

Consulting – a scary, thrilling, adventure NOT for the faint hearted

By Debbie Craig

“Success is not built on success. It’s built on failure. It’s built on frustration. Sometimes it’s built on catastrophe.” - Sumner Redstone

How it all started

A few months ago, I received a LinkedIn notice that I had been 21 years with Catalyst Consulting, which I founded in 1997 when I was but a young pup full of the enthusiasm and optimism of youth. It took me back to that time when I was working in corporate and frustrated with the slow decision making, politics and sick building syndrome. I was then married to a serial entrepreneur whose mission in life was to create or convert as many entrepreneurs as he could. He gave me the “nudge” out the nest that I needed.

The early days were a heady adventure as I started out sub-contracting my time to facilitate a variety of team-building and other workshops and helping my husband build more entrepreneurs and expand his own financial services business. There were many critical learning moments through my own thrilling successes and humbling failures, but also observing many other entrepreneurs succeed or suffer. This included experiencing a retrenchment and sequestration (my husbands) before the age of 30. I was lucky to work with many informal mentors over the years. Many of these people encouraged me to believe in my talent, try new things and take leaps of faith. They were also thought partners for bouncing ideas around and were willing to give me constructive feedback when I was unaware of my impact.

The best and worst of times

The worst part of consulting being uncertain of where your next piece of work and income is coming from. You need to be out there every day, networking, listening, being curious and creative with possibilities. You also need to face many a rejection and survive the quiet months staying committed and believing in yourself despite feeling anxious.



The best part of consulting is knowing that I have made a meaningful difference to individuals or organisations that will ultimately result in a better South Africa. I get to choose the way I invest my time, who I work with and how I balance my energy levels. I get to meet many interesting people, learn, write, speak, influence, innovate and inspire. Just don’t be fooled with the “freedom” of being your own boss. I am my own worst “boss” and give myself ridiculous deadlines, struggle to say no to unreasonable demands, and often end up working for my client and team to ensure we can pay the bills and help our clients look good. You also never stop thinking about the work, the clients, the risks, your team ... at all hours of the day and night!!

Tips for starting your own consulting business

- Know the **mindsets and skills** you need for consulting, do a gap analysis and start building these.
- Assess your **fit for consulting**. It is not for the faint hearted, slow movers, stress bunnies or comfort seekers.
- Start **building your network** now. Be interested and curious in others, their lives and their struggles. Reach out, share, participate and start small.
- Build your own unique **thought leadership** on emerging challenges and trends and read widely. Subscribe to great sources and make time for learning every week.
- Build a group of **people around you** that will stretch your thinking, give you honest feedback and support you when times are tough. The right coach or mentor at the right time can fast-track your growth and expand your options.
- Finally build your **financial and commercial acumen** to understand the drivers of a business, so that you can build a sustainable business and add business value for clients.

We need many more entrepreneurs and business owners in our country. If this interests you, do it. Just do it with your eyes open and with a plan, to ensure that you end up in the 25% of businesses that succeed rather than the 75% that don't make it.

“The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it.” – Henry David Thoreau

Contact

For more information on our unique high impact culture, leadership, talent and learning approaches contact me at debbie@catalystconsulting.co.za or view our website www.catalystconsulting.co.za



About the Author:

Debbie Craig – a passionate adventurer, global traveller and mountain climber, curious dolphin swimmer and ocean lover, philosophical dreamer, hopeless romantic, dysfunctional over-achiever, compulsive seeker & sharer, courageous difference maker, patriotic South African, author, facilitator, yoga nut, wine snob, dog lover, guardian mom, step mom, wife and friend

Some interesting tit bits: travelled to more than 60 countries, hiked to Machu Pichu, Kilimanjaro and Everest Base Camp, over 60 swims with dolphins, over 5 trips to India to explore her inner world, facilitated over 50 personal transformational workshops, facilitated business workshops with people from over 30 countries in 5 continents, written 3 books, guardian mom to 3 kids, step mom to 2 kids

Also: adventured through life's darker parts including divorce, unhealthy relationships, sequestration, retrenchment, loss of loved ones, betrayal, broken bones and inner struggles to over-come self-doubt and be our best selves

The usual stuff

Debbie has over 20 years' experience in the field of strategy, leadership development, change management, talent management, high performance teams and organisational development. She has worked and consulted at leading local and global organisations in the private and public sector throughout Southern Africa and internationally in the UK, Australia, South East Asia, South America, Mexico, China, Canada, Europe and the USA. Debbie is a skilled strategist, design architect, team builder, a powerful facilitator, change agent and executive coach. Her passion is transformation and empowerment which she facilitates through individual coaching and empowerment workshops, team-development workshops, corporate training and consulting assignments and organisation wide strategic change interventions. Debbie is the founder and Managing Director of Catalyst Consulting which she has grown into a successful consulting company (now 21 years old). She is also the founder of World Alive, a personal empowerment and transformation company. She is a registered Master HR Professional through the SA Board for People Practices (SABPP).

Debbie has published 3 books "I am Talent", "I am Alive" and "Accelerated Learning", written numerous articles, appeared on radio talk shows, presented at conferences and does public talks. Debbie is a warm and down to earth facilitator, leader and life

coach. She has many real examples in her own life and in many of her delegates on creating a fulfilling life of abundance. She is an engaging presenter with practical advice and information that is easy to apply.

Some unusual stuff

Debbie is a regular hiker and has hiked to Machu Pichu, Kilimanjaro and Everest Base Camp. She swims regularly with dolphins in the wild and resonates with their playful, sensual, energy, their intelligence, their focus on protection and survival and their complex yet fluid social patterns. She looks after 3 guardian children and 2 step kids. Debbie is passionate and deeply committed to her own personal development journey, reads extensively and has participated in numerous in-depth transformation experiences including many trips to India where she has studied mindfulness and living a life of fulfilment, abundance and flow including mediation, dance, yoga, tai chi, art and experiential workshops. Debbie has designed and facilitated over 50 Personal Transformation workshops. She is passionate about South Africa and making a difference to People's lives.