

## Important to weigh ups and downs before entering consulting

**By Derek Sankey, Edmonton Journal**

CALGARY - Consultants are becoming a common sight in the workplace as an aging population looks to cash in on experience as they near retirement, say employment specialists.

With employers seeking ways to cap costs, many people are leaving stable employers for the uncertainty -- and flexibility -- of consulting, says Douglas Gray, consultant and author of *Start and Run a Consulting Business*.

"If you can specialize in a certain area and become known as an expert in that field, the opportunities are very appealing," says Gray.

But Gray says people have to be careful about diving into consulting because it takes planning and research.

"It's just not right for some people . . . so it's essential to do a thorough self assessment," he says.

As a former lawyer and entrepreneur in Vancouver, Gray saw the opportunities to capitalize on the trend toward firms hiring outside consultants.

"(Employers) have more control over their costs this way, but if you can't offer them what they need . . . it won't be successful," says Gray.

A meticulous plan and thorough self assessments help identify the market for your services and determine if you are the type of person that can succeed as a consultant.

While there are many consultants out there -- and the number continues to grow -- only the most specialized earn the big bucks, according to human resources experts.

"People often look at it as a way to get re-employment, they look at new career options . . . but many people realize it also provides autonomy," says Elizabeth Stevenson, who is with Knightsbridge Career Management, adding only the most specialized experts get the highest rates for their services.

One of the biggest advantages, according to Stevenson, is that consultants normally have a number of employers.

"There's no severance at the end of it and no guaranteed paycheque, but the reality is that you have so many clients that you don't have to rely on any one company for your pay," says Stevenson.

Consultants often use the concept as a means of earning cash while hunting for a permanent job and find the market can be so lucrative that the search for a full-time job ceases.

Also, consultants aren't necessarily affected by industry changes. When the oil and gas markets soften, for example, consultants can turn their sights to technology firms, agricultural operations, and other sectors.

"For people who are generalists, then maybe there is more competition out there, but if you're deemed to be an expert in your field, then there's a lot of money to be made," says Stevenson.

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