

APMP

Our mission is to advance the arts, sciences, and technology of new business acquisition and to promote the professionalism of those engaged in those pursuits.

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Highlights on news and educational initiatives throughout the association at large

Association
Spotlight

Annual Conference in New Orleans, May 2003

The theme of our 14th Annual Conference, "Breakthrough: Innovations in Winning," acknowledges the need for more effective strategies in a time when discrimination and differentiation among competitors in the federal and commercial worlds have become more illusory. Now is the time for presenting ways to achieve innovative and competitive breakthroughs that distinguish competitors and lead to wins for us and for our customers.

Consistent with APMP's mission statement, we are placing greater emphasis on business development, capture management, competitive intelligence and analysis, program management contributions to new business, and the importance of knowing your customer. Traditional proposal management subjects will also be prominent.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Mentoring Program

APMP was pleased to kickoff a Mentoring Program at the 2002 Annual Conference. Several members immediately submitted applications to be a mentor or protégé in this program. Pairing of mentors and protégés occurs quarterly. The last quarter paired two teams for the mentoring program and training was completed in August.

The purpose of the program is to further develop business development/proposal professionals through the sharing of knowledge. This totally volunteer program assists in pairing a senior business development/proposal professional with a junior professional for the purpose of learning. Those interested in participating as a mentor or protégé should read the guidelines, complete an application, and await notification of pairing. The Mentoring Program information can be found on the APMP Web site (www.apmp.org).

Commercial Interest Forum

Led by Charlie Divine, Director of Commercial Programs, and co-moderator Sherri Baker-Greer, APMP has developed a Commercial Interest Forum for those members who work in the commercial area and wish to share their interests and gain more value from their APMP membership. The forum:

- Serves as a focal point for information about the commercial proposal sector
- Provides an avenue for members to communicate freely with each other
- Helps new and old (seasoned) members practice their trade more effectively
- Provides social contacts to enhance professional growth.

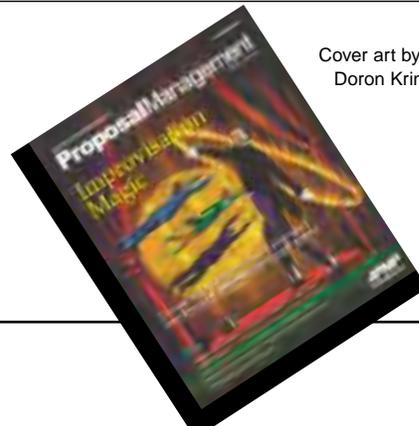
Think of this forum as a virtual APMP Chapter composed of all commercial members. But instead of attending a monthly meeting, the virtual chapter gives you one website and e-mail address that allows you to interact with other members at your convenience to share ideas, test new plans, ask questions, and discuss current issues across industries.

For more information about this new Forum, you can check our website: www.apmp.org or send your questions to apmp-commercial-owner@yahoo.com. Join the Forum to discuss today's issues in the commercial proposal world.

—KAREN SHAW and PATTY NUNN



Proposal Management



Cover art by
Doron Krinetz

fall-winter 2002

Association Spotlight
New Orleans Conference, New Mentoring Program,
and Commercial Interest Forum.
BY KAREN SHAW AND PATTY NUNN

Invitation to Writers
Call for Articles.

From the Editor
BY R. DENNIS GREEN



Looking Back with Edward J. Velton
A talk with Velton, who with the late Jim Beverage, wrote
books and developed methodologies that became the
foundation for today's proposal and business development strategies.
INTERVIEW BY R. DENNIS GREEN

US Department of Defense B&P on the Rise:
What Does It Mean?

Recent DoD projections show 5 years of increased spending after 15 years
of decline. Will cutthroat competition for qualified staff be one result?.
BY CHUCK DEVORE AND TYSON MOLER

Always In Motion—Patty Nunn

Who Climbs Mountains, Runs Ironman Triathlons, and Becomes a Vice President
because she "Got Bored?" A profile of and advice from a successful professional.
BY R. DENNIS GREEN



IMPROVing the Proposal Team

Learn how to use improvisational theater techniques to
build a high-performing proposal team.
BY BJ LOWNIE

Creating Preference

It is increasingly harder today to win contracts by having the best product, solution,
team, or experience. Here are four ways to create preference over your competitors.
BY TERRY R. BACON, Ph.D.

Why, When, and How to Ask Questions on
Government Solicitations

Your proposal team needs to ask good questions in order to properly prepare a compliant
and acceptable response to the solicitation. Here's why, when and how to do just that.
BY DAVID HERNDON AND ROBIN K. RANSONE

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Welcome

From the Editor



All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players:

They have their exits and their entrances;

And one man [or woman] in his time plays many parts...

Shakespeare, As You Like It

Stagecraft and Leadership

This edition, like the seven before it, is a tribute to leadership. It celebrates leadership in its many and varied forms. In the profile of Anteon's Patty Nunn, it probes the mindset of a proposal management professional from inside the corporate executive suite. It helps us to understand the politics of management ascendance. It helps to answer a recurring question: Why do some people rise to the top? Is it talent? Vision? Raw will? Happenstance? Or, as in the case of Nunn, a combination of all those qualities mixed with hard work, perseverance and a disarming smile.

Edward J. Velton is a familiar name to proposal management veterans. With colleague Jim Beveridge, he co-authored the now classic "Positioning To Win: Planning and Executing the Superior Proposal" in 1982. To pick it up is to be seduced by a finely written and provocative handbook on the subject of developing new business. As it and the Looking Back piece written with Velton for this edition attest, the advice has not lost its relevance today.

If leadership can be captured as process, look no further than Howard Nutt's primer on the Business Development-Capability Maturity Model. Developed over the past two years, this road map to improved efficiency

was modeled after the Software Engineering Institute CMM created at Carnegie Mellon and, as part of the new model's validation, its precepts were tested on APMP's industry benchmark study earlier this year.

Leadership is also ingrained in the contributions of this edition's other authors, including Terry Bacon, Robert Frey, Dave Herndon, Rob Ransone, Jayme Sokolow, and Barry Fields. We thank them all.

But a special thanks goes to B.J. Lownie, author of our article on improvisation techniques applied to proposal team training. Because, in this article, Lownie reminds us that theater is still a teacher with lessons aplenty for the business world.

Proposal development remains a team-based enterprise. A proposal is more than mere words on paper. The pathos, hubris, humor, and humility of stage craft can teach a team how to be more effective. As Lownie explains, it can shape a team mentality with the fortitude and unity to win.

R. Dennis Green

Special Contributions Acknowledged:

APMP and the broad journal community thank Books co-editors, **Amy Bennington** and **Jennifer Parks**, and Commerce-Products editor, **Greg Wilson**, for managing these important columns and bringing us their insightful reviews for all of the past two years. The journal is better for their contributions, and we wish them all good fortune as they pursue their respective careers.

Effective with the Spring 2003 edition, please welcome our Books editor-to-be, **Joanna Hannigan Gaither**, but don't imagine an idle-in-waiting. As you glean from the eloquent review Gaither contributed to this edition, she brings writing talent, a love of books, and appreciation for how those books apply to improve our professional lives. We welcome Gaither aboard.

At this writing, we are still in the hunt for a new Commerce-Products editor. If you write well, if you love to ask questions, if you enjoy the company of writers and artists who take pride in producing an elegant professional magazine, you are invited to nominate yourself as a candidate for our motley journal team. We welcome your e-mail or call.

LOOKING BACK

with Edward J. Velton

**INTERVIEW BY
R. DENNIS GREEN**

Within the world of proposal development and new business acquisition, there are modern-day pioneers whose work and counsel have been groundbreaking, prescient, and timelessly wise. Edward J. Velton and his late colleague Jim Beveridge were two such visionaries. The books they wrote in the 1970s and 1980s and the methodologies they practiced and preached became the foundation for proposal and new business development strategies that still prove successful today. They coined such phrases as “ghosting the competitors” and introduced an eager audience to the concept of discriminators, strengths, weaknesses, action titles, and themes.

With the help of APMP member Tom Boren, we were introduced to Velton electronically and treated to this thoughtful, ever provocative e-mail exchange.

Left alone, they will state the facts and that is all...

PROPOSAL MANAGEMENT (PM): You co-authored “Positioning to Win” with Beveridge in 1982. Perusing that wonderful book today, it astonishes us how profound and timeless



your insights remain, now 20 years hence.

VELTON: The one thing that has always been constant about high technology proposal development is that it is always changing but the implementation problems never change.

The people at the heart of the innovative matter — those who have to do the selling — don’t like to sell. They’d like to be above it all; dispassionately dissociated from the “Why Us” and “Why Not the Competitors.” They want to be Technical from start to finish and never get into the competitive arguments. Technical people

like to talk (and write) to technical people in their own narrow discipline. Left alone, they will state the facts and that is all — write a technical report, not a competitive proposal. It will be up to the evaluators to dig out how the features of their approaches implement benefits to the customer and how they compare to the alternatives. Even if it is their area of expertise that is critical to winning or losing, it is hard to get them to do trade studies comparing their approaches to the viable alternatives, which the competitors might champion. The Proposal Manager has to overcome this because in today’s high technology world, only the persons at the heart of the technical matter are qualified to tell how the features of approaches implement benefits.

Management does not like the give and take of competitive arguments. Some feel their elevated positions should put them above the competitive grunt and groan. Most are much more comfortable fulfilling the in-house contracts — the ones that the

company functional groups are organized to perform. Proposals are disruptive, require new set ups, schedules, and operations. They don't fit the established functional organization. It is costly to make changes in approaches — or to start from scratch — so that the proposed technical and management approaches match the customers' perceptions and not in-house favorites. In many — no make that most — companies, there is separation between the front offices and the technical disciplines that generate new concepts and respond to RFPs. It's hard to direct when you don't have a close rapport with the technical gurus in distant laboratories. Managers talk a lot to managers. They live in different worlds from their key technical people. The Proposal Manager is not going to get far unless he can bring management to the proposal table. They have to approve the selected competitive approaches. It's a sad day when, in the closing days of a proposal effort, the front office says, "Where the hell did that come from!"

PM: How does a company avoid such surprises?

VELTON: The Proposal Manager faces a hostile environment. I don't know how it's done today but it used to be that companies went outside for proposal smarts, selecting people who would try and dig out a responsive set of competitive approaches that were properly presented to the customer. It took a lot of hard close work with the people at the heart of the innovative matter, both management and technical, to come up with a proposal that was both responsive and competitive. Sometimes it is better to have a third party orchestrate that effort!

*I'm sure management thought
I'd seek better employment
rather than grind it out in the
proposal pits.*

PM: Many regard you and Beveridge as two of the industry's founding fathers.

VELTON: There were a number of front-runners in the transition from "technical report" to "competitive" proposals. I think the best was Jim Beveridge, now deceased. I ran into Jim in the early 70s. I'd just been demoted from "unsuccessful program manager" to working on proposals (the least attractive job around). You create a lot of enemies as a program manager fighting for every buck and technical asset you can get. I'm sure management thought I'd seek better employment rather than grind it out in the proposal pits. I did take a few looks outside but proposals made for a busy day and busy days go by fast. Along the way, I implemented some discipline. Somewhere in all that I was exposed to Jim.

PM: What kinds of qualities distinguished Beveridge as the best?

VELTON: Jim Beveridge could get to the heart of the competitive approaches faster than anyone. He ran games of "Why Us" and "Why Not Them" with all of the key technical and management personnel. He did it in such a manner that both management and technical people opened up. And, more often than not, a new or modified set of approaches emerged — approaches whose features truly implemented benefits to the customers' requirements and perceptions. That is not easy because sometimes there are many customers and the first step is to find out "who is the real customer — the one that's going to swing the award." And, as always, you have to get away from proposing to yourself and not the customer. Jim was a master at handling that.

*We had a better success ratio
because we matched it with an
implementation discipline.*

We [General Dynamics] had great success with Jim's efforts, much better than most of his other clients. We had a better success ratio because we matched it with an implementation discipline. We learned how to fight the tendency to drop back into comfortable ways — "Forget all that competitive stuff, let's just do it the way we've always done it. Here is the customer, you dig it out."

PM: How did you nurture your competitive approaches?

VELTON: The competitive approaches were "company approaches." They didn't belong to any single person or group. We learned how to hang on to them and make sure they were the proposed approaches. We did this by demanding:

- Headline themes to start each chapter that told how the features of the approach in that chapter implemented benefits to the customer
- Lead-in paragraphs that made claims of how the selected approaches compared to all the alternatives
- Substantiating figures — and lots of them — that showed comparative performances
- Action titles to graphs to make sure messages got across
- Clear presentation with low fog index that managers as well as technical gurus could understand.

That is the job of the Program Manager. He or she can't know it all. But, they can insist on substantiated claims and clear presentation throughout the proposal. I've run into some great Proposal Managers in my time. The best to me was Tom Boren. His only fault was that he tried to work himself to death on every effort. He opened the place in the morning and closed it up at night. He took care of every detail. And, God help you if you messed up the schedule or turned in an "off the shelf" write-up.

*We stressed that the competitors
were not inept and their
approaches were competitive.*

PM: How were the books "The Anatomy of a Win," "Positioning to Win" and "Creating Superior Proposals" and their accompanying seminars viewed by the executives, proposal managers, and the technical community at the time they were introduced?

VELTON: All three books sold well. I even saw them on the shelves of other consulting firms. They were sold to seminar attendees and advertised in aerospace publications. Each book went through numerous printings. Most people embraced the books. Few took issue with them although "Ghosting" made some uncomfortable. This was usually overcome by pointing out that the highest form of a Ghost story was a trade study showing the relative performances between the proposed approaches and the viable alternative. The "Ghost Stories" made sure we didn't ignore the competitors' approaches. We stressed that the competitors were not inept and their approaches were competitive. At the heart of the "Ghost Story" was the telling of how you

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arrived at the selected approach. In the process you ghosted all the discarded approaches, telling of their faults and shortcomings. If you did it by trade studies using hard data, it was the highest form of proposing.

Jim Beveridge, to me, was the pioneer of this approach.

PM: Were these the first books and seminars to introduce the use of discriminators, ghosting, strengths, weaknesses, action titles, and themes?

VELTON: I am unaware of any prior books or seminars that advocated their use. Certainly none that made these approaches the core of proposal development. Jim Beveridge, to me, was the pioneer of this approach.

PM: Were these seminars widely attended?

VELTON: Very widely attended, yes. Open seminars were smaller but they generated in-house seminars and workshops that numbered in the hundreds — of attendees. They also generated in-house consulting assignments for both Jim and me.

PM: Are the books still available?

VELTON: No. Technical books do not make much money. They are used in conjunction with seminars or courses. Upon Jim's death and my retirement, the books went out of print.

PM: We understand that you subjected your books to red team reviews, just like your proposals.

VELTON: Yes, we Red Teamed everything. This resulted in toning down a lot of the racy illustrations in Creating Superior Proposals. Dr. Buchanan of Convair thought it inappropriate and he was so right. Much of it would have offended the ladies in our seminars. The name of the book "Positioning To Win" resulted from a Red Team by an outside editor. We had some complicated

name for the book, which she said she could not understand. She said it sounded like we were talking about positioning to win, hence the name.

PM: Tom Boren recalls that working with the Velton-Beveridge team could be quite humorous, but he's too polite (or embarrassed) to elaborate. Are you as shy?

VELTON: Yes, there were a lot of humorous things that happened during the seminars and workshops. A lot of it is too controversial to tell.

We had a couple of fights between people in mock competitions. We once had to separate two ladies who were ready to slug it out. We closed the bar at noon in England because we did not want our attendees to go to sleep on us — and almost got run out of the country. Both Jim and I fell off the stage at one time or another. And, sometimes we did a little too much drinking in the follow-up mixers. Also, I remember a Position To Win workshop at Ford Aerospace. We did a mock competition of three competitors for a new low emission car: an electric car, a very small gasoline car, and a hybrid. It was a lively competition and frankly, I can't remember who won, but I do remember the comment of a vice president after the exercise was completed. He said that it was all interesting but that it was not very realistic. No one could make money on a small gasoline car. Electric cars were impractical. And, that hybrid thing was the dumbest idea he ever heard of. That shows you the problem of the innovator.

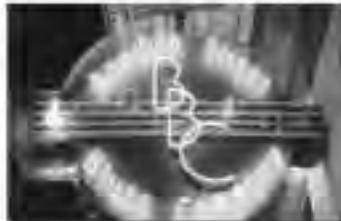
I'd find it all different and that nothing has changed.

