Is Consulting For You? Five questions to ask yourself now.

Perhaps you’ve asked yourself if you’d like to leave your current job or transition into consulting? After all, it is a growing field with a high demand. Many organizations don’t have the desire or resources to hire a full-time or part-time grant professional so they look to contracting with a grant consultant.

Each year at the Grant Professional Association’s annual conference, there are several excellent sessions that focus on the practice of consulting in the grant development arena. You may have already heard some worthwhile advice at these sessions, so this article is simply to encourage you to think about a few “big picture” questions that may help you determine if consulting is right for you.

Here are some questions to ask of yourself:

1. **Do you believe in what you are doing?** If so, it won’t feel like “selling”. I was having coffee with a friend of mine who said she could never go into consulting. When I asked why she replied, “I don’t like selling”. Uh oh, I thought... I don’t like selling either. But it never feels like selling. Instead when I meet with a potential new client, it’s exciting to hear about their work, their mission and their passion. That is energizing and makes me realize just how much we can accomplish together (maybe that IS selling!). On the contrary, if you are in a field that just doesn’t feel right to you, then the selling WILL be a struggle, and you may find yourself feeling routinely drained rather than energized.

2. **Do you see opportunity everywhere?** There is a certain sense of optimism that seems to be necessary to enjoy the practice of consulting. Your clients may be so immersed in their daily work and responsibilities that they rely on you to find the opportunities for them. This can mean helping them plan projects so they are ready for funding, identifying the best grant prospects, or even determining the direction of their organization. On your own time, do you network with various sectors, read business journals, and scan funding announcements on a regular basis? Finding ways to see the opportunities for your clients to meet their needs is essential to being an effective grant professional.

3. **Can you focus on your most important work and say “no” to things that could derail you?** This type of clarity and focus is not easy to come by. If you see opportunity everywhere, you may just be likely to want to DO everything too...at which point there will no longer be enough time to do it all, your laundry will pile up, you might even feel irritable and tired, leading to a distinctive lack of joy. Not good. Too many times I have noticed that my business is running me, instead of the other way around. That is a sure sign to slow down, re-assess your reasons for being in this business, and list your priorities.

4. **What attracts you to being a consultant?** Is it the promise of autonomy and flexibility? Or the challenge of making it on your own? Have you always known there is an inner entrepreneur in you that needs to come out (perhaps you were the one who organized the neighborhood garage sale as a child?). Would you rather follow your own mission, rather than the one set by your company or supervisor? Will your lifestyle support a few meager financial years and the fluctuation in income that can sometimes happen in this field? Do you have a support system in place for those times you feel isolated? If you are honest and realistic about your expectations, and if they will help you accomplish your own life goals, then maybe consulting is right for you.
5. Are you ready to learn? There are numerous resources available for people wanting to get started in consulting. The most valuable early knowledge I gained was from an on-line course on starting your own grant consulting business. Alan Weiss has published several books with concrete advice on everything from marketing your business to determining pricing. The best learning, however, is in networking with other consultants and hearing about their experiences. Consider attending the October 15-18, 2014 GPA conference, local chapter meetings, or other similar professional groups. A grant writing consultant must continuously train and learn in order to stay relevant in the field. And that is part of the fun.

Consulting is a chance to do what matters most to you and to thrive at it. At the same time you will be helping others achieve their mission and succeed. What could be better?

Margit Brazda Poirier is Owner and President of Grants4Good, a grant development consulting company based in Upstate New York.