dinner. Then, the state of the economy doesn't make any difference. Clients are going to want that benefit.

Look at it another way: client repeat rate. What often happens to consultants when there's a management change--they lose the client, right? Not us. At one company, we've been through four management changes, and we're still working there.

Go beyond the person who brings you in to a client, and ask other people why they think you're there. Oftentimes the perception will be that it's because you're the friend of x, y or z. What you want is to be brought in because you're great at what you do and because you have tangible technologies.

Often you will work for different clients within the same company. For many consultants, the minute there's a change in client, it's like a completely different company. That's because their business is dependant on the person they know, not the results.

MCNews: I assume once a client hires you, you continue to build the relationships with the people who hired you.

Hall: I don't do any of that. In fact, I make an overt statement: hey, I want to let you know, we won't call and bug you. If you need me, call me.

This all grew out of an experience I had many years ago. A consultant wanted to hire me to work in his practice. I told him I was thinking of starting my own business instead, and he said, you don't understand, it's not what you can do, but who you know that counts.

Well, I got really ticked about that, and I decided it **was** going to be what I did. I didn't know enough people anyway. Besides, I thought about all those mind-numbing dinners, and a root canal without Novocain would be less painful.

I'm not saying I have anything against clients, and some of them will be friends. But, don't ask them to hire you because they love you; ask them to hire you because you will do great work for them.

MCNews: A lot of consultants probably wish they could behave that way, or would try it if they thought it would work for them.

Hall: The reality is that they know it will work because that's what they tell clients to do. And when they find the courage to do it themselves, then they can be wildly successful.

MCNews: You've spent a lot of time helping people create ideas. When you are really stuck, and can't see an answer, what do you do?

Hall: This may sound incredibly boring, but I go back to fundamentals. Usually when I get stuck, it's because I've tried to take a shortcut, I've tried to leap to the flashy answer. I just go back to the fundamentals and do it by the systems.

Now, the value of the Merwyn system is that if you don't have the fundamentals right, it kills you. It used to be easy to tell clients an idea would work, and they would believe me. Now, the computer tells me when I'm being sloppy. And, so I have to go back and do my homework.

That, and drinking massive quantities of coffee seems to work. We did a study and found that by drinking more coffee you create 40% more ideas.

MCNews: Even though it's been reported that caffeine reduces blood flow to the brain?

Hall: Consider this: caffeine is a banned substance in Olympic competition. And, every study has shown that coffee increases the ability to think.

MCNews: Last question—are you reading anything interesting these days?

Hall: On the radio show I co-host, we do book awards: we name the best books of the year. One of my rules is that I won't put it on the show unless I have read the book. The show's target audience is the small business owner, which is my personal passion. Because of that audience, another rule is that the book has to give practical advice and proven wisdom. Now, that can be either first person data, or in-depth first person experience, but not philosophy or an assemblage of other people's stuff.

The book I'm reading now, ***It's Your Ship: Management Techniques From the Best Damn Ship in the Navy***, is by Michael Abrashoff, a navy guy with a lot of useful personal experience. What I like about the book, and what is applicable to my work is how he managed to work around the bureaucracy to be successful.

The Navy is one of the bigger bureaucracies I can imagine, and it's quite cool to listen to him talk about how to deal with that system from his first-person experience. Look, I believe in the power of people to do things. It's the problems with the systems that we need to address.

MCNews: Thanks a lot, Doug. We really appreciate your time.

Hall: Excellent. Have a ball!

Visit Doug Hall at www.DougHall.com or his firm at www.EurekaRanch.com.