PM: Any interest in returning to the front lines?

VELTON: I'm retired now, got a bad ticker, and a number of other ailments. But, I'll bet if I could somehow muster the energy for one more proposal, I'd find it all different and that nothing has changed.

2003 Annual Conference - New Orleans - May 21-24, 2003

The APMP Conference will be at the Sheraton Hotel on legendary Canal Street. It borders the French Quarter and is just steps from casinos, music, entertainment, good food, and the Mississippi River.



US Department of Defense B&P Expenditures on the Rise:

What Does It Mean?

BY **CHUCK DEVORE, SM&A, VICE PRESIDENT OF RESEARCH, AND TYSON MOLER, SM&A STAFF ANALYST**

Defense industry Bid and Proposal (B&P) funding will increase \$600 billion in real terms over the next five years, according to the most recent Department of Defense (DoD) projections¹. Illustrated in the figure below, this increase fol-

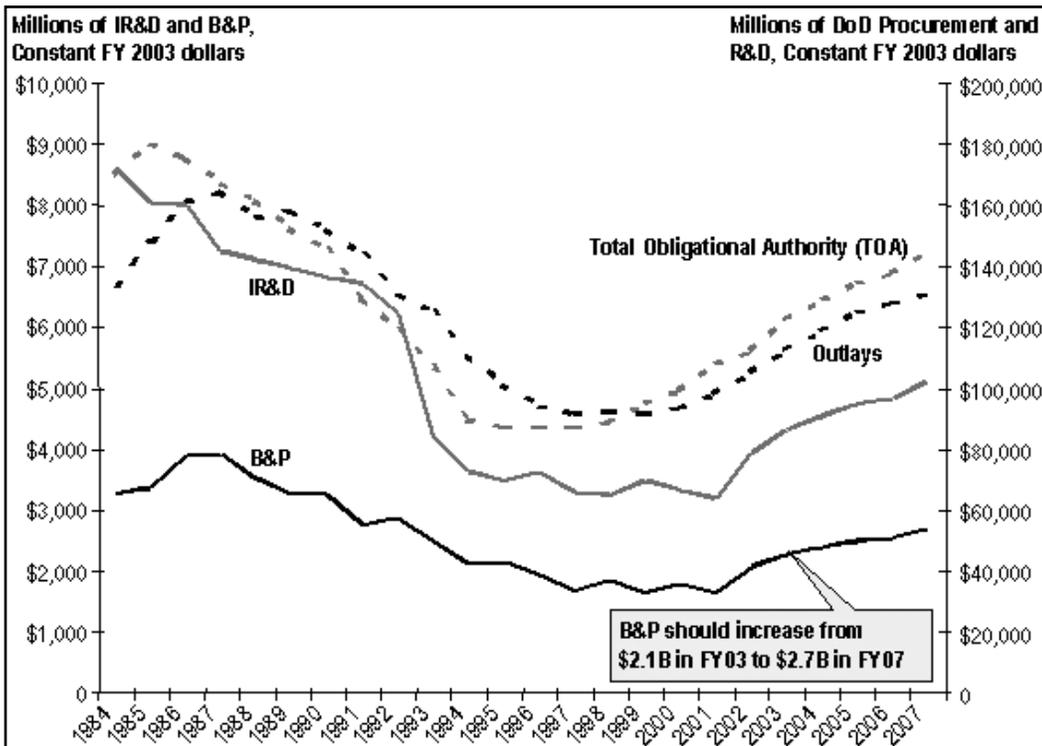
lows 15 years of decline and stagnation. What is driving this projected increase and how does the increase affect business development and proposal management professionals?

B&P projections parallel the twin requirements of fighting

the war on terrorism and recapitalizing the armed forces.

Increased B&P projections parallel the twin requirements of fighting the war on terrorism and recapitalizing the armed forces. Real overall DoD spending outlays are projected to increase 25 percent from Fiscal Year 2001 to FY 2007, with procurement and Research & Development (R&D) spending increasing 33 percent to \$131 billion (FY 2003), a level last seen in 1992.

The figure to the left tracks incurred costs for Independent Research and Development and B&P with Defense pro-



B&P spending tracks most closely with Defense outlays, meaning that B&P allocations will likely lag behind new opportunities—this will strain B&P budgets for the next five years.

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curement and R&D spending from FY1984 to FY2007 in constant FY 2003 dollars. B&P funding changes are shown with a heavy black line.

This information can be used to estimate the total number of Defense industry knowledge workers who were engaged in B&P activity historically, and to estimate future requirements for proposal management professionals. The number of labor years dedicated to B&P apparently peaked in 1987 at the equivalent of 31,400 labor years (assuming a fully-loaded average cost of \$125,000 per person engaged in B&P in constant FY2003 dollars). This was 4.3 percent of the Defense knowledge worker workforce. Today, the number of labor years consumed in B&P is about 16,600, or 3 percent of the Defense knowledge worker workforce.

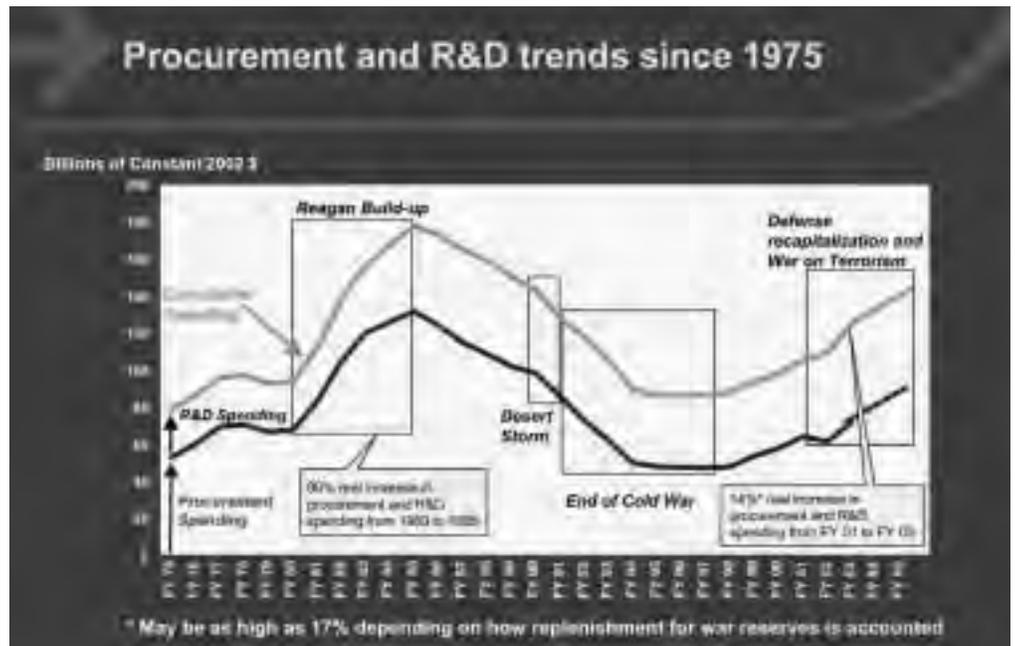
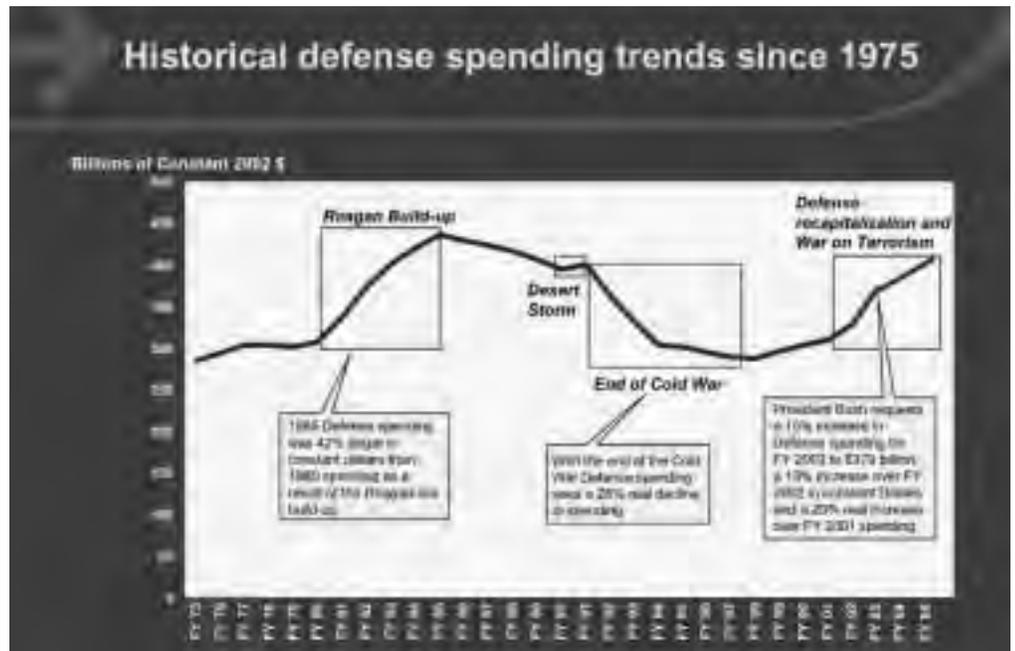
This decline reflects a gradual decline in B&P spending as a percentage of Defense spending and indicates the existing workforce of proposal management professionals is stretched very thin. By FY 2007, the number of B&P labor years should reach 21,500, a 30 percent increase for the period (6 percent, or the equivalent of 980 new full-time professionals per year).

A knowledge worker drought is imminent... the competition for qualified staff will become more cutthroat.

Companies and proposal management professionals working in the Defense industry should consider which strategies are smartest for dealing with projected procurement increases. A knowledge worker drought is imminent, the importance of using consultants will increase, and the competition for qualified staff will become cutthroat. Companies may turn to retired workers to meet their procurement-hiring shortfall.

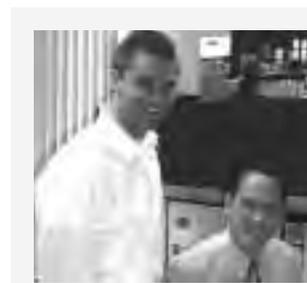
Resources:

For more information on the history and future of Defense Industry spending, a white paper is available from SM&A at: http://www.smawins.com/docs/SMA_FY_2003_Budget_Analysis.pdf.



SM&A's white paper shows the historic defense spending trends and the procurement and research and development trends since 1975.

¹Department of Defense, National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2003, Outlays by Appropriation Title—FY 1945-FY 2007, table 6-11



Chuck DeVore, seated at right, is Vice President of Research for SM&A. He can be reached at Chuck.DeVore@smawins.com. Tyson Moler, standing, is SM&A's Staff Analyst.

Always in Motion

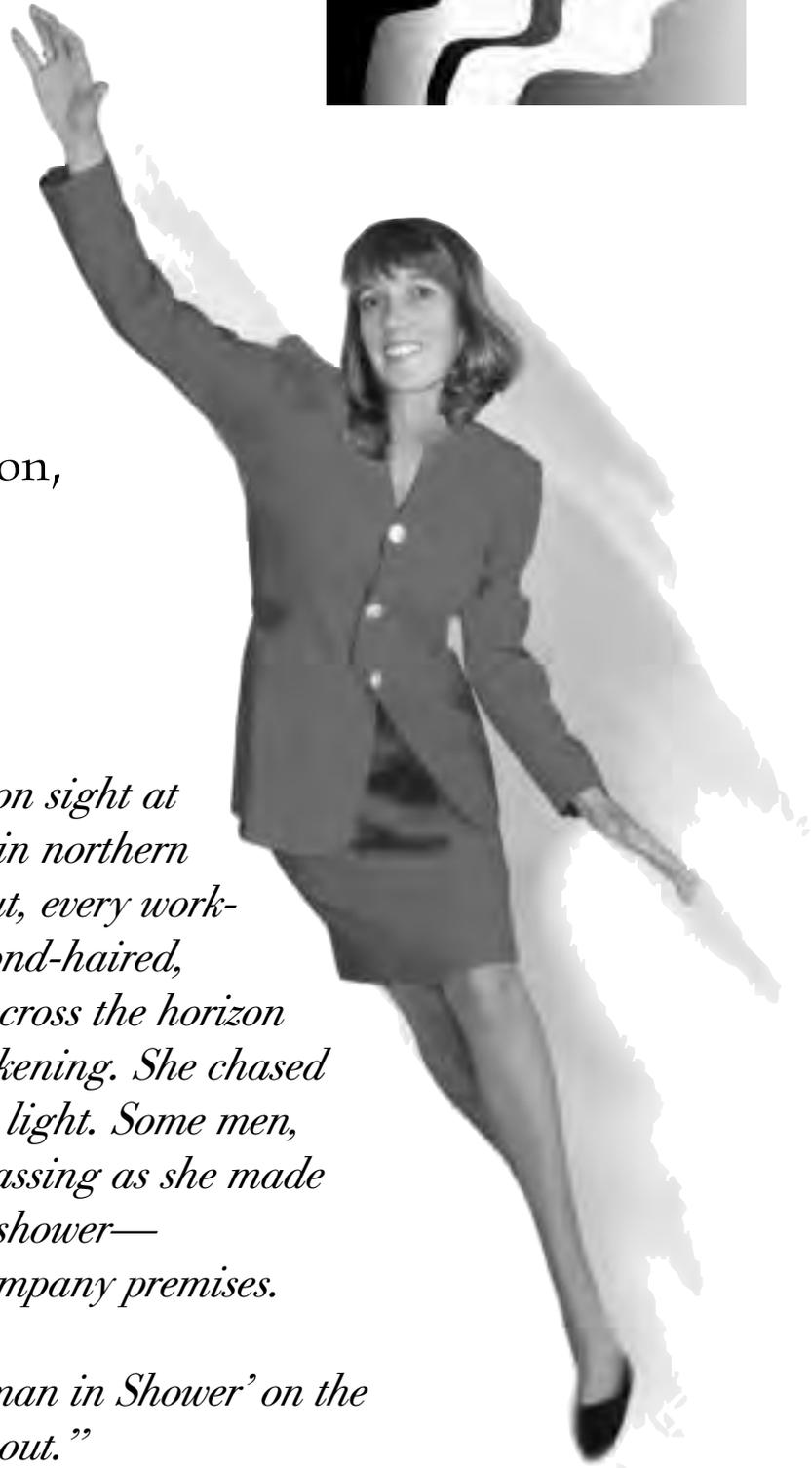
Patty Nunn

Vice President,
Proposals and Production,
Anteon Corporation

BY R. DENNIS GREEN

Women were an uncommon sight at the corporate warehouse in northern Baltimore. It was 1985. But, every workday, often before daybreak, a blond-haired, gazelle-like sprite would streak across the horizon on a journey of light-footed awakening. She chased birds a' flurry in the haze of first light. Some men, the early risers, grinned at her passing as she made her way back to the men's room shower—the only shower then on AAI's company premises.

“Just hang a sign that says ‘Woman in Shower’ on the door,” they said, “and we’ll stay out.”



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A similar discipline carries on today, more than 16 years later, though the pre-dawn run is in Fairfax, Virginia, and a 'Woman in Shower' sign is no longer required.

Patricia Nunn leaves for her office from Haymarket at 5:15 each morning. Driving a green Jaguar XK8 convertible, she is typically one of the first employees to arrive at the Anteon corporate lot. Once there, she runs, bikes or exercises, seeming to charge an endorphin-rich battery that never goes dead. The Vice President of Proposals and Production is in her office by 7 a.m.

THE SPRINT TO VP

How did Nunn get from AAI, where she first worked as a logistics engineer, to become Vice President at Anteon Corporation? According to Nunn, "I just got bored."

After rotating through AAI's logistics disciplines—from reliability and maintainability to training, analysis, and technical publications, she found that she needed something more dynamic to hold her interest. A devilish manager referred her to another division that needed proposal support. She transferred and, in her first assignment, wrote what was labeled "the absolutely worst management plan we've ever read." It was an auspicious beginning.

However, the new manager helped her to co-write "a far better plan," and she was hooked on a new career.

"That's the kind of people I've had all my career," Nunn said of the nurturing manager. "People who let you try it, make mistakes, then get you in the right direction." She added, "That's my management style with my team now."

