

## Take the direct approach in business matters

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“I wish they would just come and talk to me!” my friend Sophie lamented. She recently retained two freelance consultants. The consultants’ contracts clearly spelled out their terms of engagement. Their first payment of 40 percent would be upon client approval of a specific, named deliverable. For a variety of reasons however, the project was advancing at a slower pace than expected.

Hard pressed for cash, the consultants repeatedly asked Sophie’s project manager Lucy to pay them 50 percent of their contract amounts. In spite of Lucy’s numerous reminders to the consultants that their contracts were not set up that way as well as her suggestion that they speak to Sophie, the consultants barraged Lucy for a couple of weeks, without a word to Sophie. Deaf to Lucy’s advice, a few days ago the consultants e-mailed their request to her. At her wits end, Lucy forwarded the e-mail to Sophie and briefed her on what had been going on.

There is a lesson here for Sophie. It could be that the consultants felt she was unapproachable. That however, is a story for another day. We will focus on the consultants. Although different environments call for different approaches, in business, there is much to be gained from being direct.

### **ADJUST CONTRACT TERMS BEFORE SIGNING**

The contracts that the consultants signed clearly indicated the milestones against which they would be paid. If they were not happy with the terms of the contract, they should have pointed that out before they signed the documents. Having signed the contracts, it was unreasonable of them to request even more than was agreed to before any deliverables had been approved.

### **BARK UP THE RIGHT TREE**

The consultants were barking up the wrong tree. Sophie was the paying authority. Instead of speaking directly to her, they chose to subject Lucy to their demands. Asking the security guard at the gate to unlock a building to which s/he does not have a key, will get you nowhere. You need to speak to someone who has a key. Sophie was quite perturbed that the consultants did not approach her. She did however respond to their e-mail and asked them to raise any issues with her. They did not respond.

### **WALK THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR**

The invitation to raise any issues with her was an open door that the consultants chose not to walk through. Had I been in their shoes, I would have responded by asking Sophie for a 10 to 15 percent advance in light of the delays, just to tide me over until client approval. After all, she constantly commends the consultants’ work so, there are no performance concerns. Their delayed payment is purely a function of delayed deliverables and thus delayed payment from the client too.

**If you are unhappy about a business situation instead of skulking around in silence, address the right party and be direct with your request. You will get a faster response and perhaps even better results than you expected.**