



**PIERCE
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HOW EMBRACING DIFFICULT TASKS CAN MAKE YOU A BETTER CONSULTANT

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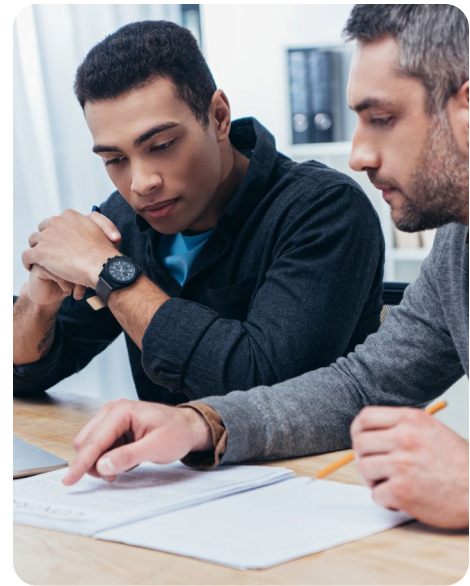
By design, consultants encounter difficult tasks on a daily basis. Not only do the projects frequently involve complex processes and problems, but working with clients can be challenging as well.

In the midst of a stressful situation or difficult project, you're probably not thinking about how this situation will benefit you in the future. But the fact is, challenging situations drive personal and professional growth, ultimately giving you the experience and confidence needed to be a better consultant.

HOW TO EMBRACE DIFFICULT TASKS THAT COME YOUR WAY

Sagi Koborsi, Managing Director of EMEA at Pierce Washington, has over 13 years of enterprise CPQ and B2B ecommerce experience, handling complex projects on a daily basis.

Here, he shares his experience and tips on how you can learn to better handle difficult tasks as they come:



TAKE YOUR TIME BEFORE REACTING.

As a consultant, you'll undoubtedly be faced with situations and clients that will trigger a reaction; for example, an upset client or a request that's unreasonable or out of scope. Oftentimes, in an attempt to appease a client, a new or inexperienced consultant will do whatever it takes to ensure the client is happy.

"One of the key skills consultants can develop in handling difficult situations is not reacting immediately," Sagi says. "When a client is unhappy about something, for example, it's important to listen and make sure they understand that they've been heard. Oftentimes, they simply want to voice their concerns and make sure their concerns are heard. Once you've done that, you can start to address the problem at hand and determine the correct course of actions."

The same skill will come in handy when you're inevitably asked by a client to do something out of scope. "A situation like requires a consultant to be able to step back and regroup with their team, rather than immediately responding," Sagi explains. Becoming comfortable with telling clients you will discuss it with your team and get back to them, rather than saying yes or no immediately, will help manage expectations.



COMMUNICATE—AND OVER-COMMUNICATE IN SOME CASES.

Effective communication is essential in the workplace, and this is especially true when it comes to managing your workload. While constant status updates aren't necessary, if you're unable to meet a deadline due to a new priority or a project that has taken more time than anticipated, it's better to over-communicate than miss a deadline with no explanation.

For example, if you've been tasked with a new, high-priority problem and determine it will take much longer than planned to address, make sure you inform your project manager and other team members so they can reprioritize or manage expectations.

BREAK THINGS INTO MANAGEABLE TASKS.

It's easy to quickly become overwhelmed by the complexity and size of a task, which can make even the best and most organized people freeze in their tracks and end up wasting time.

Sagi recommends overcoming this common problem by breaking the activity into more manageable tasks. "The best way to tackle it is to jump straight in and separate the problem into different silos or areas, and then tackle it accordingly," he says. "This way, you're actually making progress and can ask questions as they arise."



DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP.

If you find yourself lost or faced with a task you are unable to handle, don't be afraid to ask for help from team members or more senior employees. This is something that Pierce Washington encourages. "Something we preach internally is to not be afraid to ask questions," Sagi says. "Our consultants have a support system within the organization, and we encourage them to use it."

Many of the senior consultants within an organization will likely have been through the same situations you're facing. As you do so, however, it's important to ask specific questions rather than throwing up your hands and saying, "I don't know what to do."



In his early days at Pierce Washington, Sagi recalls doing this very thing. “In the beginning, I would go to one of our senior employees with questions that weren’t very specific. He gave me valuable feedback and encouraged me to come with examples of what I had already tried to solve the problem, as well as specific questions I had about the issue I was encountering.”

This not only shows that you’ve attempted to address the problem on your own, but it also helps your colleagues better understand where you’re getting stuck, and how they can effectively help you.

STEP AWAY AND TAKE A BREAK.

Sometimes, taking a step away from a situation is all that’s really needed to help you approach a problem with a fresh perspective or help you regroup. “Sometimes, all it takes is checking out for a bit,” Sagi says. “Often, you’ll do that and then come back feeling refreshed and ready to get back into it. We encourage people to find out whatever it is that helps them regulate stress and incorporate it as part of their day.” This could be meditation, going for a walk, drawing or anything that helps you exit mentally (and physically, if needed) from a stressful situation.



GROWTH FROM CHALLENGE

No consultant is immune to difficult situations or clients. Looking at them for what they really are—opportunities for your personal and professional growth—will ultimately make you a better, more confident consultant. Here’s how:

YOU’LL BE A BETTER LISTENER.

As a consultant, dealing with highly complex projects and processes is only part of it. Client-facing work sometimes means handling individuals who may be resistant to change, making active listening a must as you try and gain a deep understanding of their needs, goals, challenges, and expectations.

It’s a skill that takes practice, too. “It can be very difficult at first, because it requires you to stop and actively listen rather than jumping in right away,” Sagi says. “Someone who can actually listen, take notes, and then come back with pointed questions—especially early on in the consulting relationship—helps build trust and rapport with the client.”



YOU'LL HONE YOUR PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS.

Complex projects often come with complex problems to solve, some of which you may never have dealt with before. These are opportunities that allow you to approach problems from different angles, explore unconventional ideas, and identify opportunities that others may overlook. With each new project comes an opportunity to strengthen your problem-solving skills, helping you to be better-prepared as new issues arise.

YOU'LL BUILD TRUST WITH YOUR CLIENTS.

One of the most valuable ways you can build trust with a client is by showing them you're capable of handling difficult scenarios as they arise, and there's no better way to do so than through experience. "When you interact with a client, they will know right away whether or not you've already handled a problem or task at hand," Sagi says. "When you can draw on past experiences from previous clients, whether it's a process you've re-worked or some other complex problem, you're able to gain the trust of your clients much faster."

The more you've experienced, the more comfortable and confident you'll be with future clients as well.

EMBRACE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Embracing uncomfortable situations can be difficult. But as you learn to effectively handle conflict, break down challenging tasks, and tackle the unknown, you'll come out on the other side a more confident, experienced consultant.