We'll move you to vice president if you add value to the organization and show us you can do it.

When Nunn arrived at Anteon three years ago, the company had \$200 million in revenue. Nunn was offered a Director's position to accept the proposal operations reins. Nunn countered that proposals were critical to the government contractor's continued success and suggested that a vice presidency might be more appropriate. Nunn relates, "they said, we'll move you to vice president if you add value to the organization and show us you can do it."

What happened? "We had one strong year," she said. "First large task order win under the ANSWER contract. Major awards occurred. The company's revenue went straight up."

Nunn then became the youngest vice president in a company whose revenue has since grown to \$715 million. "Okay, you're a vice president," she recalls being told by Anteon's executive board. "Now, continue to change us. Continue to mold us. Continue to get us better. And every year, my budget goes up."

WINNER'S CIRCLE STRATEGIES

Be an Agent for Change

In this bargain, Anteon took on a proposal management leader who thrives on change. She entered an environment where all proposals had previously been written and reviewed by top management, an increasingly difficult expectation for the growing company to meet. As Anteon acquired other companies and won increasingly larger contract bids, its model for developing new business had to change.

"Your executive team can't be doing that if you're going to be grow-



..... at a glance

Position: Vice President, Proposals and Production, Anteon Corporation.

Born: March 31, 1963, the middle child of six children (sisters are twins), to farmers north of Columbus, Ohio.

Previous Employers: CACI, Inc. (1993-1999), RJO Enterprises (1991-1993), AAI Corporation (1985-1991).

Education: MA, Administrative Science, Johns Hopkins University; BS, Electronic Engineering, DeVry Institute of Technology.

Hobbies: Running (triathlete), mountain climbing, wine tasting, gardening, and travel. Antarctica marathon trip planned for Spring 2003.

Recent Book(s): *The Change Monster* by Jeanie Daniel Duck.

Favorite Quote: "Hard work pays off." (Her mother's mantra).

Dream Vacation: Rented yacht with captain and chef, "just cruising all around the world."

APMP: Member since 1993 (#534). Chair, APMP Mentoring Program (founded May 2002). APMP Vision Award (1999). Taskforce Leader (former), Electronic Procurement Task Force. Taskforce Leader (former), Acquisition Reform Task Force. Regular presenter at Annual conferences.





Not Just A Metaphor—For Patty Nunn, the aspiration to climb is more than a management theorem. Here, in March, she takes the pinnacle of Africa’s Mt. Kilimanjaro, standing (without gloves!) at 19,340 feet. Why is she holding an Anteon sign? Just her way of showing solidarity with colleagues launching an IPO on Wall Street that same week.

ing to a billion dollars in size,” said Nunn. So, with the blessing of Anteon senior management, she put the proposal resources in place to assume the firm’s growing appetite for new and expanding business. She has grown her department from 8 to 20 professionals—an increase that parallels corporate growth to 5,400 people in 80 locations worldwide. Her team managed a third of the company’s 2,000 proposals produced last year. The balance was supported indirectly by the Virtual Proposal Center databases, history files, and templates maintained by her proposal and production team.

The proposal group is an overhead function allocated across the full spectrum of Anteon line organizations, providing a built-in ‘no added cost’ incentive for her department’s use. The focus of proposal group energies is defined by what is known as the corporate top list. It is “those bids we know across the year and into next year that we need to be doing capture for, identifying teammates, and developing strategy.”

My job is just to help them get that revenue the best I can.

The proposal group serves the line organizations from which each opportunity’s capture manager is drawn. “Because the line is responsible for generating revenue,” said Nunn, “my job is just to help them get that revenue the best I can.”

The ‘best I can’ in this context is a formidable resource, encompassing the talent of professional proposal managers, virtual proposal management tools and data bases, and graphic talents that are second to none. “Many times,” said Nunn, “the capture managers are not trained to capture; they are program managers that are doing a good job, and ‘Oh, by the way, now you need to be doing this proposal.’ That means my group has to be very effective at helping them understand proposal development and helping them make decisions on strategy.”

Anteon proposal managers are trained to ask the difficult, probing questions. “Okay,” says Nunn, recalling a typical exchange with a capture manager, “Let’s look at your team, see which way you want to go.”

Her team’s confidence is born in the knowledge of strategies that have won before, and knowing how those strategies might apply to any new bid. They know how to structure a project organization in ways that are responsive, reasonable, and economical. Moreover, they ensure compliance with all requirements, because they have studied the customer’s Request for Proposal inside and out.

Her department’s motto is “Always in motion.” That is not just a tip to frenetic activity. It is also acknowledgment that growth necessitates change.

Train, Train, Train

Close on the heels of strategy definition are just-in-time training and process support. For Nunn, the need to train and be trained is true both inside her department and out. Earlier this year, she received the Anteon University’s Crystal Apple award for teaching more than 500 Anteon employees. Almost every business trip she makes—and there are many—includes the teaching of proposal-related courses to remotely-located Anteon or subcontractor personnel.

Just-in-time training may take two days to complete, but they’re actually doing hands-on product.

more...

Just-in-time training, it turns out, is a perfect complement for evolving strategy into actual content. "It allows us," said Nunn, "to figure out where they are in the process. If they've already built their strategy," she said, "then I'm not going to spend my time there. I may take that strategy and work it into themes. Really hone down on discriminators. Work on past performance or selecting and tailoring résumés. That just-in-time training may take two days to complete, but they're actually doing hands-on product. It is not just, 'Okay, we're going to show you what proposals are and the process.' It's 'Where is this team? How far along are we?' And 'Let's start working from there.'"

She also promotes the training of department staff, sending them to courses on everything from technical process improvement to leadership, team building, and supervision. Certifications are also available through Anteon University courses, including over 200 computer-based training modules on the Web.

Nunn's personal résumé is crammed with educational credits. In addition to a bachelor's degree in electronic engineering and a master's in administrative science from Johns Hopkins University, she keeps herself regularly enrolled in courses or seminars. "I go to Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard on occasion to listen to their philosophy on change," she said, "how it impacts people and how you can make it better as people have to change. Because if you're not changing, you're not growing," she says.

Show Positive Attitude

In addition to Nunn's brilliance as a leader and competitor, perhaps her most persuasive traits are found in her disarming smile and positive attitude. Without warning, she may burst into short, spontaneous bits of hi-decibel laughter. The laughter is her constant companion, and can punctuate nearly any conversation. Sometimes it celebrates a comic moment. Often it is there to poke fun at herself. However, just as often, it is a

kind of life force, blasting through opposition or argument. Combined with her expertise and penchant for strategy, it can ameliorate nearly any defense or facilitate any change.

If a point needs to be forced, she does it without yelling at anyone, without putting anyone down.

According to proposal director Joanna Gaither, the person Nunn calls her "right hand person," Nunn is "positive, even when she has to be negative. It is that positive orientation of saying something in a critical but constructive way. And a lot of people are just amazed by it." "If a point needs to be forced," said Gaither, "she does it without yelling at anyone, without putting anyone down."

With her own staff, she leads by example. "In general, when someone has a hard time doing something," said Gaither, "she never says, 'Well, you should be able to do that. Why aren't you able to do that?' She never is critical in that way. She simply says, 'Okay, where are you at? What needs to happen?'" Even if the answer and a pending deadline result in her working late into the night.

Build and Nurture Teams

A natural complement to Nunn's positive attitude is her uncanny propensity for building or facilitating effective teams. It is not always clear how this is accomplished, but circumstantial evidence abounds. At the time of our interview, for example, she was co-managing a bid with 19 active and critical subcontractors. Curiously, all were getting along and had just sailed through a red team review without a significant deficiency of note. When questioned about the enterprise and why it has worked so well, Nunn deflected any compliments (as she often does), giving most of the credit to others. "It's the capture manager," she said, "whose job it is to work the subs. To call them regularly, let them know what's going on, advise of changes" and ensure continued support. Though acknowledging the challenge that comes with integrating 19 cultures, 19 agendas, and sometimes, conflicting experience, she pointed to regular conference calls and fact that every subcontractor participated. "No one has been absent from the process," she said, beginning to end.

Cohesion within her staff is marked by low turnover and the flattering comments we heard the day of our Anteon visit. Gaither, for example, had accolades aplenty. "She is genuine," she said. "She gives it to you straight. What she says she stands for, you find she really does stand for that. And she's loyal...she sticks to her word."

On building a department, Gaither has observed Nunn's role in getting sen-



New Meanings For Team Spirit — Patty Nunn's far-flung Anteon Team, pictured here in a rare group photo, took pleasure in composing fictional missives, supposedly written by her and sent back to them, during her African sojourn earlier this year. Apparently, as their letters report, and without breaking a sweat, she was called upon to slay dragons, wild lions, and unholy beasts—promoting world peace. It was all in the course of her worldly quest. Sitting, left to right: Tony Gary, Brian Livingston, Kim Metta, Bethann Gallagher, Kathy Double, Patty Nunn; Standing, left to right: Thien Ho, Rachael Hixon, Donna Lenco, John Rodgers, Gillian Dionne, Lois Karb, Wayne Simpson, Lynn Sornson, Sharon Kaplan, Cat Howser, Holly Andrews, Jan Lamoglia, Joanna Hannigan Gaither, Jane Leahy, Robin Laiti.

ior executive buy-in. “She really keeps the pulse on,” said Gaither, “and she’s had to fight her way into it. But, she’s gained respect and fought her way up. And she saw a need to protect as well as advance in kind of a tactical way which is very related to doing proposals—going to war.”

What Gaither calls war, may have been both a practical and public relations onslaught. It started at a time when the firm had only six divisions, but no system for collecting, maintaining, or disseminating corporate proposal data.

She sent us all on the road.

So what did Nunn do? “She sent us all on the road,” said Gaither, “to do training, and to do some business development in terms of not only taking from them their résumés and project qualifications, but in giving back [to staff on the line] by providing training, sharing insights into the corporate culture, and explaining how our department can help them, including use of its tools. So, we’ve come to be—although no one’s indispensable, we’ve come to be depended upon as a very reliable group.”

Nunn endears herself to staff in other ways, some tangible, some corny. When the company changed eligibility standards for Team Achievement Awards, for example, she created a new awards program, dubbed Outstanding Performance Awards. Her new program includes an annual executive awards dinner and cash-based, personalized gift certificates that Nunn fulfills on her personal time. There is also an annual pumpkin carving contest, creation of personal Web site graphics, and team-oriented exercises for each quarterly meeting with staff. It helps build a spirit of family as well as team.

Little wonder that Nunn is also the life force behind APMP’s new mentoring program. Launched at the annual conference in May, the volunteer program pairs senior business development/ proposal professionals (mentors) with junior professionals (protégés) for the purpose of learning. Informally, Nunn had already become a mentor to colleagues she met in the course of business. She seems to have a need to mentor, a mandate consistent with the 4-H pledge (right) that she learned growing up on a large Ohio farm.

Don’t Underestimate This Competitor

Julie Moss took first place in the Ironman Japan competition in 1985-86. This accomplishment would be even more inspiring if you had seen the TV coverage of Moss’s infamous but determined crawl over the finish line of the Ironman World Championships in 1982. Nunn had. She shared these

recollections and excitement with a cubical mate at AAI.

“Was that incredible?! Oh, my God!” she exclaimed. “I could just feel her pain.”

“There’s no way you could ever do an Ironman,” he challenged, and there the gauntlet lay, thrown down by a man who made the mistake of underestimating the 120-pound Nunn.

I’ve done five Ironman-distance triathlons since then. I like that distance.

“Okay, so it took a few years,” she follows. “But I’ve done five Ironman-distance triathlons since then. I like that distance. I’m an endurance person. Point me in one direction, I can go forever.” And so, she does, competing in 10 to 15 sporting events each year.

Nunn seems to thrive on athletic challenges, and recently turned that extreme ambition to pursuing Africa’s Mt. Kilimanjaro. “The mountain climbing is just one of those things,” she said. “There’s nothing like peaking to the top of a mountain. And seeing the world around you.”

What drives a woman to such incredible but solitary endeavors?

“I think it’s the desire to get away from the world.” She laughs. “It is. My whole life, my whole job, is around people and solving problems and challenges. So, when I take my vacations, it’s generally away from people. Going to Kilimanjaro and climbing was away from everything that I normally do. I was with eight guys whose whole job was to get me up the mountain. A guide and seven porters, then me. We were on the mountain for nine days. I slept at 18,700 feet. It was cold. But it was wonderful.”

Nunn reached the peak in March 2002; the same week Anteon had its initial public offering on the New York Stock Exchange (symbol: ANT). She stood on the peak at 19,340 feet (see photo).

Those who were invested at the IPO have seen their stock enjoy notable growth.

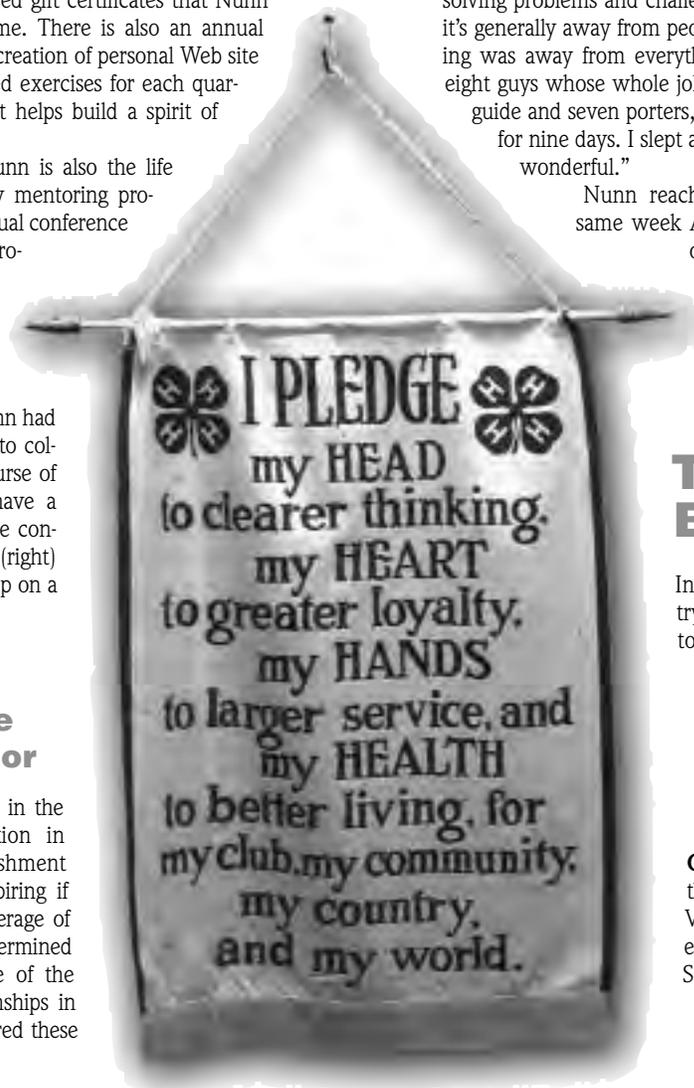
To Make the Best Better

In the company of one of the industry’s few vice presidents, we asked her to speculate on:

- What distinguishes a best of breed proposal operation, and
- What proposal management professionals can do to elevate their operations into becoming a best of breed.

Start With High Visibility and Centralization—The organizations that place Proposal Management at the Vice President, General Manager, or equivalent levels include Anteon, CACI, SBC Communications, Computer

more...



Sciences Corporation and RS Information Systems. What distinguishes firms such as these and the business development success they enjoy? "I think," said Nunn, "you'll find in such organizations a view that proposals are a critical element, and that view is driven downward from the top." At Anteon, for example, Joseph M. Kampf, President and CEO, attributes the Company's double-digit growth rate to a strong centralized proposal organization, high quality performance and the Team-Anteon culture. Kampf stated, "Our centralized proposal organization has enabled us to increase the number, quality and winning percentage of our proposals. This centralized approach has also enabled Anteon, a mid-size company, to successfully compete for the larger contracts that are now the norm for the government information technology services sector."

Keep Senior Management Involved in Your Bids—

What can you do if your organization is not yet centralized or lacks a senior management mandate? "I think," said Nunn, "it really comes down to the buy-in of the senior management team. If the proposal manager is in a line organization, as I was at AAI, each line organization may have its own proposal center. How much time does the line organization's senior management spend with that proposal organization? It's critical for them to see the added value. Involve that senior management team." Brief them, candidly. Encourage their participation in needed changes. On critical bids, ask for personnel support. Experience shows that the senior managers "want to be involved. That's what makes it easy for me," said Nunn. "To have the involvement at the top. These bids are critical to them. They know that. They see that as their ticket to growth."

