

19 September 2017

CONSULTING INTERNATIONALLY: 10 TIPS FOR SUCCESS

East Isn't East Any More

Just like their engineering counterparts in the aerospace, automotive and advanced manufacturing sectors, innovative British nuclear companies are increasingly looking towards new overseas markets in order to sell their hard-earned consulting expertise. Look closely at the financial accounts of Britain's biggest FTSE professional service firms and you will see that most large consulting practices quietly earn over half of their revenues abroad. Indeed the UK market is generally too small to support multinational firms alone. Even smaller domestic nuclear SMEs are eyeing foreign markets, as much for post BREXIT survival as for growth. Sooner rather than later nuclear professionals tend to find themselves working in foreign lands. This modern-day nuclear Gold Rush lies in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and South East Asia, where civil nuclear electricity programmes are needed to power their rapidly growing industrial economies.

How to Compete and Win

British firms have a reputation for high quality. But also high cost. The simple fact is that local professional labour is often much cheaper in Eastern and Asian countries with their budget priced nuclear power programmes. How can British firms compete? The answer lies in offering a mix of technical expertise, outstanding customer service and – most importantly - a finely tuned sense of cultural awareness upon which to build effective business relationships. In short, knowing your customer is key. And this means stepping outside of your cultural comfort zone, by looking at things from a different viewpoint. Travel does indeed broaden the mind.

My experience of working overseas as a nuclear consultant has been overwhelmingly positive. Here are 10 quick tips for fame and hopefully fortune for those nuclear experts brave enough to venture abroad with their laptops.

Rules of Thumb for Working Internationally

Tip # 1. Walk in their shoes. The major difference between doing business in the East and the West is that personal relationships matter much more in the East than tender submissions. All other things being equal, clients would sooner do business with a trusted friend. In fact even if things are not quite equal, clients will still prefer to work with a friend rather than gamble on a cheaper but unknown alternative. Always try to see problems from the other person's point of view – not your own. Put yourself in the client's shoes. Understand the wider foreign context and the internal pressures that they may be facing. What motivates them? What does success look like for them? What outcomes really matter and what are less important? How can you genuinely help improve your client's situation? Take the time to get to know your client deeply. The answers may surprise you.

Prospect Law Ltd
23 Berkeley Square, London W1J 6HE
T +44 (0)20 7947 5354

Regus House, Pegasus Business Park, Castle
Donington, Derbyshire DE74 2TZ
T +44 (0)1332 818 785

 @prospectupdate
E info@prospectlaw.co.uk
www.prospectlaw.co.uk

19 September 2017

Tip # 2. Deals are based on trust, not contract documents. Contracts tend to be regarded as the minimum level of performance. Foreign clients will usually expect you to deliver more than what the contract says. Going above and beyond without complaint is the norm for expat Brits. Besides, it is very difficult to legally enforce contracts in foreign jurisdictions. Nuclear energy projects are invariably closely linked to State governments, who can tie you up in red tape delaying payments indefinitely when displeased by under-performance. Getting paid mostly depends on whether the client thinks you have done a good job. Don't get hung up on legal details in contracts. Arguing over small points sends the customer the wrong signal, that you don't trust them. And trust is essential for doing business overseas.

Tip # 3. Be polite and courteous in all circumstances. The British have a reputation for politeness, courtesy, integrity and honesty. Live up to it. Overseas clients will respect and admire your Britishness, even in difficult situations. Your softer people handling skills will ultimately determine how successful you become overseas. A willingness to help is always a big plus.

Tip # 4. Avoid the hard sell. Hard sell is really a form of grovelling. Brashness hints at desperation which is never attractive for buyers of professional consulting services. They will wonder why you are quite so desperate. Professionals never grovel. So don't hard sell under any circumstances, even if you lose to competitors sometimes. The customer may eventually come back to you when they realise why that cut-price deal they bought was so cheap or the consulting solutions didn't work. Also, confrontational management styles rarely work in consultancy business situations. Collaborative diplomacy and people skills are the way to get things done abroad.

Tip # 5. Ask questions rather than give opinions. Gently asking your future client questions will give you much deeper insight into the underlying problems and issues that your client is really trying to solve. These may not be immediately apparent from a translated contract scope or tender document. For example, technical consultancy on the chemical composition of steel in nuclear transport flasks might reflect wider systemic difficulties with the regulatory safety case for spent fuel dry cask storage. The client's real problem might be running out of spent fuel storage capacity, not chemical analysis of steels. But if you don't ask "why?" you may never know. Avoid silo mentality. Try to experience a wide range of different technical and situational challenges. Develop crossover skills. Nuclear power projects are never undertaken in isolation. Many different people and skills must be brought together as a team. Understanding your client's project in this way will lead to new business opportunities.

