

Odds are you've heard the job title, "management consultant." Maybe you even know someone who holds such a position. They may talk about travel to client meetings, presentations, spreadsheets and the like. But what does a management consultant actually *do*?

"We help people and organizations reach for and realize their vision, we solve problems, we create and deliver solutions," says Thomas Célérier, Senior Director, Market Head for Healthcare and Life Sciences in Silicon Valley at Slalom Consulting.

Slalom is headquartered in Seattle, but has offices in six California cities, including Célérier's Palo Alto office, and more than three dozen other cities across the U.S. and around the globe. Célérier works with healthcare, biopharma, diagnostics, medical devices and health tech companies to bring their ideas to fruition.

Célérier is a biotech engineer by training, rooted in his early learnings as an agronomist and food industry scholar – and he also holds an MBA from HEC Paris, giving him unique



***What Exactly Does a Management Consultant Do?
To start with, they are a combination of scientist,
inventor, anthropologist, explorer, designer, engineer,
architect, reporter, journalist, museum curator, travel
guide, therapist, teacher, trainer and athletic coach.***

insights into what's required to navigate organizations and living systems, to design and build digital solutions, and to get them to market.

Fifteen years ago, Célérier moved to the U.S. from France, his birthplace, where his parents were educators. His mother, a university professor and research scientist is one of the country's and European leading ecophysiological, with a specialization in spiders, and his father started teaching math, and then headed various middle school headmaster and principal positions.

In the following interview, Célérier discusses the role of management and technology consultancies in building businesses, a concept he

contends is invaluable because even the most well-funded companies don't always have the expertise and latitude in house to bring products and services to market. "And because everyone benefits from additional perspectives, help and coaching," he says.

CBJ: Explain in lay terms what a consulting business like Slalom does?

Thomas Célérier: "I often start discussing this question by telling the parable of the elephant and the seven blind men where each man takes hold of a different part of the elephant and is utterly convinced that what he feels is the actual thing. One thinks the elephant is a wall, one thinks it's a snake, one thinks it's a tree, and so on. It's always a great conversa-

tion starter with our clients and partners. As consultants, we are able to offer many services to the various clients and industries we interact with. We influence, change, build and enhance capabilities necessary for their activities. Our engagements can be a few days to years long as we co-create, build, support and deliver – all with a joint purpose in mind and at heart.

“We are both generalists and experts. I happen to specialize in healthcare and life sciences where I’ve worked on projects like creating a strategy to launch new and adapt existing products and services, such as a drug or digital apps for patients or to help a supply chain department with modern analytics improve the way it forecasts product demand and balance supply needs like we recently did as we looked for solutions to fight COVID-19.”

CBJ: Describe a typical day in the life of a consultant? What skillset does it require?

TC: “I absolutely love this question, which, by the way, is one we also often ask to our clients, as we start our diagnosis and begin to shape our recommendations or solutions for them. The best ways to answer it, is how I explain it to my kids and other younger professionals who ask: “No single day is the same for chameleons” or “We are artists and scientists.”

“As a consultant and as part of a team of them, I get the opportunity to do many things, either as an expert and/or a leader, within client-facing teams or supporting ones, depending on the situation and your journey. This is why many others who really get what we do and can make happen love this profession and the roles and pathways it offers. This also leads to the best trust-based relationships with clients. We have to embrace and champion the notions of diversity of thoughts, people, approaches, change and realistic optimism with an open mind. At Slalom, we like to say, ‘love your work and life, love your future’, and strive to help ourselves and each other make it happen.

“We have to be versatile, adaptive, collaborative, flexible and competent in our crafts, which can take many aspects and roads as you build your career. When working with clients, we tap into the skillsets, experience and traits of many other professions. In some situations,



we are researchers, scientists, inventors, anthropologists, explorers and thought leaders, with companies and humans as our subjects of attention. We also are doctors for companies and their people. We are designers, engineers, data scientists, architects and builders. We investigate and contribute to information sharing and creating experiences within the ecosystem of clients, such as reporters and journalists, or even museums curators and travel guides.