Put Executives on Proposal Red Teams—"If you are a proposal manager, and you are trying to get more visibility, instead of just being the grunt down at the bottom, get the guys upstairs involved. No matter what level. Invite him or her to be a member of the Red Team Review. Say, 'Hey, I really need your support at this Red Team to review what your team has done.' It's amazing what kind of support you get."

Groom and Recruit Your Staff for Growth—When recruiting staff or hiring a successor, what qualities do you seek? "Oh, lots," said Nunn. "I'm always trying to groom my staff to take the next level. To help capture managers who say to you, 'I don't know what to do.' Because the line wants that. They want the leadership to help write a better proposal. One that they can live with once we get the award. Yet one that they can execute. One that's going to win." Overall, she adds, repeating an earlier precept, "I think what I am looking for is someone who can deal with constant change."

What About Ego?—"Proposals are personal," said Nunn "You've got to be hands on. And yes, I'm a vice president, but I can tell you I love being in the middle of the team, working the strategy, listening to a red team debrief that you're getting pounded on, sitting right next to that capture manager, saying 'We will get through this!'" She laughs. It's all in a day's work.

What do you do with your ego in such an instance?

"Sit on it!" She says this too loudly. And then, she laughs again.



Always In Motion

"Who moved my cheese," hollers Hem in a book by the same name¹, ranting at the injustice of finding his cheese station bare. While others move on in search of new cheese, Hem and Haw complain that life is not fair and yell unattractively, refusing to acknowledge and deal with change. Patty Nunn sees a corollary to life in a corporate proposal department. She uses the story as a teaching aid in management meetings with department staff.

Embracing such a precept, where does someone so wedded to change go from here? Nunn considers.

I always go where there is change needed.

"I would have to say, as long as we're in a change mode at Anteon, and we're constantly growing and changing, molding the company, I'll be extremely happy here," she said. "But my goal is to continually contribute. If I get to a point where I feel I'm not contributing to whatever it is, then I'll move to something else. But I always go where there is change needed."

Proposal director Gaither sees Nunn in the context of the metaphor that she likes to climb hills and mountains. "She will take on any challenge," said Gaither, "reach the summit and say, 'Where's the next one?' Others would be so exhausted, or so tickled to death that they got halfway up, that they'd leave it at that, but she's just looking for the next mountain."

"It's a literal thing that she takes into her life."

¹Johnson, Spencer, M.D. *Who Moved My Cheese?: An A-Mazing Way To Deal With Change In Your Work And In Your Life.* G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York. 1998.

Thanks to anonymous Anteon staff who contributed artwork shown on this page.

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IMPROVing the Proposal Team

Using Improvisational Theater Techniques To Rapidly Build an Effective Proposal Team

BY BJ LOWNIE

Most of us have had the painful experience of working on a proposal effort where the people involved did not function as a team. We have experienced high stress levels, low energy, and missed deadlines. We have seen minor disagreements that might have been easily resolved without the undue stress, but have instead become full-fledged, raging battles. And, despite our hard work and 'best laid plans,' we have more often than not seen our efforts result in poor quality proposals and the subsequent loss of potential business. Working on such teams is not much fun, and people are not eager to remain involved in such efforts or sign up for future endeavors.

Many of us have also had the pleasure of working with a proposal team that performed brilliantly. We have experienced the strong commitments, the creativity, and the quick and easy resolution of conflicts that characterize such efforts. And we have had the delightful experience of working efficiently and effectively, producing higher quality output and ultimately winning the business. In the best of cases, we have actually enjoyed working on the effort and with each other.

So, what is it that makes one team perform well together, while another struggles to avoid self-destruction?

Successful proposal efforts share certain essential elements. Among these are:

- Effective leadership
- Clear goals and objectives (both team and individual)
- A realistic plan and ongoing planning
- Appropriate and sufficient resources, including specific skills and knowledge
- Reasonable measurement and rewards
- *And, the ability to perform as a team!*

It was the best of teams, it was the worst of teams.

The need for team building is often overlooked

How a team functions and performs has an impact on:

- Commitment and buy-in
- Creativity and flexibility
- Cooperation and conflict resolution
- Level of motivation, energy, satisfaction, and stress
- *The quality of the proposal and the chance of winning the business!*

Surprisingly, assessments done on proposal efforts reveal that

more...



often little, if any, consideration is given to team dynamics or the need for team building. It is often assumed that the people involved will automatically work well together. When team building is not a component in the proposal process, the associated proposal quality and win rates are consistently lower.

Team building is critical

A given group of people involved in a proposal effort will have a much greater chance of functioning as a high performing team, and doing so as quickly as possible, when team-building is a part of the overall plan. Team building benefits the team by:

- Clarifying overall goals and objectives (individual and team)
- Drawing out each of the members' strengths and challenges
- Defining roles and responsibilities
- Improving the team's ability to communicate with one another, and to respect and understand differing points of view
- *Reducing the amount of time it takes to function as a team.*

Effective team-building exercises set a vision, emphasize critical information, and develop a common understanding for the individual and the overall team. They draw out key issues and learning relating to specific areas of the proposal effort. It is for these reasons that it is essential that team-building exercises be built into the proposal plan and undertaken at the start of the project, as well as used at specific times throughout the effort.

Playing along

Team building exercises pre-date proposal writing. Perhaps in the interest of team building, an enlightened ancestor of ours gathered his or her fellow cave dwellers together and suggested they 'share' their thoughts, and thus alleviate some of their fears and improve their performance on the upcoming hunt. Maybe they even graphically depicted their 'desired outcome' on the wall. It is even possible to imagine Grock expressing her concerns about being paired with Throg for the next outing and the two of them sharing their

feelings during a pre-historic role-play.

Much of the basics of team building remain the same. It is still about developing a common understanding, airing concerns, reviewing plans and gaining acceptance and buy-in, etc. It is the way teams cause all these things and more to happen, as quickly as possible.

Team building has been studied, developed and modified over the years. One fairly recent method for quickly creating team synergy is the use of improvisational theater exercises. In improvisational theater the actors 'act out' a scenario in a spontaneous and unrehearsed manner. They are given a set of guidelines and a premise, often provided by the audience, and then create the piece on the spot. The hit TV program *Who's Line Is It Anyway?* has popularized this type of theater.

I saw first hand how quickly a group of disparate individuals, many unknown to each other, were transformed into teams that performed brilliantly.

I was introduced to improvisational theater activities several years ago when I was fortunate enough to meet and work with Izzy Gesell, the author of *Playing Along—37 Group Learning Activities Borrowed From Improvisational Theater*. Gesell specializes in teaching people how to use Improv and humor to improve their lives. I saw first hand how quickly a group of disparate individuals, many unknown to each other, were transformed into teams that performed brilliantly. The fact that the people involved were greatly enjoying themselves was not lost on me. With his permission and guidance, I adapted several of the learning activities from Izzy's book specifically for developing high performing proposal teams.

The Power of Improv

I have used these exercises with proposal teams for several years now, and have always found them to be very effective. By participating in creative exercises, team members quickly discover and come to appreciate the strengths and styles of their fellow team members. They also have the opportunity to improve their communication skills and experience different perspectives.

Typically, as a result of participating in the exercises, individuals are more energized, more positive, and more open to new ideas and methods. They listen better, are more cooperative with one another, are more creative, and 'play nice' together. As a result, their team functions at a higher level, producing significantly higher-quality proposals and doing so in a more efficient and effective way.

The fundamentals of improvisational theater are highly applicable to high performing teams.



Why are Improv exercises so helpful in developing teams? “The fundamentals of improvisational theater are highly applicable to high performing teams,” states Gesell. “For any team to be successful, the participants need to stick to the plan or topic, actively listen and be accepting of what someone else offers. They need to be aware of what is going on around them and be flexible as the circumstances change. They also need to be able to make a mistake, adjust and quickly move on. Finally, Improv develops an individual’s sense of humor and ability to have fun. Teams with these capabilities consistently perform at a much higher level.” Kat Koppett, author of *Training to Imagine: Practical Improvisational Theatre Techniques to Enhance Creativity, Teamwork, Leadership and Training* concurs. “In today’s fast paced, ‘right-sized,’ competitive environment, businesses increasingly need staff who are creative, think on their feet, take the unexpected in their stride, and work effectively in fluid teams.”

Whose job is it anyway?

The proposal manager has the responsibility for how the team performs. However, the proposal manager is not necessarily the individual that should facilitate the team building exercises. Facilitating team building exercises, especially those based on Improv, requires superb people skills, experience with facilitation, a sense of humor and playfulness, and a genuine sense of caring. It also requires someone who is willing to take risks and is not afraid of appearing foolish. Ideally, the facilitation of the exercises will be done by someone who possesses the appropriate skill set.

In the beginning

An exercise that is very effective for introductions at the start of a proposal effort is *Stand Up If*. This exercise provides a safe and ‘playful’ way for participants to discover things about other participants that might otherwise remain undiscovered for some time. This typically includes finding out one another’s past experiences, commitment, motivation and personal interests. In this exercise, participants are read a series of about 20 statements, and if the statement is true for them they stand up. They remain standing until the next statement is read and if that statement is also true they continue to stand. If it is not true they sit down. Besides revealing information that helps people get connected, the game creates movement, increases energy, and helps people relax. Some typical statements used during the exercise are:

- Stand up if you have a pet.
- Stand up if this is your first proposal effort.
- Stand up if you are highly organized.
- Stand up if you squeeze the toothpaste in the middle.
- Stand up if you love to write.
- And so on...

I used this exercise during my presentation at the 2002 APMP conference to help the audience quickly learn a

few things about their fellow attendees. The statements were specifically tailored to the event (something that should always be done) and included ‘Stand up if you are already a member of APMP’ and ‘Stand up if this is your first time attending an annual APMP conference.’ As a proposal manager, this exercise will let you discover, in a safe and non-threatening way, valuable insights such as skill levels, previous experiences, and likes and dislikes.

It causes them to think “This is different!”

Stand Up If and other Improv-based exercises also help the team to realize that the proposal effort will be undertaken and managed in a creative way. The activity causes them to give themselves permission to have fun. It causes them to think “This is different!” and snaps them out of thinking about other tasks and focuses them on the proposal effort. Doing *Stand Up If* early on gives you as the leader a chance to determine what sort of group you have, decide who plays, who does not, and what skills the team members believe they possess.

Stand Up If takes very little time to conduct, typically less than five minutes. In fact, it loses some of its effect if overly drawn out. The set of statements should contain a balance of statements relating to work, hobbies, interests and personal traits. It does take some time, typically several hours, to develop, refine, and test appropriate statements. However, once you have developed a set of questions that work for you, refining the list for your next event will take very little time or effort.

*There are no wrong answers,
there is no time pressure,
they should relax and
enjoy themselves.*



The World’s Worst is an exercise that helps a team look at the skills and behaviors needed to be successful and is also useful early in the proposal effort. It helps the team examine their capabilities in light of the tasks ahead of them. In this exercise, team members are asked to stand up and form a circle facing inwards with plenty of room in the middle. Participants are coached to exaggerate, be silly, and ‘play’. They are also coached that there are no wrong answers, there is no time pressure, and that they should relax and enjoy themselves. Team members are asked to consider a behavior that the world’s worst in that role might typically exhibit.

As these behaviors come to mind, a participant steps into the center and demonstrates the behavior. They then step back and another member steps in.

If the selected role was ‘the world’s worst proposal team member,’ the dialogue for this exercise might go something like:

- C’mon, we don’t need a plan.

more...

- Relax, they won't mind if we submit it a couple of weeks late.
- Oh, did I mention that I'm on holiday for the next three weeks?
- I only write with purple crayons.
- And so on...

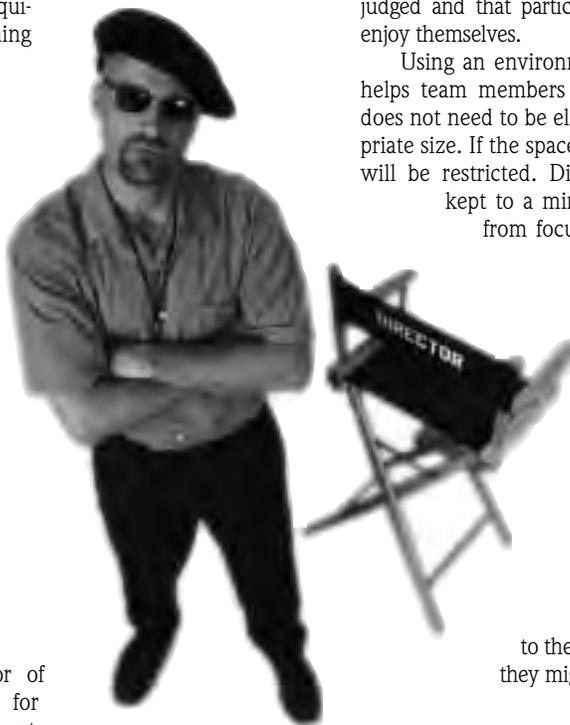
By exaggerating the behaviors that one sometimes sees from an ineffective person in a particular role, the team is able to generate energy and laughter — and to highlight potentially damaging behaviors in a non-confrontational way. The ideas presented form the basis for an open discussion of what is required for someone to be highly effective in that particular role, as well as what might prevent them from contributing to a high performing proposal team.

Doing what it takes to build the team

All of the Improv exercises require team members to work together, to focus on their communication skills, and to think clearly about a particular topic. Through their participation in the exercise, team members gain insights into the given topic in an original and creative way. Through the exercise, the team has an opportunity to have some fun together, to generate energy, and to bond. These are all essential prerequisites to becoming a high performing team.

The level of performance the team achieved would have taken much longer if we had not incorporated the Improv exercises.

When Jon Williams, Director of Strategic Proposal Management for Purchasing and Materials Management Services Ltd., was building a proposal center for a major computer corporation, Improv exercises played a key role in creating a high performing team and doing so as quickly as possible. “We had under 12 weeks in which to transform a successful small division level group with five members to a group of 18 supporting all business units across the entire country,” said Williams. “I am convinced that the level of performance the team achieved would have taken much longer, or would never have been attained, if we had not incorporated the Improv exercises. One director commented that the team was the best motivated he could ever remember seeing — and that was three days after the group had first met! This proposal center continues



to use the exercises on an ongoing basis to keep their skills sharp and I suspect, because they have had so much fun doing them.”

The amount of time and the location for conducting these exercises varies. On larger efforts, when a proposal is expected to take several weeks or even months and the team is fairly large, there might be one or two days of dedicated time set aside for team building. In other cases, typically when a team has worked together before or when the team is fairly small, the exercises are used in a less structured manner over a shorter period of time. Perhaps a few hours are set aside at the beginning of the effort, and then other exercises, which might only require a half hours time, can be used when the team needs to step back and get a new perspective. In both situations, the exercises provide important reminders for how the team wants to operate.

Why don't we get comfortable?

Improv exercises work best when the team members feel comfortable and safe. When participants feel safe, they are more open, willing to play, and to take risks. As mentioned earlier, the facilitator can help make participants feel comfortable by reminding them that there are no wrong answers, that they are not being judged and that participants should take their time, relax and enjoy themselves.

Using an environment that is conducive to ‘playing’ also helps team members be more comfortable. The space used does not need to be elaborate, but it does need to be an appropriate size. If the space is too small, movement (and thinking!) will be restricted. Distractions and interruptions should be

kept to a minimum as they prevent the participants from focusing on the activity and cause them to disengage. It is also best if the space is not too visible to others as this can cause participants to be inhibited. The best space will include toys (for literally ‘throwing ideas around’), soft furniture and soft lighting.

It is also helpful to not appear to be too removed from the business world. If the team feels the exercise is too much like playing they may disengage. Kat

Koppett suggests, “Pay attention to your vocabulary. Sometimes participants (not ‘students’ or ‘actors’) respond better to the terms ‘activities’ or ‘exercises’ better than they might to ‘games.’”

Take your time

When working with groups that have not been exposed to Improv exercises, it is useful to use a relatively simple exercise as a warm up. *Fold the Blanket* is a fairly simple exercise that is very effective to get a group started. In this exercise, team members are paired up and are asked to role-play folding an imaginary beach blanket. This activity lets the team members get a feeling for role-playing in a very safe situation with no real demands put on them. Typically, it will involve lots of movement, laughter, and fun. It helps them start to visualize and to imagine different possibilities.

