

# Should you give free diagnosis?

**Peter Bowbrick**

Copyright © Peter Bowbrick, [www.bowbrick.eu](http://www.bowbrick.eu), [peter@bowbrick.eu](mailto:peter@bowbrick.eu) 07772746759. The right of Peter Bowbrick to be identified as the Author of the Work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act.

---

## **SHOULD YOU GIVE FREE DIAGNOSIS?**

1. Free diagnosis is something you do because you have to. When you build up your reputation and repeat business you may not have to do it. For the reasons given below, it may still be important for some types of consultant always.
2. If it is free, say so. Most clients expect that they are paying you every minute, and may reject it for this reason.
3. Doing a diagnosis means that you are a lot closer to selling a job. It means that you are in a position to get the information needed to sell the job properly. It is easier to get a prospective client to accept a diagnosis than to sign a contract on your first visit.

You can postpone your selling until you know what you have to sell.

4. There is no such thing as a free lunch. Free diagnosis has to be built into your fees. You cannot charge double fees because you do four one-week diagnoses for every month sold. You can probably get away with ,600 a day instead of ,500 because you will have done a better selling job. Unless you have a very high hit rate, it brings your average income down to unacceptable levels.
5. You are trying to get the information needed to clinch a deal which is satisfactory to your clients and yourself. The job must be profitable, it must be doable and it must keep the client happy.
6. You may tell your client when you are negotiating to do a diagnosis that you want to check that you can produce £3 in extra profit for every £1 you will be paid.

### **Does he know what he wants?**

1. Some possibilities are:
  1. He knows exactly what he wants the consultant to do
  2. He knows that something is wrong but he does not know what. He may just have a feeling that he is not making enough money.
  3. He knows that he is efficient and competitive, but he wants to be better still, and keep up with competitors who are also improving, and with a changing market. Very similar at first sight to the previous, but a different relationship. It may be worth pushing this on the surface, so he does not have to admit to a problem.
  4. You have a service to sell which he might or might not want and which he might

or might not need. Like free damp inspections.

7. Clarification is urgently needed before you put your foot in it

1. See article on *Modes of Consultancy*

2. Does he want Advice

1. What to do?

2. How to do it?

3. ....

3. Does he want you to install a process e.g. ISO9000?

4. Does he want information, like market research? Does he want the raw data or does he want you to analyse it?

5. Does he want something done? Advertisements designed and published, install computers? I.e. does he want you to tell him what computers and software to install or does he want it hands on and ready to go.

8. Generally he will have a hotchpotch of all these. It is up to you to separate out the different things e.g.

1. As specified in the business plan

2. Vague ideas for the future

3. There may be many ideas at different stages

9. Initially you want to separate out the ones you can do and can sell. Others can be borne in mind. You may be able to do *networking* - passing the job to colleagues on a reciprocal basis.

**When he knows exactly what he wants**

1. If he wants a service you can offer, but you think that he does not need. *Ethics, Reputation*. How do you get out of it?
10. If he wants a service you can offer, but you have insufficient information to know if he needs it or not. *Ethics, Reputation*. Keep an open mind? Tell him of your reservations?
11. If you cannot do it and you think he does not need it. You do not want to attack his preconceived ideas, but on the other hand you do not want him spending his consultancy budget elsewhere. You can perhaps be the disinterested outsider giving him sound advice about something that does not bother you.
12. If he needs it and you cannot do it *Network*
13. If he needs it and you can do it, this is your opportunity to sell. Show him that he is right. Show him that you can do the job

## **You have something to sell**

1. Some of us are single product consultants, selling a single technique, and, one hopes, being experts in that technique. Others have a toolkit of several techniques. Only the very largest firms would claim to be able to supply everything in house (they lie).

To some extent all of us are in the position of selling the techniques we have. We may not be able to tell whether these are of the highest priority. *Ethical problems* can arise.


14. Some situations are:


1. He does not need it or want it. *Ethics*
2. He wants it but does not need it. *Ethics*
3. He needs it but does not yet want it. It is up to you to prove it to him.
4. He wants it but does not need it
  1. Simple if it is harmful or a total waste of time
  2. It is probably a good thing, but it is not top priority.
5. He needs it and wants it: Reinforce: tell him how clever he is. Tell him he can do the job.


15. You have more credibility if you have a toolbag. *Networking* means you can say outright that he does not need you, today, but you can provide what he does need.

## **When he does not know what he wants**

1. You have a limited time to get what you want. It is worth having a check list.

- 
16. You want to talk to the client. The decision maker? The MD? Try and ration this.
- Say an hour at the beginning, an hour later and an hour at the end maximum. If he is loquacious and telling you a lot that is very interesting but a bit off the subject try and steer him. He may not notice while he is talking how long it takes, but he will afterwards. At the end of a week he finds he has given you nine hours. He decides he cannot go on like this for the whole consultancy, so he will do without it.
17. You are not counseling him now.
18. You are not giving solutions ‘I am always worried by consultants who start giving advice as soon as they get out of their car, before they have understood the firm’s problems and opportunities’.
19. Who to speak to. Get him to introduce you and clear it.
20. What sources of information. You may not have access to all of them at this stage, but you must know what exists. This means you do not duplicate. It also means you can negotiate access and cooperation in your proposal.
1. MIS manual and sample output
  2. ISO9000 manual
  3. Any other manuals
  4. Any previous consultancy reports
  5. Internal consultancy

- 
6. Any market research
  7. Financial accounts (one for the taxman.
  8. Management accounts
  9. Budget
  10. Production plans
  11. Organogram
  12. Library: trade journals and other data
  13. Internet data
  14. Other data sources available.
- 
21. Negotiate to have the data on disk or at least to be able to analyse it on their computer. You cannot afford to spend time entering data.
  22. You will need to do some analysis to determine the quality of the data.
  23. I would expect to find sources of information that senior management were not aware of.
  24. Your job is to get enough evidence to convince yourself that you can justify your fee.  
Then
    1. Try and get enough evidence to convince him: this may be difficult without revealing what you have found out, or what methods you will use. If you can convince him, you will be able to charge a daily rate, with him bearing risk.



2. If it is not possible to convince him

1. Payment on achieving stated results, or

2. Take a percentage of increased profit etc.

**Information that sells consultancy**

1. At the same time you will want to get the information that makes your proposal and your pitch sell.

25. What consultancy does he now buy? What has he bought in the past? Was he happy with it? Why?

26. What buzz words does he use? It adds weight to a proposal if it uses his terminology and turn of phrase.

27. What does he do?

28. What does he want to do?

29. What does he think he wants to do?

30. What does he think consultants can do?