

## Book Review

*The MECE Muse: 100+ Selected Practices, Unwritten Rules, and Habits of Great Consultants*  
by Christie Lindor

Reviewed by Maureen Laneski

### 4 out of 4 stars

As a new freelancer I had a general idea that I could consult as well as simply write for my clients. I know a lot about my former employment area, about education, and about writing, so I figured I could consult people in those areas. But it wasn't until I made "consulting" part of my business's name that I realized I had no idea how to sell people on that skill, or even how to consult. In my previous office life people knew what to ask me about, and I gave them advice or helped them out. Even as a tutor, I feel like a subject-area consultant.

When I saw this book, I thought I should give it a try since I really couldn't give a good definition of consulting. At least, I didn't think that I could define it for my business. Since I couldn't define it for my business, I couldn't go looking for the right clientele. So I picked the book up with a small hope of learning something useful. What I found was much greater. I loved this book! I never expected to be thrilled about a consulting book, but Christie Lindor's *The MECE Muse: 100+ Tips for Becoming a Great Consultant* really surprised me in such a lovely way.

For one thing, there was not a *ton* of jargon. At least, the amount that was there was explained and didn't deter from the work overall. Acronyms and any industry terms are explained in words and graphics. Lindor writes in a positive tone, though somehow not sunny or saccharine. I'm actually finding it extremely difficult to write a decent review without falling into such traps myself because I loved the book so much and though it was just so thoughtfully put together. The graphics I would grade at a "3" on a five-point scale just because some of them aren't that helpful while others are hard to understand, and she included too many for my taste.

Lindor, however, is a real, live *consultant* consultant.

The book is split up into three sections:

- I. Mindset of Great Consultants
- II. Performance and Conditioning of Great Consultants
- III. Reflections of a consulting career.

There's no prattling preamble or fluff in this book. Lindor jumps right in, offering helpful insight right in the prologue. Packed as it is, it doesn't feel dense or tedious - it's still a very easy read that has a conversational, sometimes almost confessional tone. The fireside chats read like a

conversation with a more experienced coworker at lunch, or the bar after work. Or like sitting at the feet of a patient, honest mentor. Reading this was a privilege.

Of course, nothing is perfect. I really, really liked the first two-thirds of the book best and got a little bored in section three compared to the rest of the book. My guess is that this is because the first two really appealed to my position in life right now, whereas it was harder to connect with the reflection of a career that's already hit its stride. I also really enjoyed the interviews. This third section is also where you'll find the list of traits of great consultants. Since the list is literally 100+ items long, it's hard to read through in one sitting and instead works better as a reference. As a reviewer, however, I did not have the luxury of skipping through it at my leisure so my eyes glazed over a bit. It's a great list, just hard to take at in one reading.

Now, although I was a bit bored, I think it's a great reference and my 4-star rating stands. I cannot give it less because it is such a well-written, useful, lovely book.

What I took from the book most was: "Don't Be a Jerk." Even if you smile in your clients' faces and they think you're a great person, you'll never get far if you're treating your subordinates or assistants like crap. That's simply poor leadership and word will get around. Your subordinates won't give you that extra bump that they might give to someone else, and their body language will convey what they may be too professional to say about you to your face. It's going to get around and nobody wants to be around somebody like that. This is classic Karma, golden rule stuff.

Another important trait, related to the first, in my opinion: Have genuine confidence. This means being able to admit when you're wrong and find the right answer for people from someone else.

Great consultants also show up on time and have deliverables ready and working and the absolute best shape when they present them to their clients. In fact, delivering ahead of time whenever possible and in the best shape possible can head off delays that throw the whole project off.

My favorite aspect of the book is the interviews. Lindor's interviewees give fantastic advice. They are leaders and partners high up in the consulting world. They have seen people fail spectacularly at every level, from their very first early days as consultants and now as people with who make hiring and firing decisions. They're the kind of people that you want to work for - genuinely good leaders. In fact, this book was, for me, a book about how to be a good leader and manager rather more than it was about how to be a great consultant. We are experiencing a dearth of great leadership in this world today, and it is gratifying when someone shines like a diamond from the midst of the dusty incompetents promoted by other incompetents who just wanted to be rid of them.

I would recommend this book not just to consultants or those looking to become consultants, but to anyone looking to improve their leadership skills, to work as entrepreneurs or freelancers, small business owners, and anybody else who must make decisions that affect others. Seriously. Even new parents could use some of this book, because it is, at heart, a book about relationships. Christie Lindor understands how important relationship-building, professionalism, and mutual respect are. These are the heart of her practice and the soul of her wonderful book.