At the end of the activity, participants might be asked who is holding the blanket. Usually, one of the pair will acknowledge that they are holding the blanket and they might even be holding their arms as if they are actually holding it. Participants will often be engaged enough to be able to describe the blanket's color, texture, and size. If you use this and the team is really enjoying themselves, you can take it to the next level by role-playing *Wash the Puppy*, an exercise that can get very lively.

The impact of Improv

It is a given that teams with energy, enthusiasm, and creativity perform at a higher level and generate better results. Using team-building exercises can greatly contribute to having such a team. This innovative approach to proposal team building also pays huge dividends when it comes to engaging people on a proposal effort, keeping them engaged, and recruiting them to work on subsequent efforts. People want to be part of teams that have these attributes. However, quantifying the benefits within a proposal effort can be difficult, as the results achieved, though significant and substantial, tend to be subjective and intangible. These benefits include:

- Less stress and high energy levels
- Better communications
- Improved ability to overcome obstacles
- Easier conflict resolution
- Greater creativity and flexibility
- Increased tolerance and acceptance
- *More fun!*

These are all difficult to quantify, but equally, they are all critical to the team's ability to perform. Gesell's clients, including such notables as NASA, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and many others see enough value in Improv team building exercises to include his programs as a standard component of their training curriculum.

This is so good

A game that helps the team focus on the goals of the proposal effort is *World's Best*. In this game, team members are asked to act out what the best case results might look like for a proposal effort. In this exercise, participants are asked to act out *The World's Best Proposal* in three different 'acts,' each one portraying a different proposal perspective. The three perspectives acted out are that of the customer, the competition, and the proposal team. The exercise works best with three to five players per scene but works well with any number. A person working alone on a proposal effort can, with practice, use this exercise to understand and capitalize on the various perspectives. At the start of the exercise, you should coach the team to exaggerate and to be silly, acting out their reactions to an unbelievably good proposal.

The dialogue for the 'customer' role-play may go something like this:

- This is an amazing document. It is absolutely flawless. I have never seen a proposal that is so easy to read and understand.
- I'll say, I'm ready to award them the contract right now.

- I'm so impressed, I'm ready to give them all our future business.
- And so on...

The dialogue for the 'competition' role-play might be:

- We don't stand a chance against this proposal.
- I want to be on their team.
- Theirs is so good, we shouldn't even submit ours.
- And so on...

And the dialogue for the 'team' role-play' might sound like:

- That was so much fun, I feel guilty getting paid.
- And we only used 50% of the available time.
- I'm looking forward to that trip to Tahiti.
- And so on...

Though the statements made by team members during the exercises are obviously exaggerations, this role-playing allows the group to experience positive perspectives from the various groups involved and give them a taste of what it might feel like to receive such reactions. It causes the team to step into the shoes of the customer, the competition, and of a skilled team member. It allows those involved to create a vision of the desired best-case end-result. After they have acted out their parts, the team

is led by the facilitator in a discussion to crystallize their ideas on the desired outcome and truly get a feel for what they wish to accomplish.



Communications is key

As stated previously, communications is a key characteristic of a high performing team as well as critical to success with Improv activities. There are several Improv exercises that are effective for developing the team's communication skills. As with all the exercises, success requires the participants to listen, to be aware and to be flexible. Exercises for improving communication skills

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include *Questions, Questions, The Alphabetical Conversation, and One Word at a Time*.

In *Questions, Questions*, the object of the game is for two participants to conduct a conversation on a topic relevant to proposals using only questions. If one of the participants inadvertently makes a statement rather than asking a question a different player steps in and continues the conversation. To be successful, participants must pay attention to the topic, listen carefully to what the other participant says, accept what the other player has said and be conscious of only asking questions. To start, a topic is suggested. If the topic suggested was

Tools I'd like to have as a proposal manager, the dialogue might go something like this:

- Person 1—"Wouldn't it be great to have a dedicated copier?"
- Person 2—"Can you imagine how much faster and easier we'd get proposals done?"
- Person 1—"Do you think we'll ever have one?"
- And so on...

The game would be restarted if one of them said "Maybe we'll get one next year."

This exercise allows participants to practice their communication skills. They learn to listen carefully, set aside their own agendas and are reminded not to pre-judge what others are going to say.

Also good for focusing on communication skills, though slightly more challenging is *The Alphabetical Conversation*. In this activity, two or three participants once again conduct a conversation based on a topic suggested by the group. The group picks a letter for the participants to start on. The participants then speak in turn, using either statements or questions, with each one starting with the next consecutive letter of the alphabet. The dialogue continues until they have gone through the letters of the alphabet and returned to the letter on which they began. If the topic were 'Proposals' and the starting letter was 'H,' the game might go something like this:

- Person 1—**H**ave you ever worked on a proposal before?
- Person 2—**I** was on one last year.
- Person 1—**J**oin our team.
- Person 2—**K**ind of you to ask me.
- Person 1—**L**et's get you started.
- And so on...

An important aspect of this activity, as with most Improv activities, is that the play does not stop even if a participant uses an incorrect letter. The other person(s) merely continue, using what has been offered. This allows the participants to experience what it is like to not be judged or criticized and to experience a successful recovery as the conversation continues despite the apparent mistake.

One Word At A Time is also great for improving communication skills. It really tests the listening and awareness skills of participants, and is a bit more challenging than the previously mentioned two activities. In this game, two or three participants hold a con-

versation on a topic suggested by the group. They speak in turn, but only speak one word each time. Sentences are built as each person adds the next word. Each sentence is concluded when one of the players says 'period' and the overall conversation stops when the participants feel they have reached satisfactory conclusion. If the topic were 'What I like about working on proposals,' the dialogue might go like this:

- Person 1—My
- Person 2—favorite
- Person 1—thing
- Person 2—about
- Person 1—proposals
- Person 2—is
- Person 1—working
- Person 2—with
- Person 1—creative
- Person 2—people
- Person 1—period.

All these exercises help team members become a stronger and higher performing team. They help the team members to be more aware of the need for good communications skills such as listening, speaking clearly, and paying attention. They also cause team members to focus on the topic at hand, to be more flexible, and to be more accepting of what is being said. And they help the team to relax, to talk openly, to learn to trust and depend on one another, and to be creative.

It is a great way to discuss what might happen during the proposal, and to explore possible contingency plans.

Pragmatech Software has used several of these exercises and seen significant results. Deborah Leff, Vice President of Sales, said, "Going through the exercises let us take a critical look at how we communicate and allowed us to practice a variety of skills. The team picked up some great ideas and immediately put them into practice. One of the more powerful ideas we picked up is the concept of saying 'Yes. And...' when you are tempted to say 'But.' This allows the person who made the initial statement to feel their comment was heard rather than merely being dismissed. That idea alone has proven very powerful and had a strong impact on the way we communicate. The exercises were very well received by the team and added a great deal of energy to the overall event."

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All The World's A Stage

Improvisation—History and Business

Old as Time

According to actor, writer, and theater founder Bernie Roehl, creator of the ImprovComedy.Org web site, “Improvisational theater is as old as time. It pre-dates the invention of writing, since long before we started writing scripts we were telling stories by acting them out.”

He cites the *Commedia Dell'Arte* as the wellspring of this legacy. “Over the centuries,” he writes, “there have been many different improvisational styles. The most direct ancestor of modern improv is probably the *Commedia Dell'Arte*, which was popular throughout Europe for almost 200 years starting in the mid-1500s. Troupes of performers would travel from town to town, presenting shows in the public squares and on makeshift stages. They would improvise their own entire dialogue within a framework provided by a set ‘scenario.’

“After the *Commedia* died off, improv theatre faded into obscurity until it was separately and spontaneously reinvented by two people who have shaped the craft as it exists today.”

Keith Johnstone, one of those reinventors, is author of *Improv for Storytellers* (Routledge, 1999) and *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (Theatre Arts Books, 1989). According to Roehl, Johnstone started formulating his theories about creativity and spontaneity while growing up in England, and later brought them into his teaching at the University of Calgary. “Johnstone wanted to bring theatre to the people who went to sporting and boxing matches, the same audience that Shakespeare had written for in his day.” He combined these elements in a hybrid called Theatresports. “The trappings of team sports were adapted to the improvisational theatre context; teams would compete for points awarded by judges, and audiences would be encouraged to cheer for good scenes and jeer the judges (“kill the umpire!”)...

Johnstone’s ideas have gone on to influence (directly or indirectly) almost every major improv group.”

Viola Spolin, the second major influence, authored three books, including *Improvisation for the Theater: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*, edited by her son, Paul Sills (Northwestern University Press, 1999). “Back in the 1920s and 1930s,” writes Roehl, “Spolin began to develop a new approach to the teaching of acting. It was based on the simple and powerful idea that children would enjoy learning the craft of acting if it were presented as a series of games.

“Spolin’s son, Paul Sills, built on his mother’s work and was one of the driving forces of improvisational theatre centered around the University of Chicago in the mid-1950s. Along with people like Del Close and David Shepherd, Sills created an ensemble of actors who developed a kind of “modern *Commedia*” which would appeal to the average man in the street. As with Theatresports and the original *Commedia*, the goal was to create theatre that was accessible to *everyone*.”

The group that sprang from this work, called The Compass, was extremely successful. It brought people to the theater who had never before

attended, and eventually led to the development of the now legendary Second City, whose first company (1973) included Dan Aykroyd and Gilda Radner.

Broad Applications To Business

Improvisation techniques now proliferate the business world as complements to management training and management team activities in every discipline. Sometimes referred to as organizational improvisation, the application to management draws from a metaphor based in improvisational theater and jazz music. Brent McKnight, with McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, in a paper titled “E-Improvisation,” defines organizational improvisation as “The ability to spontaneously recombine knowledge, processes and structure in real time, resulting in creative problem solving that is grounded in the realities of the moment.”

Bucknell University’s Dr. Paul Shrivastava writes that “Improvisation may be essential for teaching and learning in the ultra rapidly changing digital economy.”

Classes and workshops in managerial improvisation are being taught at a host of educational institutions including Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business, Stanford Business School, and the Kenan Flagler Business School of UNC Chapel Hill. Traditional theater teaching venues such as Toronto’s Second City Comedy Club are teaching courses on improvisation for executives. Applying improvisation to proposal teams (as BJ Lownie does in the accompanying article) is a natural extension of these proven techniques.

—BY R. DENNIS GREEN



Another aspect of a high performing team is having a common understanding of possible problems or obstacles and having corollary contingency plans. An activity called *And Then What Happened?* is a great way to discuss what might happen during the proposal, and to explore possible contingency plans. This exercise is effective during the planning phase of a proposal for discovering potential obstacles the team might face.

In this exercise, a participant starts to tell a story. As the story unfolds, the facilitator stops the conversation, usually after a few statements and at a logical stopping point, and asks the question, 'And then what happened?' At this point, the other members of the group offer some new event, usually a problem that might really be encountered, that the speaker needs to consider and deal with. The speaker must incorporate this new information and continue to tell the story.

If the topic of the story was *The Proposal Plan*, the story might go like this:

We all agreed to the plan and all the roles had been assigned. For a change, we were fully staffed. We received the RFP on Monday and happily gathered in the conference room.

The facilitator would stop the story and ask "And then what happened?" The group might offer "You get a message that the writer you were assigned has won the lottery and left the company."

...and they all lived happily ever after.

The story teller might continue with "We heard about our writer's good fortune and all wished we were that person. Then we made a call to the resource manager."

Again the story would be stopped, a new piece of information would be solicited and the storyteller would incorporate this new information. The story concludes when the storyteller says, "...and they all lived happily ever after."

The chart on this page lists the exercises that have been discussed, their benefits, and when to use them in the proposal development process.

Facilitating these exercises is not difficult, though it does take practice. You can practice by 'playing' using non-proposal related topics, with friends, family members or with co-workers. There is plenty of information available to support you. Both Gesell and Koppett's books contain numerous exercises that can be adapted for use with proposal teams as well as helpful hints. In addition, some Web sites that offer information on Improv-based team-building are Improv.org,

Improv Exercises		
Improv Exercise	Benefit	When to use
Stand Up If	Get connected.	At start of effort.
World's Worst	Understand required capabilities, recognize deficiencies.	During kick-off meeting.
World's Best	Visualize 'best case' results. Understand different perspectives.	During development phase.
One Word At A Time Questions, Questions Alphabetical Conversation	Improve communications.	Kick off meeting. As needed throughout to reinforce skills, behaviors.
And Then What Happened?	Reviewing plan, determining possible obstacles.	Critical for planning phase. At start of each phase for plan review.



TheStoryNet.com, IzzyG.com, and Creativity-Engineering.com. You can also contact the author with any questions or for additional information.

The exercises described in this article have proven to be effective in developing high performing proposal teams. By utilizing them, a team can:

- Reach a high level of performance quickly
- Explore ideas in a new way and see and discuss things that might not be addressed otherwise
- Listen better, and speak more clearly and directly
- Gain confidence in themselves and their teammates
- Appreciate and capitalize on each other's strengths and weaknesses
- Laugh at themselves and have fun!

Improv-based team-building exercises produce immediate results, are relatively easy to implement and are lots of fun.

Try using a few of them during your next proposal effort and you will be well on your way to having a high performing team.

BJ Lownie is founder and principal of P3 Consulting Group. He specializes in proposal management, process development, benchmarking and related coaching, including application of the improvisation techniques discussed in this article. He can be reached at BJ@firstclassproposals.com.

Creating Preference

BY TERRY R. BACON, PHD

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that if you can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or build a better mousetrap, though you build your house in the woods, the world will beat a path to your door. However, he was not competing for business in the twenty-first century. In this era of global markets and hyper competition, things have become considerably tougher. If Emerson had invented his “better mousetrap” just last week, this week he would discover that six competitors have copied or improved upon his design, two large discount chains are already undercutting his price, patent applications have been filed in a dozen foreign countries, and a search on google.com for the “Emerson mousetrap” would yield over two thousand hits.

Okay, I am exaggerating, but only a little. It is increasingly harder today to win contracts by having the best product, solution, team, or experience. Why? Because nearly as fast as you can innovate, your competitors can imitate you and match you feature for feature and benefit for benefit. If you are not convinced by my argument, do this simple self-test.

All our first-tier competitors have these strengths, too, and they trot them out as often as we do.

List your company’s overall strengths. List everything you *do* or *have* that you emphasize to customers in your bids. Then go down your list and identify each strength that at least one of your key competitors cannot match. Did you find any? My colleagues and I at Lore have used this exercise with dozens of clients and have kept track of the results in an informal study of differentiation. We have found that when we ask clients to identify their unique strengths, the average client lists between eight to ten items. However, when we challenge those items, we discover that their competitors can match most of these areas of strength. On average, these companies have only one or (at most) two areas of actual differentiation — and these truly unique product or service features are often not critically important to their customers. Don Traywick, vice president of sales for BE&K, reinforced this point:

Traditionally in the engineering and construction industry, the classic approach to selling involves citing a laundry list of strengths — track record, safety, people, references, low risk, schedule and budget vigilance, customer focus, value-added, and so on. Well, that approach is all but dead for one simple reason — all our first-tier competitors have these strengths, too, and they trot them out as often as we do. Customers have heard it so often and for so long that they end up concluding we are all basically the same.¹

In the absence of real technical differentiation, customers are increasingly narrowing the field to those qualified to do the work and then letting lowest price make their decisions for them. What happens when the prices are roughly equal, too? When you are on the bidding end of that proposition, things can get ugly quickly. You are forced to reduce your price beyond any hope of a decent margin, and sometimes beyond any margin at all, in hopes of getting *some* work, *any* work.

Last year, David Pugh, one of my colleagues at Lore International Institute, conducted a field survey of 20 major contractors in the engineering and construction industry. Among his findings were these:

- 100 percent of the respondents said that they found little technical differentiation between themselves and their competitors. Technical leveling occurs virtually as quickly as they can innovate.
- 100 percent of the respondents report an average of four competitors on each bid, and this number is decreasing. Consolidation is occurring in most industries, and the fewer but larger companies remaining are bidding against each other more often.
- 100 percent of the respondents indicated that fewer prime opportunities are available in the current market. While the engineering and construction industry tends to be cyclic, respondents believed that more opportunities would surface as the world economy improves in the next upturn.
- 75 percent of the respondents said that they had been forced to reduce their prices in order to remain competitive.
- Nearly 70 percent of the respondents reported being forced to accept more risk, including greater penalties for failure to stay within budget or schedule and for safety violations.

