

The membership of FCSI may have a larger number of professional designers than management advisory services (MAS) consultants globally, but MAS membership is growing. Michael Jones spoke to three of the most admired and respected MAS consultants in the business to find out how the role has evolved over the years

Critical MAS

How would you describe the core role of an MAS consultant?

John Cornyn: A truly independent MAS consultant (ie one with no perceived or actual conflicts of interest) must act as a foodservice or hospitality industry client advocate. They must be an effective foodservice industry educator and communicator and approach each assignment as unique. They must always act in a highly professional and ethical manner and tell the truth in a way that the client will embrace the message and proposed solution set(s) as its own.

Chris Tripoli: To provide information, direction, support and advice in order that the client can make the most informed decisions possible. This creates the opportunity to succeed. I always say that good consulting isn't about doing something as much as it is helping the client to do what he/she is doing better.

Char Norton: To provide management advisory services to clients. MAS services are more varied than those of the design consultant. They range across menu and recipe development, service concepts, staff training, RFP management and operational concepts.

List the qualities every MAS consultant should embody

JC: Honesty (professional and ethical), being a highly effective communicator. Being immediately responsive to all client communications. Staying on top of what is happening in the industry and being able to distinguish trends from fads.

CT: Knowledge, communications, credibility. We must bring knowledge and a viewpoint that is helpful to the situation at hand. Good communication skills are imperative in order to be successful, present, influence and listen. Being honest and consistent even when you may disagree with some of the client's thinking creates credibility.

CN: The MAS consultant must have the ability to problem-solve, along with the desire for lifelong learning. The ability to work in concert with the design team is essential, as is being able to demonstrate leadership skills.

What are the key benefits an MAS consultant offers their clients?

JC: Having specific industry knowledge and awareness that it is not just about foodservice any more. There are issues concerning social justice, environmental,

medical/dietary concerns, religious requirements and food integrity. And these issues are constantly evolving. It's about being able to access reliable data to support all recommendations.

CT: Key benefits from management advisory services include learning what the client may really need to know regarding the situation at hand. Validating a direction, idea, or item the client is working on and managing a project's timeline and budget. The most common benefit is in increased efficiency and lower operating costs, creating higher profits.

CN: The MAS consultant offers a fresh approach to the client's operation based on their life experiences and information collected from other clients. The MAS consultant is not encumbered by any preconceived ideas.

How do you think the role of the MAS has adapted to the changing needs of the industry in the last 20 years?

JC: The past is informative, but not necessarily an essential building block for the future.

CT: As our industry has become more competitive and operating costs climb, MAS had to become more specific in its

offerings. Twenty years ago one consultant might have advised on a number of issues. Now we must specialise in either design, concept development, management/HR, menu food and beverage, operating systems/procedures or marketing related issues. I succeed because I have a team of consultants engaged with me in order to cover a wide variety of operational issues.

CN: The greatest change has been the realisation by the design consultant that the MAS consultant is beneficial in helping the client understand the operational implication of the design.

How does FCSI help MAS consultants to do their jobs better?

JC: Through the Council for Professional Standards and continuing education opportunities – although FCSI has yet to embrace the management and operations side of the equation, so there is an imbalance to the design-side education process. FCSI is a great help with peer-to-peer and networking opportunities.

CT: FCSI offers networking opportunities, current industry information, credibility.

CN: The offerings at the FCSI conferences and the approved industry partners help MAS consultants do their job better. In addition, the articles in *Foodservice Consultant* are very helpful for the MAS consultant.

How do you keep informed about changing trends in the market?

JC: Trade magazines, internet research, trade shows – even equipment shows, because a good MAS consultant should know what is new and innovative in the marketplace – and taking every opportunity to visit new and innovative non-commercial and commercial foodservice venues.

CT: Teaching, writing for a national trade journal and providing the occasional expert testimony all help me stay current. I find staying close and hands-on in



The consultants:

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■ **Charnette (Char) Norton FCSI**, president, The Norton Group Inc.
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foodservice helps me to learn from current customer habits. Trade associations, networking with other professionals and reading specific industry materials all help keep me informed as well.

CN: There are numerous ways to keep informed of the changing trends in the market:

- Attending the FCSI conferences and other industry conferences
- Attending educational seminars offered by industry partners
- Participating in the industry-offered WebEx
- Reading trade magazines and *Foodservice Consultant*
- Talking to clients and peers
- Connecting with social networking tools such as LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.

What do you love most about being an MAS consultant and why?

JC: I have enjoyed working with a broad base of industry segment clients (colleges, business, healthcare, entertainment venues etc). Plus we meet some great people, many of whom I now consider to be good friends. What I do not like – airplanes, hotels and too much bad food.

CT: Foodservice is the only industry I have been in. For 40 years I have managed, owned, developed, designed, consulted and taught. I still wake up happy to go to work because no two days are the same. I love the fact that although the principles of good hospitality management might be the same, no two clients do things in exactly the same manner. This allows me an opportunity to continually create. When clients interview me for their project, I am also interviewing them to see if we are a good fit. Part of good consulting is being able to make the right selections.

CN: The opportunity to work with a variety of clients who have different skills and provide them with lessons learned and to learn from them. Having varied clients is like having a new exciting job each time one is engaged. ■