

Careers Beyond Academia: Consulting

Dr. Jason Glaw is a Market Access Strategy leader at AstraZeneca. After a successful PhD and a short postdoc, Jason transitioned to consulting. After working at two consulting firms in the pharma and healthcare industries, he moved to his current role at AstraZeneca where he leads health plan and health system strategy for the company's immuno-oncology franchise.

In this 10 question informational interview, Jason will talk about his career path and the transition from academia to the field of Consulting.



1. Please describe your professional background?

I finished my PhD in mid-2011 and stayed on for a short post doc while my wife was finishing her PhD and we looked for jobs. My first corporate job started in early 2012, doing data-focused consulting at a small firm that focused on the pharma industry and health insurance providers. I stayed there for a couple of years, then moved to The Advisory Board Company, a large health care/education research/consulting/technology firm. I spent two years at ABC, leading a number of teams developing best practices for hospitals and health systems in topics ranging from population health to cardiovascular surgery to specialty pharmacy. Last year I moved to my current role at AstraZeneca, a large pharmaceutical company, where I lead health plan and health system strategy for our immuno-oncology franchise.

2. How did you decide that consulting was best suited for you?

I was never especially interested in continuing benchtop research, and staying in academia wasn't a goal either. Instead, I wanted to find a way to marry my scientific acumen/interest with business problems and strategy. There are a number of ways to do both of those things, but consulting felt like the best way to do it that would set me up for whatever else I wanted to do in my career down the road.

3. What helped you get your first job as a consultant?

Networking! I cold-emailed someone from my alumni network who happened to work at a firm I found interesting. After a fairly standard interview – where, to be clear, I did NOT ask for a job in any way – he said they were hiring and asked if I'd be available for an interview. This is basically the Holy Grail of networking, but know that there were another 20+ contacts I sent out that led to a couple of emails or a phone call instead. Do enough of this, and something will work out for you too. People love to help fellow alumni who are nice, responsive, and don't ask for a job in the first email.

4. How did your skills as a PhD help you in this job?

Consulting requires a lot of skills: creative problem solving, time management, prioritization, clear and concise communication, collaboration, and synthesizing large quantities of information into a few key points (among others). Outside of possibly the collaboration part, I'd argue that my time as a grad student honed my abilities in the other skills incredibly well.

5. What were the challenges that you faced during the transition into this role?

As a grad student/post-doc, there aren't a ton of firm deadlines. Maybe for things like abstract/grant submissions, but past that you are on your own clock. That's definitely not how things work in the corporate world, and especially so when you work in a client services field like consulting. So getting used to rapid, constantly evolving deadlines (and expectations) was a bit challenging.

It was also a bit weird for me to fit into the general corporate hierarchy. Older (but maybe wiser?) than some people I was working beneath, it took me a while to accept that I needed corporate work experience to "catch up" to everyone else. Put simply, the fact that my PhD didn't count for as much as I would have hoped was a challenge, but it pushed me to prove myself quickly.

6. What is your typical day like?

Varies a ton by the day. Depending on the day, I work on some/all of the following:

- i. Emails*
- ii. Strategy meetings to plot slide decks, approaches to problems, analytics, and client engagement*
- iii. Building models*
- iv. Reading to understand more about a topic area*
- v. Building slides*
- vi. Mentoring junior team members*
- vii. Prep for/doing calls with clients*
- viii. Travel to/from client meetings*
- ix. Interview guide prep and interviews (if that's part of the project)*

As for when I'm there, I tried really hard to keep my hours down. Usually I was there for normalish business hours, then went home. If more work needed to be done I did it after my son went to bed, if not I would check my email once to make sure there weren't any fires that needed my attention. Weekend work was a last resort. I'll note that this was a very conscious choice on my part – plenty of my colleagues worked far more, and in many consulting environments you have no choice but to work a lot more.

7. What was the most challenging part about consulting?

It's a grind, you're always on the clock, travel can be bad if you are in a heavy travel firm (or you don't like travel), you are completely beholden to your client and your manager (read: good client and good manager = wonderful experience, any other combination = not so great experience), high ambition is basically a requirement to succeed, and you don't actually get to see the fruits of your work (as in, you can make the best recommendations ever, and your client can immediately throw them in the trash can).

8. What is the most exciting aspect of consulting?

It's intellectually stimulating, you're always getting better at something, you have tremendous autonomy, your colleagues are typically smart and helpful, and you can influence high-dollar/high-impact work early on in your career.

9. Any specific points to consider when choosing this career?

Compared to a lot of other jobs and industries, consulting is a fairly known quantity in terms of what your experience is likely to be. If you do enough research on the field in general, specific firms you are interested in, and your own skills/goals, you should be able to figure out if consulting is a good fit. The ultimate X factor is your manager, but there's only so much you can do about that. In the worst case, consulting is almost always going to be a positive feature on your resume/CV, so if you're on the fence it's probably worth giving it a try.

10. Any other words of advise

- a. Biggest thing: figure out what life you want to lead, and find a job that fits with that vision. Lots of people do it the other way around, and it makes them miserable. If you want to go out with friends 3x/week, raise a family, have a bunch of hobbies, and cook dinner every night, don't take a job that requires crazy hours.*
- b. Negotiate your salary for every job, no matter how amazing you think their offer is. If they rescind your offer for trying to negotiate (this is very rare) – you dodged a bullet.*
- c. Keep in touch with people you worked with in grad school and previous jobs, even if it's just a quick email on occasion.*
- d. Related to the previous point, be nice to people and don't burn bridges.*
- e. Always have some sense of what your next career step might be, but be open to changing your mind if new opportunities arise. It's also good practice to take a look around at what else you might be able to do every year or so, whether that means taking a few recruiter calls or spending some time reviewing job titles on LinkedIn.*
- f. No one truly cares about your career development except you, so if you want something, speak up.*

*-Article Contributed By Vidisha Raje, PhD
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