

WHY OUTSOURCE TO EXPERTS?

A smart piece of advice I once received was to outsource all non-core activities, acknowledge my strengths, recognise my weaknesses and work with that knowledge instead of fighting it.

STORY SHARON WILLIAMS

The advice was pivotal in turning a commercial corner. It changed the way I ran my business and underpins the way we operate today.

We outsource a whole range of activities and skills from payroll, bookkeeping, accounting to security and cleaning. Although we are PR and marketing experts, we even use creatives and PR specialists to help us look at our own backyard!

10 FAST TRACK TIPS TO GOOD OUTSOURCING FOR SMEs

Outsourcing is a great business strategy but, like all relationships, it can be disappointing if poorly managed.

1. Write down what you really need. Be specific. What are you struggling with and what is slowing you down?
2. What skills will the expert have?
3. What does success look like, e.g. what would the expert be delivering in an ideal world?
4. Find experts by referral
5. Find experts who have delivered exactly what you need before
6. Check experts have put what they know into practice rather than just flashy qualifications
7. Ask them for references and check, check, and check again
8. Have firm contracts in place with clear deliverables
9. Have a 'get out quick' clause if things go pear shaped
10. Don't be afraid to ask the dumb questions.

Some of our biggest corporate collapses have happened because someone didn't ask the obvious or dumb question!

The key thing to remember is there are only so many hours in the day and small business owners are critically time poor. So my premise has always been you might as well concentrate on doing what you love. And coincidentally, we tend to be good at what we enjoy doing!

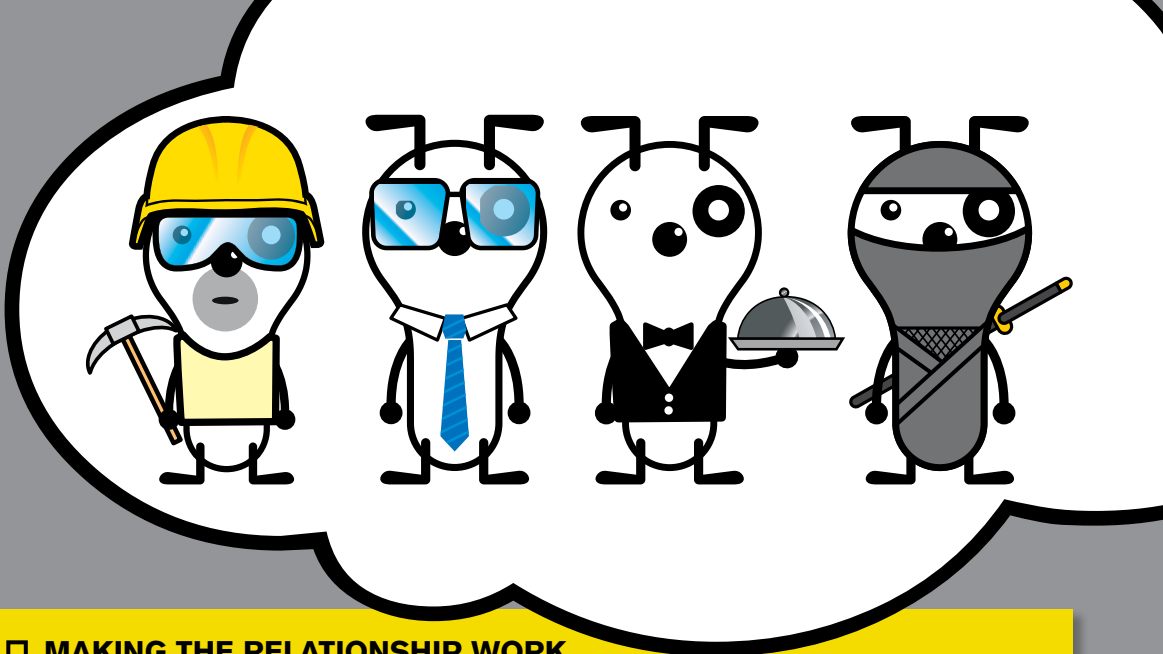
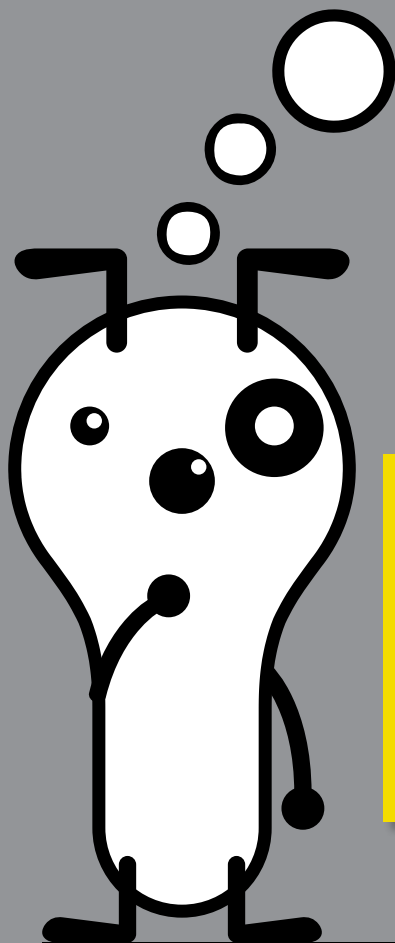
On the flip side, we are usually not good at what we don't enjoy. That doesn't mean we deserve a 'get out of jail free' card. You only have to reflect back to school days to see we just can't get out of what we don't like doing. Life isn't a bed of roses. With perseverance, conquering our weaknesses is greatly rewarding. But what it does mean is that it's worth taking an unemotional look at your strengths and weaknesses (and those of your team) and finding those skills to complement or fill the gaps.

