

13 Forgetting the expectations exchange is the single biggest career killer

Most consultants end up with poor reviews since they just do not know any better

Why have the exchange?

I am going to serve two roles in this study.

(1) First, I am going to manage the client and serve as the strategy and, to some extent, the subject matter expert.

(2) A more important role is providing cover for my team to go out and do the analyses required to test our hypotheses.

That latter role is far more critical. No matter how well I manage the client, unless we have hard data to frame a very emotional topic, we will eventually lose credibility.

In military terms you can think of the engagement team as the infantry unit. They are in the **field** and the partner needs to let them do what they need to do.

The team only calls in air support if something goes very wrong. It is my job to make sure nothing goes so poorly that it impacts their ability to complete the analyses. That is the support I provide.

This is an important analogy to think about. If I was too close to the team, I would never train them to make decisions by themselves and they would never grow.

Worse, I would never give the manager room to assert control of the study. So I need her to suffer a few setbacks **initially**, adjust and grow into the role. This is a price I will need to pay to ensure she is ready to manage the study in the more intellectually stressful parts from around weeks 3 and 4.

Though, you will soon see that on all my studies, weeks 1 to 3 or 4 are usually the worst in terms of the pace we set.

Feedback

Expectations exchanges from the team starting to come in: glad to see they are so prompt. That is a good sign. Now, let's see if the content is thoughtful.

Associates:

(1) I am not so happy with these expectations. They show a lack of ambition for the two associates. I need to send a signal about what I expect through my expectations. I am wary of interns who just want a learning experience. We are here to potentially change the face of small business financing in the US. Merely "learning" is, at the very best, a mediocre objective.

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(2) This is not a typical internship. I will set up a call to make sure the associates understand how this study will run – this will be the second call on the same topic.

(3) Never underestimate how entrenched myths are about consulting and how many calls it takes to change them. It's all those silly blogs written by associates who present distorted advice about what partners expect.

(4) What I expect as a partner is very different from what an associate thinks I expect. Especially, those associate who have never made it past engagement manager level.

Manager:

(1) The manager's expectations are good, but I sense a lack of confidence. A consulting internship is not where you go to find yourself.

(2) I will also need to speak to her, but I think she just needs support and will be fine.

I will obviously adjust my expectations to cater for the unique requirements of each person, but broadly speaking, this is what I want:

(1) Guide and develop the younger team members

(2) Total **ownership** of the problem statement and not the solution

(3) Be flexible on activities and show initiative

(4) **Fail fast** if you have to. Though, spend **zero time** apologizing or making excuses and 100% of the time fixing the problem

(5) You will **not** be measured on mistakes but how you respond to them

(6) Build good relationships with all stakeholders, including lower level employees

(7) A policy of no surprises

(8) Lets make this the best study ever done in the history of development finance – that means looking at what Bain and the US government has already done for this banking client and setting a higher bar on the level of insight and helping the client.

(9) Provide support and assistance to the other streams

(10) Leave a legacy through this study and honor our values. What we will do will change the lives of millions of US immigrants and small business owners, for better or worse. Many will not know who did the work, but they must know that a team took charge, and what they did on that day mattered.

QUESTION(S) OF THE DAY: Do you need to be accountable or responsible for your piece or work in a study? Does it matter?

We answer this question, additional reader questions and discuss more issues raised in this article on the accompanying episode on the *Strategy Skills* podcast channel on [iTunes](#), [Google Android Podcasts](#), [Libsyn](#),

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