CONSULTING

Five Things I Know About Internal Consulting: *Insider Knowledge, Outsider Edge*

B. Kim Barnes
THE INFLUENCE GURU

An internal consultant's value lies in the balance between what an insider knows and what an outsider sees.

1 Manage your boundaries.

Because you're an insider, a "member of the team," you may be asked to share information that ought to be kept confidential. Let others know what you can and can't do with what you learn from clients and their teams and organizations.

2 Speak truth to power.

Don't withhold or soften information that your client may not want to hear. Senior leaders, in particular, are often "protected" from unpleasant or dis-confirming information – and this can lead to bad decisions.

3 Stay on the edge.

Your value as an internal consultant lies in the balance between your "insider" knowledge of the organization – its members, culture, and history – and your "outsider," objective viewpoint. If you become too comfortable in the organization, you may lose that edge.

4 Hold on to your skepticism.

Trust is key to good relationships with your clients – all the same, you need to develop an independent assessment and view of situations you're called on to deal with if you are to make a valuable contribution. In complex organizations, many viewpoints are necessary to understand the bigger picture. Explore counter-intuitive explanations for problems and issues as well as the more obvious ones.

5 Negotiate strong agreements with your clients.

Be explicit in asking for what you need in order to do the required work. Rather than being a "pair of hands" for your client, become a partner, with each of you playing an agreed-upon role and following a set of ground rules and practices that you both believe will achieve the results you hope for.

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Founder of **The Influence Guru**, Kim Barnes is a coach, facilitator, and author with more than forty years of experience in leadership, influence, and organization development. She was a founder and, for many years, CEO of Barnes & Conti Associates, and developed or co-developed programs including *Exercising Influence*, *Inspirational Leadership*, *Intelligent Risk-Taking*, *Consulting on the Inside*, and *Managing Innovation*. She is the author of six books, including *Exercising Influence* (Wiley) and *Building Better Ideas* (Berrett-Koehler). She works with enterprise companies, government agencies, small businesses, and individuals from the San Francisco Bay Area.

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