As an example, when GST was introduced a few years ago, I could have spent many hours trying to understand it, deflecting precious time on building the business or other high pay-off activities. Instead, I hired a specialist who took me easily through the steps. For me, GST was painless and easy because I paid an expert to show me how.

This is the basic premise for outsourcing decisions. Outsourcing a key function allows you to meet your core objectives far quicker and leaves you to focus on what you know best—your business.

WHEN SHOULD I OUTSOURCE?

- When there aren't enough hours in the day
- If the task requires experience and skills you don't have in-house
- When certain tasks are taking too long
- When your staff are complaining that a particular task never gets completed
- When the thought of tackling that task is so scary that it is repeatedly ignored
- When certain tasks are distracting you from the high pay-off activities you're better at
- When you can't find those skills in spite of recruiting efforts
- When important tasks are being overlooked or left in the hands of junior members of staff
- When business functions are not delivering real results
- When bottlenecks are appearing in the business.



□ MAKING THE RELATIONSHIP WORK

Outsourcing any element of your business is a big step and one that you have to keep on top of to make sure that it pays off.

- Communicate and set clear objectives and priorities. Make sure both you and the expert are clear on how you will measure results so both parties can work towards an agreed outcome
- Meet the person/team who will be working on your business and experience their ability and enthusiasm
- Regularly communicate
- Provide feedback; let them know when you are delighted...and when you are not
- Do not micro manage, entrust your professional to do the job!

□ OUTSOURCE—THE LIST IS ENDLESS!

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|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ■ Cleaning | ■ Creative services |
| ■ Book keeping | ■ Sales consulting |
| ■ Financial accounting | ■ Database management |
| ■ Tax returns | ■ IT services |
| ■ HR function | ■ Security |
| ■ Payroll | ■ Recruitment |
| ■ Website management | ■ Executive coaching and mentoring |
| ■ Administration | ■ Training |
| ■ SEO | ■ Design |
| ■ Marketing and PR | |

THE BENEFITS OF OUTSOURCING

1. Maximise results without increasing your headcount

The experience of a focused, dedicated professional can mean fast delivery of results to deadline and within budget. This can be more cost-effective than maintaining projects in-house. Outsourcing gives you all the benefits of a specialist's experience, from mature consultants to fresh blood!

2. The way to speedy implementation

Using professionals who offer specialist skills and experience means you can get the job done quickly. You can choose to outsource all or nothing. Everything—even strategy to tactical recommendations—is at your fingertips when you need it.

3. Flexible, nimble service on tap

Using experts means you have the flexibility to 'turn the tap on or off' when you need it. You don't have to invest in the extra full-time resource and take the risk that an individual or group will sit under utilised when times are quiet.

4. Objective, independent advice

Professional consultants and specialists should act as informed allies to balance your internal skills and debates. They should operate as objective, trusted advisors and should ask the straight shooting questions to force improvements in your operation.

5. Mentoring

An outsourced provider should be able to mentor your junior staff and fast-track your internal expertise. They should provide eager and interested guidance and work hard to up-skill your in-house junior staff so they work smarter.

6. Turn up or down the activity dial

With an outsourced solution, you can choose to 'turn up the volume' on your activities without having to make major recruitment or budgetary decisions. So you can increase or decrease the volume of your activities.

WHY WOULD YOU OUTSOURCE?

It is a wise individual who recognises you can't be an expert in everything. To be successful you have to learn to let go and let others excel. Outsourcing may be one of the most rewarding productivity boosts your business has experience. Don't waste time. Find experts to help. **DB**

—Sharon Williams is the CEO of Taurus Marketing (taurusmarketing.com.au) and a member of our Expert Panel.