



Profiles of Electrical Engineers and Computer Scientists



Brent Chapman

**President and Owner
Great Circle Associates Incorporated
Mountain View, CA**

Education:

B.S. - EECS, University of California at Berkeley

Job Description:

Owner and President; works with other consulting clients setting up and presenting training seminars on building Internet firewalls.

Advice to Students:

"Consultants have to be able to communicate well."

Video Transcript 1:

"If you're going to be a successful consultant or contractor, you've got to be able to deal with uncertainty. Okay? You've got a job today, you may not have something lined up for next week or next month. The way you deal with that is by charging enough when you are working that you can ride out those periods when you're not working. But, if you're going to get completely stressed out because you don't know where your next paycheck is coming from, if you don't have the financial discipline to save the money when it is coming in so that you'll have some to spend when it's not coming in, then consulting or contracting is not going to work out well for you."

Interview:

Brent Chapman, president of Great Circle Associates, Inc., explains that a consulting business is built up slowly. His own plan when starting out was cautious: "I'm going to build the consulting business. . .on the side until it reaches a level that I think can sustain itself, . . .and then I'm going to leave my full time, regular employee's position." He made contacts over time and co-authored a book with Elizabeth Zwickey entitled Building Internet Fire Walls which has produced many inquiries. At present, most of his clients come through referrals.

According to Chapman those who wish to go into consulting have to have special qualities. They have to be willing to handle the daily phone calls and a great deal of paperwork letters, invoicing, taxes. Furthermore, running a business out of one's home means that, in effect, "one lives at work." Chapman has found a solution for the latter problem. "I take pains to separate

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the part of the house. . .which is my office from the rest of the house. . . .And I try to keep the office stuff confined to the office." Some people find it difficult to maintain such a clear division. Either they can't get away from work or they can't get motivated to go to work.

Consultants also have to be willing to live with uncertainty. Because it is not possible to schedule new jobs to begin just as old ones end, consultants may have periods of little or no work and, therefore, of few or no earnings. Chapman warns, "If you're going to get completely stressed out because you don't know where your next paycheck is coming from, if you don't have the financial discipline to save the money when it is coming in so that you'll have some to spend when it's not coming in, then consulting. . .is not going to work out well for you."

Finally, Chapman points out that consultants have to be able to communicate well. Consulting entails listening to clients: "listening to what is said and also listening to what is not said to understand what their problems are and what their concerns are and what their priorities are. And then. . .communicating to them what you think they can do." The reality is that "someone who cannot communicate well or who doesn't like sitting in meetings. . .is probably not going to be happy as a consultant."

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