What is the solution in this changing and increasingly difficult market? The solution to this dilemma is to create preference.

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When customers *prefer* to work with you, they will tip the scales in your favor when everything else is equal. They will make the conditions right for you to win. They will often overlook your blemishes, and sometimes they will even pay a higher price so they can work with you. Building preference is a critically important business development skill in today's tough markets. First, though, you need to get into the game.

Ante Up

Customers will not consider you for a contract; much less prefer you, unless they consider you *credible* and *acceptable*. Although the typical Request for Proposal (RFP) does not use these terms, the criteria described in RFPs fall into one of these two categories. To be credible, you must have the right experience, the right solution, the right technology, and the right team. Please note that I did not use the word *best*. That term generally does not appear in RFPs.

You really do not need to be the best at everything if the customer believes you have the wherewithal to solve their problems and meet their needs. In fact, having the best of everything can cause customers to ask an uncomfortable question: What is this going to cost? The test for most customers these days is simply this: Can the supplier we choose do the job? If so, that supplier is credible.

David Maister reinforces this point in *Managing the Professional Service Firm*. In a chapter called "How Clients Choose," Maister puts himself in the role of the client: "Most typically, after exhausting my abilities as a client to make technical distinctions, I am still left with a choice of reputable firms with good references, all eminently capable of solving my problem."²

Credibility and acceptability are just the ante, or the opening bid. It is the price you must pay to be considered at all, but it will not win work.

It should be obvious, however, that merely establishing credibility and being acceptable to the customer does not win bids. Credibility and acceptability just open the gates so the customer

will feel confident in awarding you the contract. Nevertheless, credibility and acceptability are just the ante, or the opening bid. It is the price you must pay to be considered at all, but it will not win work. To do that, and to win more than your fair share of the opportunities you pursue, you must also create preference.

The Four Ways to Create Preference

Everyone tries to create preference. Getting others to prefer you is so ingrained in human behavior that it would be difficult to imagine life without it. We learn it as children, experience it in every aspect of our lives, and understand it as one of the most operational aspects of competition. It is the entire purpose of dating and courtship. We want to create a bias in our favor. In competitive bidding, as in dating, creating preference comes down to four things: building the right relationships, performing well, telling a compelling story, and behaving in ways that differentiate us from our competitors.

Building the Right Relationships

Since people decide who should receive a contract, you must have relationships with *the right people* in the customer's organization to build preference. The right people include the decision maker and everyone else who can influence the decision. Clearly, if these people prefer you, then your odds of winning the contract increase enormously. This is nothing new, but the implications are important:

- First, you have to know who the right people are, and this is not a trivial challenge. Sometimes, you do not know who will make the final decision. Other times, you do know the decision maker, but you are unlikely to know everyone who will influence the buying decision.

The network of power and influence in any organization is dynamic and complex. It is often difficult even for insiders to fully comprehend all the influences on a decision, so it is certain that outsiders will have only a proximate view of the situation.

- Second, relationships do not spring to maturity overnight. It takes time to build a good relationship with anyone. This is why getting work with new customers is harder than get-

ting more work with existing customers who already know you. Many suppliers have developed strategic account management programs whose major aim is to ensure that they have the right relationships established long before key opportunities arise.

- Third, resting on your laurels with people is likely to lead to permanent rest. You cannot depend on existing relationships to carry the day. You have to work those relationships actively while the opportunity develops. Your goal should be to pre-sell your solution, and you do that by testing it ahead of time, discovering what works and what does not, seeing what excites them and what leaves them cold.

Having the right relationships also depends on pre-selling your team. I said earlier that you build credibility, in part, by having the right team to serve the customer's needs. It is imperative to introduce that team not only before you submit your proposal but also before the customer releases a bid request. When they read about your proposed team in your proposal, customers should think of them as old friends.

My conclusion that relationships are important seems self-evident, but there is evidence to support it. One study, conducted in the 1980s by one of the largest engineering and construction firms in the world, isolated 40 factors hypothesized to influence contract wins and losses. These factors were examined in 32 previous contract pursuits — half wins and half losses. The factor that most strongly correlated positively with wins and negatively with losses was “having a strong relationship with the customer.”

Performing Well

One of the best ways to build preference is to perform exceptionally well for a current customer. The operative word in this sentence is *exceptionally* because if you merely do a good job you risk being replaced by competitors whose promises are more compelling than your performance. It is the difference between customer *satisfaction* and customer *delight*. The former is expected and tends to elicit a rationale response from customers when they are asked the question, “Did Supplier X satisfy you?”

“Yes, they did what we asked,” one can imagine a customer saying. “They met our needs. We are satisfied with their performance.” Customers determine satisfaction by comparing their requirements with your results. This is a logical process, and the results will be reported in the proper reports. People will be briefed. While it is gratifying on the one hand to satisfy the customer, there is, on the other hand, something cold and clinical about it.

Delighted clients spread the word, and they do it with conviction and enthusiasm.

However, when you *delight* customers you evoke an emotional response. Delighted clients spread the word, and they do it with conviction and enthusiasm. Delight is a powerful feeling, one that customers want to experience again, so they are reluctant to part with a supplier that delights them. You do it by:

- Delivering exceptional quality earlier than they expected.
- Anticipating problems and preventing them before they occur
- Owning the problems that do occur and resolving them quickly and at little cost to the customer

- Being consistently responsive, available, and communicative
- Caring about the customer (more on this later)
- Adding value without adding cost.

If you are already working with a customer, nothing builds preference more than performing exceptionally well on your current contracts. Conversely, nothing will destroy your position faster than performing poorly. So performing well is good for incumbents. In fact, research Lore conducted for two large companies showed that incumbents who were performing well on existing contracts were more than four times more likely to win follow-on contracts than their non-incumbent competitors. What if you are not currently working for the customer and have no history with them? What if you are an unknown?

Then you need excellent references from sources they trust and respect. But, even that will not entirely eliminate the risk they assume in awarding contracts to unknown and untested suppliers. Your credentials and experience still amount to a promise of future benefits, and customers will always be somewhat wary until you have proven yourself in their company. You can make up a lot of ground, however, by telling a compelling story and by differentiating yourself through your behavior.

Telling a Compelling Story

Now we get to the art in preference building — telling a compelling story. A good story told poorly will lose every time to a good story told well. Assuming all else is equal — that you and your key competitors are credible and acceptable and that each company has good relationships in the customer's organization — the winning team will be the one that has been most compelling in the presentation of its offer. Artistry matters.

I became convinced of the value of artistry years ago when I served as an evaluator on a number of source selection evaluation boards. In my case, if a proposal failed to address a requirement or seemed inadequate in some way, I was supposed to give it a low score (below 30 out of 100) and write either a Deficiency Report (DR) or Clarification Request (CR). In both cases, the bidder had the opportunity, later, to provide the missing information or to correct the deficiency.

During my first evaluation effort, I learned a hard lesson. The best proposals were easy to read and score because the information we requested was there and the writers had done their best to make their offer clear. In contrast, the worst proposals were a nightmare and consumed a disproportionate amount of my time. I discovered that if I did a meticulous job and wrote every DR and CR a bad proposal warranted, it took me hours (if not days) longer, and I fell behind and had to start working longer hours — sometimes well into the night — to finish my evaluations on time. I soon learned that if I gave those proposals a barely passing score instead of a low score I did not have to write a DR or CR, and I could devote more time to the better proposals.

I could easily tell which ones were losers and which were still seriously in competition.

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As I became a practiced evaluator, I learned another trick. If I scanned all the proposals quickly at the beginning of the process, I could easily tell which ones were losers and which were still seriously in competition. All the losers had these characteristics to one degree or another:

- They failed to address all the requirements of the RFP or the specifications
- They did not explicitly show *how* the bidder was meeting our requirements or addressing our needs
- They were difficult to read and to follow. Sometimes they lacked specificity or were otherwise vague or incomplete. It was hard to tell exactly what the bidder was proposing
- Sometimes, they read like promotional brochures or were otherwise full of obvious boilerplate, much of which was not relevant to what we were asking for
- They were full of dense text and had no headings, visuals, or other devices that made the information more accessible.

The most egregious error is always the failure to address key requirements, but poor organization and dense writing unusually has a strong negative impact on evaluators. It makes their job more difficult and, frankly, puts them in a foul, ungenerous mood. I reached a point where I immediately had a bad attitude toward any proposals that made my job harder, and I scored them lower. I was not alone.

On a more positive note, the better-written proposals were almost a joy to evaluate. Everything I needed was there. The writ-

ers had highlighted what was important and showed me how their offer addressed our requirements and met our criteria. Moreover, those proposals looked like they were written to help me do my scoring. Sometimes, those bidders included a checklist that showed me where in their proposal they addressed each of the requirements in the RFP. A well-written proposal generally is not sufficient to win a contract, but it can bias the scoring in your favor and can make the difference in where you stand after the evaluation. If your price is not outside the competitive range, a slightly higher evaluated score may be all it takes to win.

When something new comes along, the customer wants to know how it will affect them. And, when customers want to buy something, they want to know what it will do for them. How does it meet their needs and solve their problem? How does the solution benefit them? The remarkable irony of most proposals and customer presentations is that they are focused on the supplier instead of on the customer.

The first lesson in making your offer compelling is to focus your proposal and presentation on the customer.

Most proposals are about as compelling as last year's phone book because they center on the supplier's qualifications and products or services instead of on what the customer needs and how the supplier's solution benefits the customer. So the first lesson in making your offer compelling is to focus your proposal and presentation on the customer. If you can do that, everything else you do will be icing on the cake.

What, besides customer focus, makes your story compelling?

- It should have clear messages about why the customer should choose you. Like billboards, headlines, and sound bytes, your messages should be bold, crisp, and memorable.
- It should address each of the customer's needs and requirements — in the same order that the customer stated them in the bid request. Being responsive is critical because when customers start to evaluate proposals they are looking for losers, not winners.

Behavioral Differences

- Your CEO meets with the customer's CEO and conveys your company's commitment to the relationship and desire to get the job.
- You send thank-you notes after meetings.
- Senior executives in your company are dedicated to your customer and show an ongoing commitment to meeting their counterparts in the customer's organization and building relationships from top to top.
- You send them business articles, news clippings, or other information that would be helpful to them.
- You move some people to a location at or near the customer's location to ensure that you understand their local needs and environment and show your commitment to them.
- You care about their share price and show it by being concerned about their market performance.
- You engage in joint planning with the customer to ensure

that you understand their needs and have the wherewithal to serve them with excellence.

- You read and comment on their annual report, quarterly reports, and any other news that becomes available about them.
- You make frequent, value-added contact with customer representatives at all levels in their organization.
- When they have an open house or similar event, you attend.
- You are proactive with your customer. You point out opportunities and pitfalls to them.
- When they have company anniversaries or other notable events, you send a card or place a call.

- It should explain why you made the choices you did in crafting your solution. If you have made smart choices, and the customer can see that, then your story will be more compelling.
- It should be told visually as well as verbally. One articulate visual, presented well, may have more power than pages and pages of text. Annotated visuals are especially compelling. These have short captions that draw readers to and explain important parts of the illustration. A well-annotated visual is like a walking tour of the illustration, drawing the reader's eyes to what the bidder wants to emphasize and making the journey more enlightening.
- Finally, a compelling story is one that meets each of its audiences' needs. For the customer's technical evaluators, who are primarily interested in whether the offer meets the specifications, the proposal shows — often point-by-point — how the proposed solution complies with the requirements. For the customer's financial evaluators, the proposal presents the bidder's costs in ways that facilitate financial analysis (one best practice today is to include an electronic spreadsheet for the customer's accountants).

For the customer's executive readers, including the primary decision maker and key advisors, the best practice is to tell the story in a well-designed, separately bound executive summary. It usually links the customer's key issues and needs to the bidder's primary features and benefits, and if it is done well it highlights how the bidder's solution is differentiated from competing solutions. The best executive summaries are designed for maximum visual impact. They make good use of color and follow the "one-third" rule: 1/3 text, 1/3 visual, and 1/3 white space. They end with an elevator speech — a concise statement of the most compelling reasons for choosing this solution and bidder, as opposed to others.

Of all these elements, the executive summary has the greatest impact on winning. In 1997-98, I helped one of my clients design a study to determine the impact of various so-called best practices in proposal development. Among other things, we studied the impact of starting early, helping customers write the RFP, developing win strategies before the RFP was released, and storyboarding the proposal. In the document itself, we studied the use of theme statements, visuals, and brochure-type executive summaries, among other commonly cited best practices. Each of these practices was positively correlated with proposal wins. Among them, however, the execu-

tive summary was king. Including a brochure executive summary with a proposal increased win probability by an astounding 240 percent.

Differentiating Yourself through Your Behavior

Lastly, what it takes to win is behaving as though you really want the work. This is easier said than done, but it is a real and powerful differentiator in the marketplace. Companies have won and lost hundreds of millions of dollars based on whether they differentiated themselves behaviorally. Behavioral differentiation occurs when you do something your competitors fail to do — when you show more interest, pay special attention, take more care, or in some other way go the extra mile. Twenty-five examples of behavioral differentiation are contained in the Differentiation Checklist (below).

No one in business is indifferent to customers, but many people lack the commitment, the intensity, the drive, or the time to do what they should to differentiate themselves behaviorally. Consequently, the people who do take time to do it right create enormous advantage for themselves. You should be thinking *behavioral differentiation* from the moment you decide to pursue a customer. How can you show them, through your behavior, that you are deeply committed to them and really want their business?

In the business world at large, the evidence for the impact of behavioral differentiation is plentiful. Ritz-Carlton, Four Seasons, Marshall Field's, Nordstrom, Men's Wearhouse, Southwest Airlines, EMC, and Volvo are leaders in their respective industries, and one of their primary sources of competitive advantage is behavior.

A True Story

To illustrate how behavioral differentiation can make a difference in the proposal stage of business development, I will offer one piece of anecdotal evidence. This true story came to us from Deke Lincoln of BE&K (the names have been changed for confidentiality purposes):

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ntiation Checklist

- You take the time to get to know your customer's customers.
- If you have a personal relationship, you note the important events in their lives and celebrate or commiserate appropriately.
- When opportunities arise, you are quick to discuss them with your customer.
- You return their calls promptly.
- You make valuable connections for the customer. You introduce them to other people who can help them or otherwise add value to their business.
- If you make a commitment to them, you keep it — no matter what.
- You show a deep interest in their business and industry. You become knowledgeable enough for them to value you as consultants.
- If you are giving them a presentation, you do it professional-

- ly and leave copies of a presentation summary prepared especially for that occasion.
- If you will be proposing a team of people to serve them, you assign and introduce the key members of your team, well before the customer releases a bid request document.
- You hand deliver proposals, if at all possible.
- At preliminary meetings, you prepare an executive summary that hits the high points, and you leave copies of these summaries with them.
- When problems occur, you personally get on the phone and stay there until you resolve them.
- Where possible, you demonstrate your products or services for them. You give them the hands-on experience to help them feel more comfortable.

“We received an opportunity to bid on a project for a company I’ll call *Global Oil Refining*. The project was for NOC (nitrous oxide) emission reduction in the powerhouse. It was a substantial job with some major work to be done later. We had targeted Global as a priority customer because of the hundreds of millions of dollars in capital to be spent there over the next few years. This opportunity was our first with this customer. We had some early communication with them and had done some marketing, but we had not spent enough middle game time with the customer before bidding on this project.



Our competition on this job was fierce, including Competitors X, Y, and Z. All had *substantially* more experience and better résumés than we did when it came to refineries and power. In fact, one of the boilers to be modified on this project was a Competitor X boiler. Few in my organization gave us a chance in hell of winning this job. The pessimism was quite amazing, in fact. It was difficult to not be affected by it, but we were determined not to give up or give in to the nay sayers who believed that experience and price meant everything. Most importantly, we were determined to be good sports in defeat — if we lost — and to build on the relationship if we felt the customer had good future potential.

