

The Journey

(A Consultant's Dilemma)

By Rainer Busch

Introduction

This story serves as a metaphor for a dilemma that consultants and their clients may experience. It is aimed at consultants, CEO's, executives and board members. What has gone wrong here? How could the outcome in this story been prevented?

Scenario

A group of people hear about an exotic destination that sounds very interesting. Group members have heard and read about this place. The group leader decides to invite someone who knows about this destination. He asks the person he knows to give a presentation so that group.

The group listens to the presentation, likes what it hears and decides that this type of journey sounds like a good idea. However the group is uncertain how to go about in organizing the journey and how to get to the destination. There are a number of unknowns such as how difficult the trip will be, how long it will take, how much it will cost and what benefits the group will obtain from this journey.

The presenter suggests that the group hire a specialist 'tour guide', an expert, who has taken other groups to this destination and who knows some of the safest and most efficient ways to travel there.

The group leader authorizes the presenter to find and hire a tour guide who will assist the group in the planning of the trip and who will accompany and support the group on its travels.

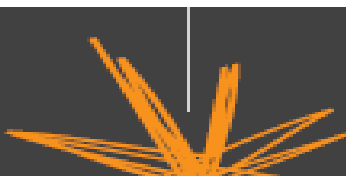
An expert is found.

This tour guide is a very experienced and committed individual who always ensures that anybody taken on these journeys receives the best possible outcomes from the trip. The tour guide accepts the assignment. He starts his work by having an initial discussion with the group leader. The group leader clearly states that he and the the group are very excited about the journey and the destination. He assures the tour guide that everyone is fully committed to get going as soon as possible.

The tour guide begins his preparations. An agenda is prepared. Prices obtained. Timing planned and a budget prepared. Next the tour guide prepares a detailed itinerary and presents it to the group. After some discussion, the group accepts the proposal and the tour guide begins making further travel arrangements, spending some of the allocated budget in preparation for a timely departure. This is a very substantial journey, involving lots of planning work and organization. To speed things up the tour guide requests to hire an additional person and is given approval to recruit another 'expert' to help with the work.

The preparations take several months with regular status briefings between the tour guide and the group. - All seems to be going well.

Some weeks before the scheduled start of the trip the tour guide requests a meeting with the group to clarify a number of important issues and to show the group what has been done so far. The tour guide makes it clear that in order to take the final steps it is essential that all group members individually specify their particular requirements and expectations of this journey.



During this meeting group members seem very evasive and unsure about articulating their needs and wants. When questioned further by the tour guide some group members, including the group leader, begin to question the purpose and need for the journey. After some further discussion the group leader closes the meeting and requests the tour guide to come back to the group with another presentation. The purpose of this presentation is to show the reason(s) why the group members should go on this journey and to demonstrate what the benefits will be for the group.

The tour guide is confused. In an effort to obtain some further clarification the tour guide meets with each group member individually to find out what his/her feelings and needs are about the journey.

During these discussions it becomes clear that whilst group members can see some benefits in going on this journey, most feel that they don't really want to go. Nobody shows any 'excitement'. However all group members indicate that they would come along on the journey if the other group members absolutely wanted to go.

After these meetings the tour guide speaks with the group leader and suggests that it appears that group members are not committed to go on the trip,

The group leader tries to convince the tour guide that everybody, including himself was still committed to the trip. However, the group just needed more information. The group leader also states that it was his belief that it was up to the tour guide to 'market' and 'promote' the journey to him and the group.

After these meetings the tour guide feels disappointed. The tour guide meets with the person who hired him and asks what actual discussions had taken place before he had been hired. The hiring person is surprised to hear about the group members' hesitations and assures the tour guide that when he had initially spoken to the group he thought the group had really wanted to go. - Something must have changed.

The tour guide is wondering what to do.

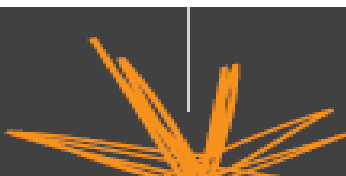
He knows from past experiences that there is absolutely no point in taking someone on this type of journey unless people really want to travel and understand all implications of taking the trip. At the same time he is very aware that he has put a lot of effort into the planning of this trip and that a reasonable amount of money has been spent already, most of which would be lost if the journey did not proceed. The tour guide discusses the developments with his assistant who is also disappointed.

The tour guide prepares another presentation about the journey and the destination.

However he is now having difficulty in getting group members together to show and discuss the presentation. Time is passing and the tour guide decides to put any further trip preparations on 'hold'. He feels that it would be irresponsible to spend any more time, money and effort until the group has made a final decision about this journey.

Both, the tour guide and his assistant feel stuck.

Tour guide and assistant do not believe that it is their role to 'market' the journey and its destination to the group. They were hired to assist the group to plan for this journey and to guide and support the group during the journey. Their role is not to promote trips and destinations. In other words they are in the business of satisfying needs, not creating them.



Outcome

The tour guide concludes that the group does not want to go on this journey.

He advises the group leader and the person who hired him that because the group is not committed in taking the trip he is not willing to take the group on the journey.

The tour guide and his assistant resign from their roles,

Most group members seem understanding of the tour guides' decision to leave. However, nobody tries to stop their departure.

The group and its leader do not seem to be concerned about the time, effort and financial resources that were wasted during the months of preparation. – Change has been averted!

N.B. You may send your comments to rainer@raidho.com.au - Thank You.

