



Interviewee: **Susan Letterman White**, J.D., M.S. of **Letterman White Consulting**; Author - *Power and Influence for Lawyers: How to Use It to Develop Business and Advance Your Career* (2011).

Q: What kinds of decisions do you make? (What is your role in the whole scheme of things?)

A: I am a published author, own and operate a consulting firm which focuses on organization development and act as a lawyer coach. In the consulting capacity, I work with law firms and lawyers on developing and implementing strategies on the business side of the firm. I assist my clients in designing business strategies. You need to know strategy design but also need to address the culture and structure of an organization to be able to make changes, help departments, as well as to make changes and structures to support growth. Growth depends on talent within organization. So, you need to address skill development, communication skills, structures that put people into right proximity to capitalize for results.

In my work as a coach, my clients are either not sure what they want or they are one-hundred percent sure they want to move-up but not sure how to make it happen. I work with them to figure out what they want. We design a business development plan. Also, we bring in and discuss mentor and sponsorship relationships and their impact on career advancement.

As an author, I write about power-bases. Power-bases involve utilizing different power sources to put into an influence strategy.

Q: How do you obtain clients?

A: It is business development 101. Bringing a client in has everything to do with your fit. You need to know your strength and weaknesses as a consultant and professional in addition to knowing your potential client bases. A law firm, for example, a managing partner, will reach out to me to bring me in for a strategic plan launch (e.g., they have idea but cannot get it off the ground). In addition, I have a network of colleagues to call on when project requires more than one person. If there is a large group, it may require more than one consultant or expertise.

Business development, in part, is the process of going out and trying something. After which, you can analyze if it works and find out why. If it does not why, determine why not and use it as a learning opportunity.

It is also essential to build your reputation. You want to create conditions where the people who want/need what you do will know that you are available and you can connect.

Q: How did you get your start in consultation?

A: I started out practicing as a lawyer at a small firm. I was looking to build up my own practice, but ended up joining a firm and became the managing partner. That was eye-opening experience. It led to my decision to pursue my master's degree. It was after that that I started my own consulting firm.

Q: What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in the consultation field?

A: There are consultants who analyze a deal (e.g., merger, financial health of an organization) and look at the numbers. An attorney would obviously need to have a background in those fields to succeed as a consultant in those arenas.

Their skill set is a little different than mine. My work is different because the expertise that I have is in human behavior and what motivates changes, and processes. For every task you have to execute, there is a corresponding process that makes it happen. Moreover, I use the training I have to train others, specifically how to look at strategy in a volatile environment. People who are effective in implementing strategy in a volatile environment are ever-changing instead of sticking to one plan for five (5) or ten (10) years. This can be useful especially today in our current economy.

To be effective as a coach or consultant for organization development, you should have had some experience that triggers transformational behavior. For instance, there are a lot of former litigators who are now jury consultants. If you practiced in a certain field, you may be best fit as a consultant in a related industry.

Also, there are more and more lawyers looking for a coach. For them, it is important to have a lawyer who understands how a practitioner thinks.

Q: What does your company see in terms of needs? Threats? Opportunities? Strengths?

A: The economy is the biggest threat. If there are not clients that have the money to spend, a consultant cannot create resources for them and it is out of the consultant's control. So, you must identify those challenges that a consultant can change and address them effectively.

I have been able to grow my business and it is still growing, so there is a need in the industry. I can see, however, how rigid structures in large organizations could make utilizing consultants challenging.

Furthermore, a lot of law firms are in super-growth spurt (50-250 lawyers) and they are reaching out to me. Those firms started in some kind of niche practice (e.g., bankruptcy, IP, title work due to movement in the mortgage foreclosure). Another growing issue in the industry is leadership transition due to shifts within organizations and firms.