

The Consultant and the Shepard: A Modern Day Parable

A shepherd was herding his flock in a remote pasture, when suddenly a BMW charged towards him in a cloud of dust. The driver, a young man in a Prada suit, Gucci shoes, Dior sunglasses and a D&G tie, leans out the window and asks the shepherd: "If I tell you exactly how many sheep you have in your flock, will you give me one?" The shepherd looks at the man, obviously a consultant, then looks at his peacefully grazing flock, spread out over an entire pasture and calmly answers, "Sure --- why not?"

The consultant parks his car, whips out his laptop, connects it to his cell phone, and surfs to a NASA page on the internet, where he calls up a GPS satellite navigation system to get an exact fix on his location, which he then feeds to another NASA satellite that scan the area in an ultra-high-resolution photo. The young man then opens the digital photo in Adobe Photoshop and exports it to an image processing facility in Redlands, CA. Within seconds, he receives an e-mail on his Trimble GeoExplorer that the image has been processed and the data stored.

He then accesses a MS-SQL database through an ODBC connected Excel spreadsheet with hundreds of complex formulae. He uploads all of this data via an e-mail on his Blackberry and, after a few minutes, receives a response. Finally, he prints out a full-color, 150-page report on his hi-tech, miniaturized HP LaserJet printer turns to the shepherd and says: "You have exactly 1,586 sheep."

"That's right. Well, I guess you can take one of my sheep," says the shepherd. He watches the young man select one of the animals and looks on amused as the young man stuffs it into the trunk of his car. As he is ready to drive off, the shepherd says, "Hey, if I can tell you exactly what your business is, will you give me back my animal?" The young man thinks about it for a second and then says: "Okay, why not?"

"You're a consultant," says the shepherd. "Wow! That's correct," says the young man. "But how did you guess that?" "No guessing required," answers the shepherd. "You showed up here even though nobody called you - you want to get paid for an answer I already knew - to a question I never asked - and you know nothing about my business. Now give me back my dog."

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