

# **BELGIAN SENIOR CONSULTANTS**

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## **1. WHO ARE WE?**

Belgian Senior Consultants (A.S.B.L.), in existence for over 15 years, is a non-profit association made up of 500 pensioners (executives, company directors, civil servants and technicians) who place their skills, knowledge and experience at the service of the community, for free.

These individuals represent a wealth of know-how that can help young people, the self-employed, SMEs, various institutions and bodies and not-for-profit organisations lacking the resources to make use of paid consultants.

## **2. SOCIAL ROLE**

Preventing the waste of a tremendous potential of knowledge and experience;

- Keeping senior citizens -sometimes pushed into retirement at an early age- active by enabling them to remain useful and to keep up their contacts with the country's social and economic developments.

## **3. AREAS OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INITIATIVES**

- Start-up of new businesses
- Management, human resources, administration, accounting
- Marketing, export, import
- Legal, taxation, insurance, technical problems
- Informatics, ISO 9000
- Contacts with universities (research, conferences, etc.)
- Motivation and organisation seminars

## **4. BREAKDOWN OF SKILLS (diversity)**

1. Engineers: 35%.
  - Economists and financial experts: 17%.
  - Law - legal experts: 8%.
  - Political and social sciences, psychology, education: 5%.
  - Other (doctors, veterinarians, technicians, agronomists, self-employed, IT specialists): 32%.

## **5. HELP FOR YOUNG DIRECTORS OF SMEs**

Participation in Employment Forums organised by regional and local governments:

- Defining young people's professional plans and objectives  
Determining education or training possibilities.
- Establishing a job-search programme (full-time work).
- Presenting a simulation in front of a television camera: the C.V., the cover letter, the job interview.

Assistance to young self-employed persons:

- Critical study of projects, goal-setting.
- Feasibility plan, financial plan, marketing, personnel.
- Administrative formalities.
- Sponsoring of candidate.

Training through in-service programmes in another country: (see point 10).

Organisation of in-service programmes in Great Britain (Kent) for students and company staff. The programmes last six to twelve months. In addition to the professional knowledge they provide, the programmes enable participants to acquire knowledge of everyday and technical English. Participants are housed with families and the business is chosen in terms of the applicant's education or specialisation. Social affairs are not neglected: several in-service programmes are offered in this area.

Observations:

- The young people who contact B.S.C. are serious, motivated and want to succeed.
- They follow the advice they are given and do not hesitate to get in touch with B.S.C. again if they have a problem.

## **6. AID FOR THE OVER-45**

- At the request of the King Baudouin Foundation, B. S. C. organised a project of assistance for those over age 45 wishing to start a self-employed business.
- Setting of new objectives in terms of the applicant's educational background, past career and aspirations.
- Assistance launching the project.
- Sponsorship.
- Observations:
  - Of the 40 candidates for the King Baudouin Foundation project, 6 were successful
  - the influence of the surroundings was very important: in addition to personal stress, opposition by the family (no risk) and pervasive pessimism were preponderant factors. Two other elements came into play: too much red tape and financial problems (in Great Britain, formalities take only one day).

B.S.C. is continuing to provide advice, assistance and sponsoring to all those age 45 and over who apply for help.

## **7. AID TO BODIES IN THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR**

In this field too, the King Baudouin Foundation asked B.S.C. to conduct audits of non-profit enterprises applying for aid offered by the Foundation (opinion on the reliability of the enterprises and the merit of the aid requested).

Even more than start-ups, many non-profit associations suffer from a pronounced management and organisation deficit and only rarely have qualified managers who are rigorous in their approach.

Non-profit associations very rarely interest working people so we are not creating unfair competition by taking on these tasks.

Certain non-profit associations (S.A.M.U., ambulances) have called on us to organise and conduct seminars to motivate their personnel and to help them solve accounting or administrative problems.

Clinics and hospitals turn to B.S.C. for feasibility studies, to prepare a reorganisation of services or to review IT and accounting plans.

