

I AM CONSULTING

“Oh, so you are out of work.”

If you are not working full time but have been consulting, there are some very specific things you need to do to avoid this response.

By Vincent Scaramuzzo, Ed-Exec Inc.

It is cruel, it is unfair and it is frustrating, but unfortunately it is often very true. The second a candidate tells one of my recruiters or a hiring manager for one of my clients that they are “consulting,” our knee-jerk reaction is, “Oh, so you are out of work.”

What is it that elicits such a cynical response from us? Essentially, you are paying for the sins of those who have gone before you. It seems to be a growing trend (and one not unique to education) among those who have been laid off, fired or who have resigned from their positions. Many of these individuals seem like they can’t get to their LinkedIn accounts fast enough to change their current assignment to something more like the following (all names are fictitious):

“Anthony is now a higher education consultant at (Anthony’s last name) Consulting,” or “Andy is now founder and CEO at Higher Education Consulting.”

Let’s address these examples specifically, as my intent is not to make anyone feel bad here, but simply to try and help. First, if you are going to name a consulting company, you need to actually have a business with that name. That could be a sole

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proprietorship, partnership, LLC or S corporation. I personally recommend either an LLC or an S-corp, depending on your state income tax laws, but of course please consult with your accountant. Anything less is like having a five-cent lemonade stand in your front yard and saying you own a bar.

Your business should be backed up by a website, literature and so on. If you are simply declaring yourself a “consultant” to bridge a period of unemployment in your career, it can look both very obvious and very desperate. The truth is, it is OK to be unemployed for short periods of time, especially if your tenure track record is very good and you have multiple references from each of your last jobs. So, make sure to tap your network and ask for references and, most importantly, LinkedIn recommendations.

Now, for the folks who are actually doing consulting, you need to quickly differentiate yourself from those who are merely borrowing the title. There are several things you can do:

- Update your LinkedIn profile and resume to reflect your current consulting assignment. Don’t be afraid to ask the person who contracted your services if you can list a project directly by name.
- Specifically list your consulting efforts, including tasks, goals and accomplishments. If you are helping to attain success for an organization, you need to highlight it. This is a huge sell to your next potential employer.
- List detailed dates and timelines of the consulting project.
- Ask for references and LinkedIn recommendations. Nothing helps more than this to seal your reputation as a trusted and valuable consultant.

Consulting is great work if you can get it. Unfortunately, many take the consulting title without actually ever doing a real consulting gig. Use the title wisely, differentiate yourself and don’t be an “out-of-work” consultant.



Vincent Scaramuzzo is President of Ed-Exec Inc., one of the leading executive search firms in education. As a specialist in the education field, Scaramuzzo works nationally with universities, colleges, online schools and career schools. He can be contacted at Vincent@Ed-Exec.com or 860.781.7641.