

The 6 Things to Look For in Your ISO 14001 Consultant

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Selecting an ISO 14001 Consultant is not the same as choosing an Environmental Consultant!

Today, nearly all “environmental activities” have become commodities, pushed by “lean manufacturing” and all types of financial pressures. In fact, some large corporations treat purchasing environmental services the same as purchasing “widgets”, setting up “target” pricing, and using numerous methods to drive down prices in an ever continuing drive to “be competitive” with overseas competition.

However, whenever the **survival** of a business or business segment is concerned, a firm cannot be *too careful*. And, acquiring or *retaining* ISO 14001 certification has become a matter of survival in today’s worldwide marketplace where ISO 14001 failure (and yes, even sometimes just delay) will *preclude* a business from *continuing its existing business* or timely penetrating new markets to grow *its existing business (especially overseas where ISO 14001 is, in many cases, a pre-condition to even quoting on business)*.

So, it becomes critical to choose an ISO 14001 Consultant who can assure that a facility will conform to their Registrar’s interpretation of the standard (including the “new” ISO 14001:2004 Standard). This is a **skill**, developed over years, and is not a commodity (environmental) service, as many have learned the hard way. Having been responsible for the ISO14001 certification of nearly a thousand facilities worldwide, I have found that there are six characteristics common to ISO14001 Consultants who are *successful* in gaining their clientele ISO 14001 certification, or continuing their clientele’s ISO 14001 certification, as follows:

1. First of all, success is dependent upon the **individual** (not the consulting firm) who is in your facility managing the ISO 14001 consultancy service. Choose wisely. Do not be misled by the type or number of professional registrations or certifications a firm has, the total number of professional registrations or certifications can obfuscate that no one individual has a sufficiently **in-depth** understanding of ISO 14001 and the practices of the Accreditation bodies and Registrars. The *only* credentials that matter are those of the **individual working at your facility**. No firm can legitimately guarantee a successful ISO 14001 registration, but firms or individuals those who are ignorant of RABQSA, IAF, JAB, RvA, UKAS, etc. practices are blind, and the last thing you need is, the “blind leading the blind”. Again, choose wisely. Interview face-to-face the individual ISO 14001 Consultant, and be sure that you are comfortable with that individual and their ISO 14001 competency. If you are not comfortable, do you think the ISO 14001 Registrar will be comfortable with the propriety and effectiveness of your ISO 14001 System? If the firm is unwilling to allow you to interview **your** ISO 14001 Consultant, RUN, don’t walk away.

2. The **individual** must have an Engineering or Science degree, and be registered as either a Professional Engineer (P.E.) or have at least RAB (now RABQSA) ISO 14001 Lead Auditor status. Validate both degree and status.
3. The **individual** ISO 14001 Consultant conducting the in-plant activities **must have at least four years (48 months) of industrial environmental experience,** and the more hazardous the industrial environmental experience, the better. This means that someone who has chemical plant background is much more likely to be an excellent ISO 14001 Consultant than someone who has a utility plant background. Request the individual's resume and validate their experience at random.
4. The **individual** ISO 14001 Consultant conducting the in-plant activities **must have been the ISO 14001 Lead Auditor on at least fifty (50) ISO 14001 Registration (either Stage 1 or Stage 2, but preferably, at least half were Stage 2) Audits.** Those with lesser experience are wannabes (they may be an excellent ISO 14001 Lead Auditor, but they still can be unskilled in the nuances of Accreditation Body interpretations if they don't have at least 50 ISO 14001 Lead Audits "under their belt"), and one would be a fool to risk one's business on a wannabe. And, ask for and validate that ISO 14001 Lead Auditor experience at random (if the individual or firm is unwilling to provide you with a copy of the "project manager's" (i.e., the lead individual's) ISO 14001 Auditor Log, RUN, don't walk away). And non-ISO 14001 Audits don't count! ISO 9000, QS, TS, OHSAS, RC, etc., are all nice audits, but they really don't matter for ISO 14001 implementation.
5. The **individual** ISO 14001 Consultant **must be able to demonstrate that s/he has implemented at least three (3) ISO 14001 conformant systems.** This means that *in addition to the experience required to complete #s 3 & 4 above,* the individual must have spent 3 years just implementing ISO 14001 conformant systems (it takes, on average, 11 months to fully implement an ISO 14001 conformant system, start to finish). And, as in #4 above, ask for and validate that ISO 14001 implementation experience at random (again, if the individual or firm is unwilling to provide you with at least three references for the individual's ISO 14001 Implementation experience, RUN, don't walk away).
6. The **individual** ISO 14001 Consultant **must be able to demonstrate that s/he has conducted at least three rigorous, Environmental Compliance Audits in the country where the candidate ISO 14001 facility is located.** Proper and Effective Environmental Compliance Audits (as mandated by Clause 4.5.1 in ISO 14001:1996 and now, Clause 4.5.2 of ISO 14001:2004) are the *weakest* link in successful ISO 14001 implementation in the United States, it means that the individual must have evaluated all 42 federal Environmental Laws and their concomitant regulations at least three times. And, as in # 4 above, ask for and validate their ECA experience (and, that it was successful) at random (and as before, if the individual or firm is unwilling to provide you with at least three references for the individual's ECA experience, RUN, don't walk away).

The implementation of a successful ISO 14001 system that will withstand Registrar (and Accreditation Body) scrutiny on a continuing basis does not need to evoke fear or trepidation. One simply needs to be rigorous in all aspects of your ISO 14001 system, including the choice of an ISO 14001 Consultant. DO NOT be timid, validate **your** ISO 14001 Consultant, after all, your facility's future business is at stake. Finally, an ISO

14001 Consultant meeting all six criteria above can also routinely correct deficient ISO 14001 Systems that have encountered a Major Non-conformity.