## **8. AID TO ENTERPRISES**

- Preliminary conditions for all interventions:
  - The assistance must be ad hoc and limited in time (with the exception of sponsoring).
  - respect for B.S.C.'s code of professional ethics: not taking the place of a working person.
  - Confidentiality and building mutual trust.
  
- Interventions begin with an analysis of the problems the enterprise is experiencing. The variety of specialisms covered by B.S.C.'s experts make it possible to respond to the deficiencies observed. In some cases, several experts are called on to find solutions to multiple or complex problems.
  
- Types of aid: see areas of intervention above.  
Management, financial, accounting, information processing, export-import, cost-price studies and fixing of selling price, ISO 9000 certification for small enterprises.
  
- Observations:
  - The difficulty an entrepreneur might experience confiding in someone vanishes when the B.S.C. expert intervenes without self-importance. Experience, age and practical knowledge of all the problems being addressed encourage confidence.
  - A young businessman or one experiencing difficulties rarely has the means to turn to a consulting firm and yet has urgent needs for such services.
  - The advice of a "wise man" is needed and the pragmatism of B.S.C.'s experts is greatly appreciated.

## **9. AID TO ADMINISTRATIONS**

- Regional and local administrations have turned to B.S.C. for long-term missions that are often complex in nature and necessitate the presence of several experts.

We might mention:

- the inventory of the assets of the commune, i.e. the local administrative area (12 to 15 months for 5 experts at the rate of 2 to 3 days a week).
- the organisation of language courses in provinces leading to the hiring of several teachers specialised in guiding conversation tables
  - the audit of bodies that are satellites of the communes and the selection of volunteer directors for cultural or social centres.
- Participation in the introduction of information processing systems.
- Accounts management advice for inter-municipal firms in difficulty.
- Co-operation with Forem (Belgian training and employment office), which entrusts sponsorships to B.S.C.
- Observations:
  - B.S.C. maintains excellent relations with provinces and communes. The advice of senior citizens is requested and put into practice.
  - The administrations do not always have the possibility of carrying out different projects owing to a lack of personnel and financial resources.

## 10. AID TO DEVELOPING AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

These assignments are obtained through the EU or the EBRD. They turn to B.S.C. when they are unable to find on the consultancy market the experts with the skills needed to respond to the criteria set by the country requesting aid.

B.S.C. is chosen because of:

- its availability
- its varied skills and experience working abroad (several of our experts spent their careers in other countries)
- the motivation of its members and the acceptance of very basic working conditions (housing, transport, food, safety).
- its pragmatism.
- Tasks carried out (non-exhaustive list):
  - Case studies in Belgium and assignments in China, Mongolia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, North Africa, Spain, Kazakhstan, etc.
  - Sponsoring: preparation of business start-ups for African graduates (CREASUD).

Observations:

- The eastern European countries are very appreciative of the pragmatism of B.S.C.'s experts, who have to work with material that is often obsolete, and which they manage to renovate and improve.

- This approach is realistic when dealing with countries without financial possibilities.
- In Africa and eastern Europe, respect for elders is such that contacts and communication are established easily and advice is put into practice scrupulously.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**

Senior citizens still have a role to defend in our society. They are appreciated and admired for their will, their wish to help others, their reliability and their motivation.

Very often, commercial enterprises would like to keep older workers, whom the clientele esteem for their value and their knowledge of the products.

Posts go unfilled because of a lack of qualified young people (IT specialists, specialised engineers, construction workers, superior specialised technicians). While waiting to pass on the torch, as enterprises hope to do, why not turn to senior citizens? It is not a question of taking jobs away from young people, but of temporarily compensating for a shortage of qualifications on their part.

Enterprises turn to specialists to organise seminars for newly hired young people, to teach them the corporate culture, to integrate them into the team, to teach them work procedures and so on. Why not keep an older worker on a few more months to sponsor the young worker?

Hire senior citizens... yes, but, in accordance with B.S.C.'s philosophy, namely, without taking a job away from a young person or a working person.

See original French text in the annex