Anyway, we ended up losing this job to Competitor X. After a couple of weeks of going back and forth with the customer after they announced the winner, I thought we had an awesome chance. We had put together a nice proposal that addressed all of Global’s key issues, and it came very close to winning. In fact, the project manager, Jim Smith, told me that it was one of the hardest decisions he’d had to make. However, he went with Competitor X because they had also turned in a good proposal, and they could self-perform the boiler modeling, something we could not do.

We were disappointed at losing the job, and the internal pessimists made it even more difficult, saying that we should not waste any more time with this customer. Despite the fact that we really improved our relationship with these guys, people were willing to throw in the towel. But, we did not do that. We were sincere in wishing Jim luck and fed him information (articles, vendor information, and technical reports) to help him on the project, despite the fact that we had not been selected. We also continued to develop our relationship with Jim and other key decision makers at the plant and continued to show our interest in helping them with their problems.

A few months later, we received several more project opportunities, which we won, and we were single sourced on three more projects (two were from Jim Smith!). Later, we proposed on an \$80 million project for Global. We did several things in that bid to try to differentiate ourselves. First, we submitted a nice, to the point, executive summary to the people reading the proposal and others who would be involved in the decision. We were the only company to do this, and they really liked it. We also tried to help them find a supplier of caustic because they expected it to be a problem and were worried about the costs associated with high demand. Finding a supplier of caustic is not a typical

scope item for a firm like ours, but we had contacts and used them to help Global. Finally, we tried to help them improve their relationships with the public and with local regulatory authorities.

We had not performed any projects of this magnitude in the oil refinery industry, and our competition included every heavy hitter in our industry. As the decision came down to the wire, it was between us and Competitor A, which had the edge because of their involvement with the front-end engineering. According to Global, Competitor A thought they had it in the bag. Nevertheless, we won. Afterward, Global told us we won this work, because we wanted it more and because they trust us, like us, and believe we can execute projects successfully for them. It took a lot of effort to develop that trust, but in the end it is what won us the work.”³

This story has another interesting element. When they learned of the initial opportunity with Global, Deke Lincoln said not only was Global a new customer, but oil refining was a new industry for them. “We had not done any refinery work out of this office before. In fact, I had never stepped foot in an oil refinery. I thought ‘crackers’ and ‘cokers’ referred to people with a serious case of the munchies. Lack of experience can be quite difficult to overcome, if you let people’s objections drag you down. We overcame our lack of experience by simply listening and asking questions, rather than speaking first, which is another example of behavioral differentiation. Writing this down really blows me away. It is hard to believe these simple things can differentiate you from others. But it is really true.”^{iv}

Competing bidders devote a remarkable amount of time and energy to proving that they are credible and acceptable. Are their time and energy misspent? I think the right answer is “not entirely.” Clearly, you must show customers that you are credible and acceptable. However, if you could save 20 percent of that time and money, you could invest in what really makes the difference — creating preference.

Footnotes

- ¹ Don Traywick, personal communication with David Pugh, July 2001. Used with permission.
- ² David H. Maister, *Managing the Professional Service Firm* (NY: The Free Press, 1993), p. 112.
- ³ Deke Lincoln, story e-mailed to David Pugh, August 2001. Used with permission.
- ⁴ Ibid.



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Why, When, and How to Ask Questions on Government Solicitations

Your proposal team needs to ask good questions in order to properly prepare a compliant and acceptable response to the solicitation. This process review tells you why, when (or when not), and how to ask.

BY DAVID H. HERNDON AND ROBIN K. RANSONE

To properly prepare a compliant and acceptable response to the solicitation, the proposal team needs clear instructions from the customer on what is wanted. In more than 35 years of responding to hundreds of Requests for Proposals (RFPs), we have never found a single federal, state, or commercial solicitation that did not need some additional clarification. Most solicitations are developed from prior solicitations. They contain bits and pieces of old, previously issued RFPs that do not relate to the proposed effort or that conflict with the solicitation intent. Solicitations often contain conflicting statements, missing data, or confusing instructions.

Solicitations often contain conflicting statements, missing data, or confusing instructions.

Most federal, state, and commercial organizations only issue a final RFP. A few federal customers such as the Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Energy (DOE) often provide draft RFPs prior to the issue of the official RFP. Draft RFPs offer the proposer significant time to analyze the solicitation and prepare comments. The primary challenge with most draft RFPs, however, is that they often include only the Statement of Work (SOW) and Specifications. Important parts, such as the Proposal Preparation Instructions (Section L) and Evaluation Criteria (Section M), are usually not included, nor are Contract Data Requirements List (CDRLs), Data Item Descriptions, and Performance Work Statements.

Preparing questions on the solicitation is therefore an important step in the solution development, storyboarding, and propos-

al writing process. Properly asked questions can clarify ambiguities and, more importantly, can assist in positioning the bidder to win. This article provides basic information on the why, when, and how to ask questions on RFPs.

Why Ask Questions

There are many reasons to ask questions on solicitations. In general, questions to be submitted to the customer fall into three primary categories:

- Obtaining clarification on confusing, conflicting, or missing information relating to proposal format and submission
- Obtaining clarification on confusing, conflicting, or missing information relating to technical requirements and specifications
- Influencing the customer to make changes to the solicitation that will benefit the bidder.

Responses to properly asked questions will influence “bid/no-bid” decisions, and if a company decides to bid, responses to the questions can affect the total technical approach/solution and proposal layout.

Preliminary Customer Contact

If your company is the incumbent and you have a close working relationship with your customer, you should have significant input into the RFP development. Even if you are not the

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incumbent, you might still influence the RFP, but you have to start working with your customer long before even the draft RFP is released.

Draft a “strawman” Statement of Work (SOW) or specification and discuss it with your customer.

There are several ways to influence the RFP when you are not the incumbent, but you must first establish an open and honest working relationship with your customer. As soon as you become aware of an opportunity that meets your business objectives, you should start expressing your interest to your customer. One way is to draft a “strawman” Statement of Work (SOW) or specification and discuss it with your customer. Be careful to work at an appropriate level in your customer’s organization so that you do not appear to be trying to go over someone’s head. Depending on your specific customer and your relationship with him or her, your discussions can take any of several forms. You might present an informal briefing about your similar program activities, provide hard-copy of your strawman material, or just sit down and discuss your ideas informally.

Our program manager was reluctant, but we finally persuaded him, and he pursued the matter.

On one program opportunity for an Air Force program in which we were greatly interested — long before the draft RFP was released — we recommended that our program manager draft a strawman specification and SOW and discuss it with the Air Force program manager. Our program manager was reluctant, but we finally persuaded him, and he pursued the matter. He returned from his meeting both amazed and excited. He reported that the Air Force program manager had gone through the material in great detail and with great interest, commenting on each item. Some items he expressed his approval; other items he said that he had no interest in; and others he thought were good ideas that he planned to use. The meeting was a great success, and gave us an advantageous head start on our program and proposal.

On another effort, however, we were not so successful. Our client had just set up a new local office near our customer’s base, but a trip report for the customer told us that the customer did not know who we were, what we did, or how well we did it! We advised our client to:

- Send the president or vice president to our customer
- Introduce our local representative and announce the new local office
- Demonstrate that we were greatly interested in the customer’s program and that our local representative was there to help in any way he could. If not, then to call the president or vice president directly.

The impression was to be: “I am a very busy senior company executive, but I have taken time out from my duties to come see you personally to express our top-level interest in both you and your program, and to pledge our complete support to its success.”

Incredibly, the company vice president told us: “Gee. If they don’t know that we are interested in their program by now, then I don’t know what else to do.” The firm’s reluctance to follow our advice contributed to their losing proposal.

Proposal Format and Submission Questions

If the solicitation instructions are not clear on how to format the proposal, and if this ambiguity is not resolved, the customer may receive proposals that differ significantly in format and are difficult to evaluate. In addition, if your proposal is not formatted the way the customer really wants it, your evaluation score will suffer. Typical issues relating to proposal format include:

- Unrealistic instructions related to font size, line spacing, and page limitations
- Confusing or missing instructions related to proposal layout and organization
- Confusing or missing instructions related to proposal submission.

Many solicitations have unrealistic instructions relating to font size, line spacing, and page limitations. Program personnel who prepare proposals often underestimate the importance of these requirements and concentrate their efforts on the technical solution. Such oversight can lead to disaster when preparing the final proposal.

For example, some years ago, as consultants to an environmental services company, we managed an environmental services proposal for a NASA customer. The RFP’s instructions stated, “The proposal must be double-spaced and in 12 point Times Roman.” As tables are usually single-spaced, and graphic notations are best done in smaller text, we asked the customer whether the proposal could contain single-spaced tables and have graphic notations as small as 8 points. The customer responded in the affirmative that this would be allowed. We prepared the proposal accordingly, and the proposal won. About a year later, the same company bid on another solicitation to the same NASA customer. As the company now knew this customer, they decided to write the proposal on their own and not to use outside consultants. This solicitation had the same instructions as the prior one, i.e., “The proposal must be double-spaced and in 12 point Times Roman.”

Asking the proper questions could have turned a loss into a win.

For some reason the company’s proposal manager did not ask the question, but proceeded to use single spacing for tables and smaller than 12 point graphic notation based on the responses to the prior solicitation. About one month after the proposal was submitted, the customer sent the last six pages of the proposal back to the bidder with the statement that the bidder had not followed the proposal instructions and that they (the NASA customer) had calculated the extra pages used by not following the instructions and removed them from the end of the proposal, unread. These returned pages contained important information that should have been evaluated and contributed to the fact that the company was not awarded the contract. Asking the proper questions could have turned a loss into a win.

On a large Navy hardware procurement, the contractor had the draft RFP for about six months. The proposal team, all program engineers, had asked many questions of the customer relating to the SOW and specifications, but had not asked any questions on the proposal format instructions. After our arrival at the company, one of the first things we noticed in analyzing the RFP was that the proposal instructions called for “double-spaced, 12 point text,” and the RFP limited the entire proposal to 75 pages, including résumés of all key personnel. In addition, the instructions called for “detailed discussions of all (220) numbered items listed in the SOW.”

During the period that the company was reviewing the draft RFP, no one had noticed that the 220 technical items to be dis-

cussed in detail, plus the 12 requested key résumés, plus the 8 management topics, came to 240 topics that were to be discussed in 75 double-spaced pages. As there are approximately 22 total lines on a double-spaced, 12 point font page and about 1650 total lines for 75 pages, each topic would have to average only 6.8 lines for all text, graphics, and any white space. Based on the draft RFP instructions, the contractor proposal team had already prepared full-blown storyboards for each of the 220 technical items, including first drafts for each item that averaged about four pages per item.

About one month after the proposal was submitted, the customer sent the last six pages of the proposal back... unread.

We brought this inconsistency to the attention of the proposal team and pointed out to them that unless the proposal instructions were modified, much of their work in preparing proposal topic responses would not be able to be included in the proposal documents. We prepared and submitted a question to the customer that identified the problem and requested increased allowable pages along with single spacing in order to allow the detailed discussions requested in the RFP. The customer's response was to increase the page limitation to only 100 pages and to answer the question with the statement that, "the draft RFP had been out for six months with this requirement and no bidders had questioned the requirement during the draft period."

Based on the customer's response, the entire proposal format had to be modified. As there was not enough room for detailed discussions, many SOW topics as well as key résumés had to be combined and presented in condensed form using tables. Even using this format, many of the contractor's themes and discriminators had to be eliminated to meet the space requirements. Although our proposal won the contract, a considerable amount of proposal preparation time and Bid and Proposal funds could have been saved if the problem had been identified early and proper questions had been asked.

One major proposal format inconsistency often found is between the proposal instructions and the proposal evaluation factors. With most federal agencies these two areas usually agree to some extent, but with some agencies [i.e., Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the US Postal Service (USPS)], we have found some RFPs wherein these areas are in conflict, making it difficult to outline the proposal response without clarification. If these areas are conflicting, ask the customer to provide clarification.

Ignore the proposal instructions and follow the evaluation factors.

About two years ago, we had a consulting assignment to manage a mid-sized USPS proposal for the management and operation of a large airport mail distribution center. The proposal instructions simply stated, "Submit three volumes: Technical, Management, and Cost." The proposal evaluation factors stated, "Bidders should prepare a technical volume responding to each of the following items." The following items contained a list of managerial, past performance, and technical items (there was no formal SOW in the RFP). We sent in a question to the customer stating the inconsistency between the proposal instructions and the evaluation factors and received the following response from the customer: "Ignore the proposal instructions and follow the evaluation factors." We did

and we won. Had we not asked the question, we would have attempted to follow the instructions and would have prepared a management volume that the customer really did not want.

Some RFPs are unclear on how proposals should be submitted. Questions relating to bindings, front-end materials, appendices, electronic submission format, etc., should also be asked if the instructions are unclear.

Proposal Technical Requirements Questions

If the SOW or specifications are unclear or in conflict, ask questions. For example, federal agencies sometimes request the use of obsolete computer software or older versions of existing applications, such as MS Word 97. This may be because the agency used old RFP boilerplate, or it may be because the agency has not upgraded its software at the desktop. Ask questions to find the proper software to use.

Bidder Benefit Questions

Perhaps the most important questions that can be asked are those that benefit the bidder. These types of questions range from simple requests for due date extensions to questions that can change the customer's technology requirements to the benefit of the bidder. The purpose of these types of questions is to increase the probability of the bidder winning the contract. Providing additional benefits to the customer is only positive if those benefits can be sold to increase win probability.

For example, if you are an outsider or non-incumbent, are starting your proposal late, or have not been working with the customer, requesting an extension could be an advantage. Proposal due date extensions always help the "outsider" more than the "insider." If you are an incumbent and believe that you require more time to prepare your proposal, think again, as your competition is probably in worse shape than you are.

Don't be reluctant to ask for an extension if you really need one, hoping that someone else will request the extension. Sometimes an extension will be denied if only one bidder requests it. The extension may be granted when more than one bidder requests it because the request then seems more legitimate.

It is often a good strategy to ask questions even if you already know the answer. For example, if an important step, process, or requirement has been left out of the SOW and including this requirement in your proposal will add additional costs, then a question should be asked on the missing item to even the playing field. If the customer modifies the solicitation by adding the missing requirement, then all the competition will have to add this cost. However, if the missing requirement does not impact costs, do not ask the question, just put it in your proposal and state why it is important — it may turn out to be an advantage for your bid.

Some companies think that it is a good strategy to ask questions that will mislead the competition. For example, if there are several alternate solutions that might be proposed, asking questions on a solution that you do not intend to use may result in your competition wasting proposal space ghosting against this solution rather than the one that you will actually propose.



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Your customer will know who asked the stupid questions.

Be very careful about asking these “clever” questions under your company name. These questions, intended to mislead your competitors, can easily backfire. Although your competitors may not know who asked the “stupid” questions, your customer will know, and the customer may interpret this as lack of knowledge or capability on your part.

Such “ruses” are not condoned by APMP, but, when millions or billions of dollars are at stake, be aware that some companies may use them. Watch out for them.



When (And When Not) To Ask Questions

Do not ask questions if the answers could help the competition more than they help you. Do not ask questions that will provide information to your competition unless you are doing this to make the competition increase costs. For example, do not ask whether you can submit unmodified, commercially-prepared manuals for Commercial Off-The-Shelf (COTS) software if a reasonable interpretation of the RFP does not prohibit it.

Do not ask the question if you cannot stand the answer. For example, if the RFP does not specify double spacing, do not ask whether you can single space your proposal. If an RFP requirement (either proposal submission or program specification) is unclear, but a reasonable interpretation is to your advantage, do not ask for a clarification that would be to your disadvantage. However, be sure that your interpretation will not result in noncompliance.

The RFP will normally have a paragraph in the proposal preparation instructions on submitting questions about the solicitation. These instructions include how to send questions (e-mail, fax, etc.), who to send them to (contract manager, etc.), and the deadline for submitting questions. The RFP may also state when and how the answers will be provided. Many agencies are now providing answers to questions on the solicitation Web pages.

Look for inconsistencies, missing information, conflicts, and other areas needing clarification.

Questions on the solicitation should be asked as soon as possible after receipt and analysis of the RFP. Most customers allow questions to be asked using e-mail. Upon receipt of the RFP, the proposal manager or the proposal coordinator should make copies and submit them to all proposal team members. The proposal manager should instruct the proposal team members to read the entire RFP and look for inconsistencies, missing information, conflicts, and other areas needing clarification from the customer.

Team members should provide any potential questions to the proposal manager within five days of proposal receipt. The proposal manager will then sort through the questions and combine and select those worth sending to the customer. On a large pro-

posal, the proposal manager will often work with the capture manager and program manager to prepare the questions to be submitted to the customer.

