What Makes Someone a Good Fit

Idea In Short

After conducting interviews for many years, one recurring pattern stands out: beyond resumes and case interviews, real fit for consulting work comes down to four traits, being smart, aware, fun and eager. Each trait addresses a different failure mode, and the fourth, genuine eagerness, is often the one that separates consultants who stagnate from consultants who keep improving throughout their careers.

Beyond the Resume

After conducting interviews across many years, a consistent pattern emerges: beyond credentials and case interview performance, genuine fit for consulting work reduces to four traits, being smart, aware, fun and eager.1 Each trait addresses a distinct risk, and missing any one of them tends to create real friction on client engagements sooner or later.

Smart Means More Than Raw Intelligence

Consulting teams billing premium hourly rates cannot afford weak thinking, but smart, in this context, means something more specific than raw intelligence alone. A genuinely smart consultant can break apart an ambiguous problem, conduct real research, engage clients directly, run a team effectively, and drive toward a solution through disciplined hypothesis-based thinking. Not knowing an answer immediately is fine; not knowing how to reliably find one is the real problem.

Aware Means Reading the Room, and Yourself

Being aware means staying genuinely attuned to a client, the surrounding team dynamic, and, perhaps most importantly, one's own blind spots and impact on others. A consultant who cannot honestly assess how their own behavior lands with clients and colleagues struggles to build the trust that consulting work fundamentally depends on.

Fun Is Simple, and Surprisingly Important

The fun trait needs relatively little explanation, and its simplicity is exactly the point: people genuinely enjoy working with colleagues who bring some lightness to inherently stressful, high-stakes engagements, and a team stripped entirely of that quality tends to burn out faster regardless of how technically strong its members are.

Eagerness Separates Careers That Grow From Careers That Stall

Eagerness may be the most important trait of the four. A genuinely eager consultant stays client-focused, team-focused and committed to continuous learning, and specific phrases reliably signal the opposite: blaming a client's own input for weak analysis, blindly following a template without genuine thought, deferring entirely to a partner's instructions without independent judgment, or defending mediocre work by pointing to how it was done previously.2

Why Those Phrases Matter So Much

Language like this reflects complacency and boredom far more than genuine constraint. Someone working directly with a client, being trusted and paid to think seriously about that client's problems, occupies a genuinely privileged position, and treating that privilege as an entitlement rather than an opportunity quietly corrodes both performance and reputation over time.

Stagnation Has Nothing to Do With Age

A consultant who stops actively improving professionally is, functionally, stagnating, regardless of age or tenure. Plenty of younger consultants settle into doing only the minimum required, seemingly unaware of what genuine excellence in the role actually looks like, a pattern that has far more to do with mindset than years of experience. Widespread workplace disengagement is a real, well-documented phenomenon, and avoiding that fate requires actively choosing not to coast.

Curiosity Is the Root of Eagerness

A lack of eagerness ultimately traces back to a lack of intellectual curiosity. The strongest team members genuinely dig into a task, take real pride in producing something they would want to stand behind, and treat their own work as a potential new standard for how the broader team approaches similar problems going forward. A simple, honest question worth asking after finishing any deliverable is whether the person actually likes it and feels proud of it, a more revealing gut check than any formal review process.

Spotting These Traits in an Interview

None of these four traits are perfectly visible on a resume, which is exactly why structured interviews and reference checks matter so much. Asking a candidate to walk through a genuinely difficult problem they solved reveals the smart dimension directly, while asking how they handled disagreement with a manager or client reveals real self-awareness far better than a scripted answer about strengths and weaknesses ever could.3

A Simple Filter Worth Applying Broadly

These four traits generalize well beyond consulting specifically, offering a useful filter for evaluating any collaborator, hire or team member across nearly any professional field. Smart enough to solve real problems, aware enough to read a room honestly, fun enough that people want to work alongside them, and eager enough to keep improving rather than settling, that combination consistently predicts strong long-term fit far better than credentials alone ever could.

- 1Job Interview
- 2Learned Helplessness
- 3Behavioral Job Interview

Summary

Fit for consulting work comes down to four traits: smart enough to structure ambiguous problems, aware enough to read a room and oneself honestly, fun enough that people want to work alongside them, and eager enough to keep learning rather than coasting. Eagerness, more than raw intelligence, tends to separate careers that keep improving from careers that

quietly stagnate.