“Often times, we put our cheerleader, therapist, teacher, trainer and sport coach hats to help our clients with a change needed on themselves or their teams. We can turn into headhunters as we leverage our network and create connections to help clients build, develop and grow their teams. Being a French native, I could not resist mentioning we are also cooks and restaurateurs, finding and assembling the best ingredients, teams, places and times to create experience for our clients and what is needed for their success. We also have our secret sauces and recipes that we end up sharing for the greater good as we invent the next and new ones. The list goes on. Lastly, we are guests in the house and world of our clients. We have to honor this position, with its privileges and duties, guided by honesty, respect, goodwill and a dose of mystery and magic, in all that we do.”

CBJ: What makes you different from other consulting companies like Deloitte and Accenture?

TC: “I don’t like to compare ourselves to potential competitors, because we are all unique. But what attracted me to Slalom and what makes me stay, is how we care for everything we do and especially people, whether our own employees, our clients or our partners and for sure the communities we live in. We always have long-term relationships in mind. One big difference is the amount of attention we put on our employees. Slalom was founded on the

idea that consulting doesn't have to be a grueling, road-warrior career. Though we have global and distributed teams where it makes sense, we mostly don't travel like others do and do not believe in the offshore model at its extreme. We have utterly reinvented the consultant model. We have consultants in the communities where they live and work. We live by the 'local' model driven by client intimacy, proximity and backed by regional innovation and capability hubs, a global culture of collaboration, and partnerships with the world's top technology providers and innovators.

"Of course, with COVID-19, everyone had to adapt and do some of that kind of 'local work,' but from a relationship standpoint, it is very different from how consulting companies traditionally operate, and we invented it! It is also what has allowed us to go beyond 'just' the projects. What's more, we've been able to grow without any acquisitions -- rare in this business. We've grown one person at a time. When I started with Slalom seven years ago, our revenues were approximately \$300 million. This year we are closing on the \$2 billion mark and have ambitious expansion and global plans in the works, guided by strong beliefs in our model, purpose and the energy and passion of our people. We are building a multi-generational organization, mindful and selective in what we do and the people and causes we associate with, to create the maximum positive societal and environmental impacts."

CBJ: What kinds of companies do you work with?

TC: "Slalom's clients include more than half the Fortune 100 and a third of the Fortune 500 -- along with startups, non-profits, and innovative organizations of all kinds. We approach every potential client with three areas in mind: strategy, technology and transformation. With strategy, Slalom makes a commitment to go beyond the expected and to help our clients move through ambiguity and risk, give shape to the future. For technology, the company commits to generating insights from our clients' data in order to create meaningful, incredible digital experiences for their employees, customers and other stakeholders. We're able to blend design, engineering and analytics expertise to build the future. Finally, we recognize that we're in the midst of a tremen-

dous transformation, with new technologies and industry disruption everywhere -- and we are the type who roll up their sleeves to help."

CBJ: What do you like most about what you do?

TC: "I love being able to work with diverse teams, seeing the higher results of the collective force at play, and I am convinced that the sayings 'teamwork makes the dream work' and 'when people matter, results count' are true. Slalom has also always been driven by social responsibility, inclusion and diversity from day one. Last year, we launched the Slalom Foundation, and our teams and others contribute to great mutual causes in the areas we care for: education, youth, women, underprivileged, underserved, at-risk people and communities, sports and the environment -- all with specific initiatives and investments to use 'technology for good.' When I came to the United States as an intern at the Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, Calif., it was because I knew there would be tremendous opportunities to work in life sciences and make a difference with companies that are contributing to the greater good all over the world."

CBJ: You say the role of a consultant is to not "stay forever," what do you mean?

TC: "Yes -- our goal is to never stay forever -- to take an analogy within the biology world, we are symbiotes to our clients. We want our clients to be successful, but we mostly stay in the shadows so they can shine in the light. Basically, we want to be great guests and then move on, while we also like to visit back when needed and are invited or have something to share or propose. That's why we always have a start-to-finish plan, like a chain of assembly, and always end up teaching our clients 'how to fish.' The technical part is never the most difficult one for a project. Getting the chemistry right can be complex, but when all the pieces are put in place, we are able to accomplish great things and create meaningful outcomes for everyone." — By Dana Sullivan, [California Business Journal](#).

Copyright © 2021 California Business Journal. All Rights Reserved.