Tip # 6. Negotiate with patience. Foreign business deals usually require several rounds of downward negotiation to agree a final "best price". But beware the technical scope will always remain fixed and in any case the consultant will be expected to exceed the contracted delivery terms. I have watched senior Arab officials quite literally throw a

Prospect Law Ltd
23 Berkeley Square, London W1J 6HE
T +44 (0)20 7947 5354

Regus House, Pegasus Business Park, Castle
Donington, Derbyshire DE74 2TZ
T +44 (0)1332 818 785

 @prospectupdate
E info@prospectlaw.co.uk
www.prospectlaw.co.uk

19 September 2017

consulting proposal out of the room in feigned anger, but then minutes later be utterly charming when the price was halved for the same scope. Keep calm and carry on. Negotiate with patience.

Tip # 7. Don't worry about IP. The British are above all else good innovators. Conventional wisdom has it that Eastern countries will steal your nuclear intellectual property in a heartbeat. British companies focus far too much corporate effort on vain attempts to protect their IP through complex commercial and legal contracts. For most practical purposes enforcing these in a foreign jurisdiction is impossible. You might win in Court but the process will take years and bankrupt you. Instead nuclear consulting companies should not worry too much about IP. Firstly because this misunderstands Eastern buyers. They want the very latest nuclear technology for their money, not older recycled background IP. In any case the *raison d'être* for using a high value British consultant is precisely to generate valuable foreground IP for the client. This should be part of the consultant's value proposition and helps justify high consulting fees. Secondly, IP should be less of a worry because the added value that nuclear consultants bring to nuclear projects is largely in their heads – it is the expert ability of British consultants to solve complex nuclear problems facing a client here and now – and this can't be copied. That is why British consultants are highly valued problem solvers. Although they do talk about the weather too much, which always puzzles foreigners.

Tip # 8. Be sensitive to wage disparities. Large disparities between expat and local wages can cause tensions on projects. Even quite senior nuclear officials can earn relatively low incomes by Western standards. While running a nuclear training course for some energy executives in South East Asia, I once complained about the high cost of my household gas bill. "Ian, that is more than my monthly income" my client gently chided me. I was mortified. Developing countries build civil nuclear energy programmes because they need them to boost their economy. By the same token these countries are not always rich. Beware of the social effects of wage disparities and always treat your clients with dignity and respect. They will do the same for you.

Tip # 9. Reach out to Commonwealth Countries. It is generally easier working in foreign countries that have a strong cultural association with Britain or were once part of the British Commonwealth. For example, Australia, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand and some Middle Eastern States are all undeniably foreign but have inherited some aspects of Britishness. Vietnam was once closely linked to France and retains its Western European cultural and architectural feel. Doing business in these countries is much easier than places with zero British heritage.

Tip # 10. Remember how lucky you are. Working abroad is a privilege. Think about your colleagues stuck in a City office, as you watch the sun slowly rise over the Arabian Desert at Barakah or fly low over the green jungle of Vietnam into DaLat. I've done both and they definitely beat life sat in an open plan corporate office near the M6.

Prospect Law Ltd
23 Berkeley Square, London W1J 6HE
T +44 (0)20 7947 5354

Regus House, Pegasus Business Park, Castle
Donington, Derbyshire DE74 2TZ
T +44 (0)1332 818 785

@prospectupdate
E info@prospectlaw.co.uk
www.prospectlaw.co.uk

19 September 2017

About The Author

Prospect Law and Prospect Advisory provide legal and business consultancy services for clients involved in the infrastructure, energy and financial sectors.

Ian Jackson is a nuclear energy consultant at Prospect Advisory with 30 years' experience working in both the public and private nuclear sectors. He has worked from Manchester to Vietnam, and everywhere in between. Ian joined Prospect Advisory from the UK National Nuclear Laboratory where he led international business development. Prior to that, Ian was an Associate Fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London.

This article remains the copyright property of Prospect Law Ltd and Prospect Advisory Ltd and neither the article nor any part of it may be published or copied without the prior written permission of the directors of Prospect Law and Prospect Advisory.

For more information please contact us on 020 7947 5354 or by email on: info@prospectlaw.co.uk.