

## WHAT IS THE SECRET OF THE RECORDS MANAGEMENT

### CONSULTANT'S EFFECTIVENESS?

by

William J. Gray, founder of the Records Management Company of Canada

(Transcript of a tape recorded address)

It is difficult for some people who have not worked with a professional records management consultant to understand how they can come into a strange organization and tell its staff anything it doesn't already know.

His contribution, however, is derived from his capacious knowledge of, and ability to apply effectively, principles of good records management to any organization.

During the year 1948, Emmett J. Leahy, the granddaddy of records management, installed one of the first know records retention programs in private industry. Backed by 23 years of experience solving paperwork problems for the American Federal Government, he was well on his way to becoming North America's first professional Records Management consultant.

I emphasize "well on his way" because an isolated installation doesn't make anyone a professional Records Management consultant any more than a single raindrop makes a thunderstorm.

Neither does ten or more years of experience installing records retention programs make a person a Records Management consultant any more than ten years of cataloguing children's books make a person a professional librarian.

Mind you, the experience may contribute towards making him an expert in his field, but it is still a far cry from the broad experience required of the truly professional Records Management consultant.

Records Management, as we practice it, is a far reaching subject, the breadth of which is only measured by the assignment, or the need.

In essence, our brand of records management begins with the ovum at one end of the information spectrum, and only ends years later with the incubation of an idea in the mind of the historian.

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In any event, between you and me, there is a real need for both experts and professionals in the records management field.

The distinctive qualities of a truly professional Records Management consultant, just like the character of an individual, is determined by what he does, and not just by what he says. Quite obviously, what he does depends on the limits of his resources.

In this particular case, the resources of a professional Records Management consultant include a sound education at a senior level, a broad experience not restricted to the field in which he is now working, and the ability to help his clients identify, define and solve their problems.

Problem recognition is an art. And, as with every other form of art, success is measured by time and practice.

The professional consultant is adept at defining the causes of paperwork and information retrieval problems, and at suggesting practical ways to overcome them. **He is not sidetracked by symptoms.**

In effect, he doesn't solve symptoms any more than a doctor treats a sore throat. He arrives at the true nature of the problem by the same road travelled by the doctor when he ascertains the true nature of the disease before treating it.

By way of example, a recent survey revealed that a consultant gave the most satisfaction when the problem was well-defined either by him or the organization before work on the assignment was started.

Another important factor contributing to his effectiveness is his deep concern and awareness of the human aspects in the problem as opposed to the "hardware" and technical considerations.

He favors the teacher type role on assignments rather than the imperative approach. He spends a great deal of effort transferring significant knowledge and problem solving ability to his client's personnel, and in obtaining their willing participation.

Of equal importance is the consultant's receptiveness to new ideas and information furnished by his client and staff. As a matter of fact, we at Records Management Company enjoy nothing better than to develop new ideas in unison with our client.

Accordingly, to increase his effectiveness, he dedicates a large portion of his working year, and his Sundays too, learning how to use new techniques and devices.

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He never stops learning. It is a well-known fact, that as a group, consultants have been applying the principle of continuing education for a very long time.

He prefers the long-term approach to "putting out brush fires". He seeks help from everyone he can while on a job without disturbing their work. He explains the reasons behind the real problem, and offers helpful suggestions for minor corrections whenever possible as he goes along.

He works to a design. He collects both quantitative data as well as qualitative information. He sells the end result as he toils.

He is very cost conscious, and always equates cost with efficiency. He uses mathematical models and modules in his work.

He maintains his integrity, objectivity, judgment, temper, and ability to communicate coherently under the most trying circumstances.

And finally, there is one other quality worth mentioning. It is endurance. The mortality rate among near consultants is one of the highest in the professions. Unless he has something concrete to offer, his end is not too far off.

John and I have been around a long time. John was consultant to the State of Louisiana, 1956 - 1958. I have been helping people solve their paperwork and information retrieval problems professionally since 1954.

Over the years, we have developed certain standards and short-cuts which have been useful in meeting recurring situations. Some of them are unique; others are adaptations.

For instance, John Andreassen has developed a workable pattern for the inventory and transfer under agreement, to the Dominion Archives, of archival material belonging to proprietary crown companies. He has done the same thing for 3-dimensional objects of an educational and historical character. This should help to make the work of the historian much easier.

On the other hand, I have developed standards for the processing of both current and non-current records. One of these is quite unique. I developed it while installing Canadian National Railways' 400,000 square foot Records Servicentre.

It is a very simple, inexpensive manually operated document retrieval system which quickly pinpoints any document in an inactive records centre. It requires only 10 to 15 minutes of instruction, and once learned, is never forgotten.

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For instance, Hydro-Quebec prides itself on less than a minute and a half information or document recall regardless of whether the document in question is on the first or third floor of their modern and efficient 35,000 square foot records centre.

Mr. Denis Deslongchamps, Hydro-Quebec's Records Manager would be only too happy to show you around the next time you are in Montreal. Call him.

Under normal circumstances, a consultant's study results in a report. The type of report he prepares depends on the details of his initial assignment plus any changes made to it during the study. It may be a feasibility report, an evaluation report or a procedural report complete with a step by step plan for its implementation.

Depending on the type of assignment, one of the most critical periods during the program is the implementation stage. Inertia often sets in and management freezes at the wheel of decision. A professional consultant attains his most crowning achievement and shows his effectiveness when he gets a reluctant management to install much needed improvements.

Putting recommendations into effect is a joint responsibility between the client's staff and the consultant, with the overall planning and co-ordination being done by the consultant.

During this phase of the program, the professional consultant once again proves his effectiveness by keeping the program on the right track. He does this by constantly reviewing the performance of his client's staff without encroaching on their responsibilities.

Now a word about co-operation.

There is no doubt about it, the records manager, the archivist and the historian are tied together by the chain of circumstances. We should, therefore, work together.

At the moment, in my opinion, the weakest link in the chain is co-operation. I further believe that the one area of co-operation which would benefit everyone the most is a co-ordinated program of enlightenment. The most important benefits from such a program which readily come to mind are:

1. Our image which is hazy would be sharpened.
2. Doors which are closed would be opened.
3. Profits and knowledge which are leaking away would be saved.

We could enhance our combined and individual image through a concerted and co-ordinated public relations program. **Indulging in** public relations is not unprofessional. Other professions are using it with great effect.

We could start the ball rolling with a simple inexpensive program for the mailing of appropriate reprints and newsletters to a selected group of businessmen and government officials. We might even get their Public Relations group to put one of two of them in their lobbies for visitors to read. I have still to see a copy of the Records Management Quarterly, the Canadian Archivist or the Business History Review in a client's lobby.

These items would help remove the cloak of mystery our professions wear and would show the recipient how he would benefit from knowing us better.

For example, the records manager is only now living down his reputation as a destroyer of records, and taking his rightful place as a builder of more efficient and useful systems.

Co-operation could extend to the university, and to seminars and conferences such as this one. In my opinion, university courses, seminars and conferences should always provide for reciprocal speakers.

To ensure a high degree of proficiency, a speakers bureau including speakers from each of the three professions should be set up geographically.

A concerted effort by everyone might even needle more universities into expanding their curriculum to our mutual benefit.

Furthermore, a concerted effort is certain to help you get more for your services and open new opportunities for employment for each of you.

We at the Records Management Company are already doing our part as best we can, but we are only a single voice in the wilderness. How about climbing aboard? I am sure you can think of other useful areas of co-operation.

(This address was made available to those who attended the session on "The Canadian Archivist" at C.H.A., Calgary. Ed.)