Submit questions relating to format, font size, page limits, and proposal structure immediately.

Questions relating to format, font size, page limits, and proposal structure should be submitted immediately after initial RFP analysis. These questions should be prepared by the proposal manager and submitted to the customer as soon as possible, since they have direct bearing on the development of the proposal outline, storyboards, and format. It is imperative to establish one primary

point of contact for interaction with the customer during the proposal response life cycle. Some questions, such as errors in RFP section numbering, may not be obvious until the proposal manager develops the first draft of the RFP—Proposal Response Matrix.

The proposal manager, with the participation of key proposal and program personnel, should develop questions relating to the SOW and other specifications. These questions should also be submitted as soon as possible. It often takes several weeks for the customer to respond to questions, and question responses received late in the proposal process may be of limited assistance in preparing the proposal.

Questions do not have to be answered all at the same time. Send in questions as soon as they are developed. If more questions come up later, send them as a set of additional questions. It is usually acceptable to send in several sets of questions. Questions that significantly impact or benefit the customer are usually answered even after the question submittal deadline.

How to Ask Questions

Questions on the solicitation should be sent to the customer in a manner that is easily understood and answerable.

Provide exact RFP references (RFP section numbers, topical headings, page numbers, etc, particularly those involving several RFP sections). Provide the question topic, page reference(s), RFP section number(s), and solicitation statement(s). State the concern or conflict and ask the question.

Put questions in order as they are found in the solicitation, with similar questions grouped, if possible.

Clearly state the question and if possible, suggest a logical answer. Phrase the questions carefully, as in “are we correct in assuming that?”

Provide supporting evidence to support your suggested response. Background and other related data can often be separated from the question text.

When requesting an extension, provide reasons for granting the extension that are beneficial to the customer’s source acquisition plan. The strongest arguments for justifying an extension are based on issues that:

- Apply to all bidders
- Affect the overall quality or competitiveness of the proposals (such as when there is insufficient time to prepare a quality response)

- Involve a series of long complex questions requiring customer research that he may be willing to undertake
- Do not adversely impact your customer's acquisition schedule
- Do not require your customer to do a lot of additional work
- Do not require your customer to retrace the laborious coordination cycle that he has had to negotiate to reach this point in his source selection program.

Often a bidder would like to ask an important question, but does not because it might embarrass the bidder or the customer. Do not let this stop you from asking the question. Use a strawman — such as a consultant, a subcontractor, or other third party — to ask the question. As consultants we have submitted many tough questions to the customer using our consulting firm names in order to avoid identifying our clients. In addition, if a question is very important, having several sources ask the same question (using different formats, styles, letterheads, etc.) will improve the probability of having the question answered.

Bidders whose questions imply: "You screwed up! Change this and do it all over again!" are not going to be very popular with the customer.

Most importantly, consider your customer's workload and the effort required to prepare and release an RFP. Just to get to this point in the solicitation, a typical government agency customer spends significant time and effort getting the draft or formal RFP through all the technical, programmatic, user committee, contractual, legal, political, and other hurdles. Bidders whose questions imply: "You screwed up! Change this and do it all over again!" are not going to be very popular with the customer. So do not make more work for your customer! If possible, give your customer solutions, not problems, especially if the problem necessitates an RFP change.

On a recent Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division solicitation, the Navy was attempting to establish a "new and improved" acquisition process and was more cooperative with the bidders than we had ever seen. Nonetheless, an early draft RFP had major disconnects between the proposal instructions and the evaluation criteria that would have made proposal organization virtually impossible. This was because the RFP specified that the proposal *must* follow the Proposal Preparation Instructions to Offerors paragraph numbering *exactly*, with no deletions or additions. Through our client's contracts manager, we drafted a "question" that explained the problems and provided an extensive suggested revision of the proposal numbering instructions. Our program manager received the following response:

"Mr. B _____,

Thank you very much for your thorough review of the RFP. You have epitomized the concept of Industry and Government teaming by taking the time to design corrections and providing those corrections to the STOC team...

*Thank you,
D _____
Contracting Officer"*

This positive response from our customer shows that when you take the time to help the

customer, rather than to make more work for him, he really appreciates your help, and is much more likely to accommodate your request or suggestions.

Some ambiguities or mistakes in RFPs are treated by bidders as opportunities for low-price gamesmanship. Some companies, anticipating that mistakes or omissions in an RFP will necessitate post-award change orders, reduce their bid price artificially. This is because they know that they will be able to raise their price when the post-award change is negotiated.

For example: a recent RFP required submission of an Integrated Management Plan and Integrated Management Schedule (IMP/IMS). Normally the IMP is a contractual obligation to demonstrate certain accomplishments that show statement of work (SOW) tasks completed. The IMS, on the other hand, is normally not contractual because it would require a contract modification every time a scheduled date was missed. Usually there is a data item (Contract Data Requirements List—CDRL) requirement to update the IMS upon contract award, to better correlate the customer and contractor needs. The RFP in question, however, did not specify a CDRL to update the IMS. If, as bidder, you note the absence of an IMS data requirement but know that an IMS will be required during contract performance, you might consider three possible courses of action:

- You ask a question suggesting that the customer add an IMS to the contract requirement. If the customer agrees, all bidders will need to price the IMS to be compliant.
- You do not ask the question, but price the IMS in your offer. As a result, you may penalize yourself with a higher price than your competitors.
- You do not ask a question and you lower your price, hoping to underbid any competitors, knowing that you can "get well" with a post-award increase in price (tied to an expected change order).

Debates may ensue over whether the third option is morally or intellectually dishonest. This article will not attempt to resolve the ethical dilemma. Simply consider that your more unscrupulous or aggressive competitors may use any such gambit to prevail in a bid.

When you request a change, you should show its benefit to the customer or evaluators. For example, on a Navy proposal, the RFP proposal instructions specified 12 point type and double spacing for the proposal text, including paragraph titles (but not illustrations). We wanted to provide boxed, single-spaced, italicized "headlines," below each paragraph number and title, which summarized that topic, and we wanted them to stand out against the proposal text. We requested that the paragraph titles and our "headlines" be exempted from the double-spacing requirement on the basis that the format would help alert the evaluators to the paragraphs' contents and better understand what we proposed. We also included a sample. The request was approved.



If the questions had been answered earlier, it would have saved considerable time.

Don't give up! On another proposal, the RFP proposal instructions specified 12 point type for EVERYTHING, including illustrations. We prepared questions that requested exemption for tables and illustrations, but were denied. Several

more...

Example Letter

An example of a letter asking questions on a solicitation is as follows:

Mr. John Smith, Contracting Officer
Procurement Office, Department of Services and Equipment
XYZ Agency
Washington, DC

Reference: RFP 123-456-789, Development and Maintenance of Advanced Widget Systems

Dear Mr. Smith:

We appreciate the time and energy required to develop an RFP of this magnitude, and our company wishes to ask specific questions about the above-referenced RFP. We have organized our comments and recommendations in accordance with the structure of the RFP.

(1) RFP Section L.14, Proposal Instructions (RFP page L-6): The proposal preparation instructions require 12 point, double-spaced type for the entire proposal. Question: This requirement will significantly restrict proposers from properly presenting graphical materials in our proposal. We highly recommend that you revise the proposal preparation instructions to apply the 12 point, double-space requirement to only proposal text and not to tables and graphical notations.

(2) RFP Section C, SOW Section 4.7.5, Drawing Requirements (RFP page C-19) and RFP Section J-3, Production Specifications (page 3): The Drawing Requirements on RFP page C-19 specify that all measurements be expressed metrically. The Production Specifications in Section J-3 provide drawings using the English measurement system. Question: Please clarify whether all proposer drawing should be metric or English and whether the proposer is required to convert the measurements in the specification drawings to metric.

(3) RFP Section C, SOW Section 6.1 (RFP page C-37): The original solicitation announcement stated that a prototype testing step would be required. SOW Section 6.1 does not include a prototype testing step and goes directly from prototype development to full production. Question: Should a prototype-testing step be included or is this considered to be part of the prototype development process?

We look forward to your response and to participating in this solicitation.

Sincerely,

Jim Jones, Proposal Manager

other bidders also made the same request. They were also denied. Several bidders repeated the request (in other words) more than once. For every Q&A that was distributed (there was more than one), the customer reiterated that illustrations should also be in 12 point type. Finally, just two weeks before submission, the contracting officer sent the message that it was acceptable to use a smaller font for illustrations. This late response required extensive time reformatting many final graphics. If the questions had been answered earlier, it would have saved considerable time.

While organizing the RFP/Proposal Response Matrix for a subcontract proposal, we noticed a requirement for a special pump that made no sense to us for the system specified. We advised our client to question this requirement. Our client answered that it must be legitimate because it was in the subcontract RFP. We argued the point and then had to leave before the matter was resolved. When we returned, our client had written three full pages responding to this requirement. The program manager said that he had telephoned the prime contractor technical lead, who told him that it must be necessary because it was in the subcontract RFP.

“How in the world did that get in there? That was from another RFP...”

We pushed the matter again, and, finally, our client's program manager telephoned the prime contractor's contracting officer, whose response was: “How in the world did *that* get in there? That was from another RFP and has nothing to do with this program!” Imagine what the evaluators would have thought about our “understanding of the problem” if we had submitted three pages of how we were going to provide something that had nothing to do with their product!

Informal Question Responses

If questions have been answered informally (phone, e-mail, etc.) by the customer and have not been included in a formal amendment, be careful when using this information. It could result in a protest from the competition, or worse — disqualification because of RFP noncompliance. If answers are provided informally, the bidder should request the customer to formally provide them in a solicitation amendment.

If you do use informal information from the contracting officer in the solicitation, cite the date, message, and other details. For example, early in 2002, we managed a large health-care proposal that required letters of intent (LOI) from all key personnel. As many of the firm's employees were on vacation and not readily available, we questioned the contracting officer whether incumbent company employees needed LOIs. The contracting officer answered by e-mail that they did not require LOIs from incumbent employees, but he did not include this information in a formal amendment. In the Key Résumé section of the proposal, we referenced the e-mail from the contracting officer and did not include any LOIs from incumbent employees. The solicitation won without protest.

Conclusion

You should always read all draft and formal RFPs from cover to cover and very carefully, as soon as you receive them, and then prepare a detailed RFP—Proposal Response Matrix.

- Consider all facets of the proposal — technical, management, special contract clauses, proposal instruction correlation with evaluation factors, unrealistic page limitations, data items, legal issues, etc.
- The sooner you identify potential problems, the more likely they will be favorably considered.
- Do not be afraid to ask reasonable questions, and do not wait, hoping that someone else will ask them — it may be too late.
- Provide your customer with solutions, not problems that will take time to resolve.
- Be specific, with unambiguous references, statements, explanations, questions, and recommendations.
- Show how your suggested changes benefit the customer in such areas as
 1. The evaluation process
 2. The program
 3. Increased competition in contracting
 4. A reduction in performance, cost, and schedule risk
 5. Added cost efficiencies
 6. A more streamlined acquisition schedule to reduce costs as well as proposal development expenditures.

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Rob Ransome is the President of Ransome Associates. He has more than 40 years' experience developing aerospace proposals for the federal government. He is also the developer of Proposals Organized to Win (POW) software, a comprehensive RFP proposal development program. He can be reached at Ransome@aol.com. Phone 804-580-5929.

Packaging and Managing Proposal Information and Knowledge Effectively

BOOK
excerpt

From:
Successful Proposal Strategies for Small Businesses

BY ROBERT S. FREY

Overview

Proposals are authenticated information and knowledge in carefully packaged form. Organizing a centralized, fully operational, and evolutionary informational data system or knowledge base is imperative to your company's business development success. Maintaining frequently used proposal materials in compatible electronic formats as well as in easily accessible hardcopy form will help your proposal planning and preparation process significantly. These materials include résumés, project descriptions or summaries, proposal boilerplate or reuse material such as configuration management and health and safety plans, and previously submitted proposals. Proposal managers require ready access to the latest company and marketing intelligence information. But, be sure to store all company-sensitive marketing and proposal information in a secure physical area and within a secure partition of an electronic network.

In light of the EC/e-Government (Electronic Commerce) trajectory within federal acquisition, computer-based file management and information exchange assumes increasingly important proportions.

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Ensuring that proposal managers are provided with the latest company information is an ongoing effort in configuration management. For example, a comprehensive written overview about your company that is used in most every proposal needs to contain the most up-to-date information on contract awards, company commendations and success stories, annual revenue, staff level, funded contract backlog, and corporate organizational structure and leadership. If this business overview is updated for a given proposal, the corporate library boilerplate file that contains this same overview must be revised as well.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

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The All-Important Résumés

Your company's human, technical, and programmatic talent is the basis for your success to date. Staff are a particularly important consideration in the case of support services contracts, because the client is, in effect, purchasing human expertise in, for example, pollution prevention, electrical engineering, systems design, office automation, facilities management, or integrated logistics support (ILS).

Résumés have to be customized or tailored for each proposal.

Indeed, a company's staff being presented in the best possible light is valid for most every federal government procurement. This means that résumés have to be customized or tailored for each proposal. Tailoring is not altering or misrepresenting a person's experience or education in an unethical or illegal manner but rather involves highlighting relevant experience, publications, certifications, and education to the exclusion of other information. Some RFPs require that each proposed person sign a statement that the information contained in his or her résumé is accurate. Adequate time within the proposal response schedule needs to be built in to secure those requisite signatures. Smaller companies need stellar résumés; they function like name brands.

At times, the RFP will provide a very detailed résumé format, or indicate in narrative form how the issuing government agency wants to receive the résumés. When résumé format, content, or page count are stipulated, you must comply fully. However, many times you will have a degree of autonomy to structure the résumé.

A technique for helping evaluators quickly understand your staff's capabilities is to include a box entitled "Experience Summary," "Benefits to the Client," "Basis of Team Selection," or "Relevance to the Project" on the first page of each résumé

required by the RFP. Within that summary box, highlight the individual's expertise and accomplishments relevant to the specific position description or technical requirements of the procurement—this might include education, management experience on specific contract types, number of staff managed, publications, certifications, professional society memberships, work on similar projects, innovations, and years of successful experience in an operational environment. Three to four bulleted items are sufficient.

Do not assume that the evaluators will take the time to carefully review each résumé and extract the relevant details...

If you do not use an "Experience Summary" box, you might consider including a "Benefits to the Project" section in each résumé. Do not assume that the evaluators will take the time to carefully review each résumé and extract the relevant details that correspond to the position description. If you make their job difficult, you simply cannot expect to receive the maximum points possible.

Résumés should focus on relevant technical and programmatic accomplishments and excellence. They should accentuate results—increased production rates, improved quality, on-schedule performance, cost savings, meeting performance thresholds, and the implementation of innovative techniques and technologies. As appropriate, they should be client specific, site specific, and geography specific. Résumés should use transferable, action-oriented lead words to describe an individual's activities and contributions (see list below). These types of words help the evaluators to understand the relevance of your staff's current and past experience to the new project at hand. They facilitate the transfer of talent and capability from one project to another.

Review the following example:

Wrong way: "Mr. Jones managed an investigation at Ft. Baltimore, Maryland."

Action Oriented Words for Résumés

Manages	Negotiates	Leverages	Brings	Field-tests
Performs	Translates	Provides	Establishes	Implements
Reviews	Writes	Offers	Facilitates	Co-creates
Conducts	Designs	Solves	Enforces	Assists
Directs	Supports	Diversifies	Selects	Plans
Coordinates	Builds	Delivers	Transfers	Employs
Prepares	Drives	Ensures	Operates	Studies
Initiates	Leads	Participates	Troubleshoots	Examines
Develops	Determines	Maintains	Audits	Assesses
Investigates	Applies	Practices	Analyzes	Consults
Inspects	Characterizes	Displays	Compares	Surveys

Use action-oriented words to transfer capabilities from past contracts to the current opportunity.

Résumé CONTENT— More Is Better

**Within your company's résumé data-
base, consider including:**

grade point average

name and address of high school

**previous supervisors and telephone
numbers**

security clearances

years of supervisory experience

professional references—current

**telephone numbers and e-mail
addresses**

To this listing might be added date of hire, current approved job title, total years of professional experience, maximum number and type of staff supervised, technical publications written, knowledge of MIL and DOD standards as well as industry-specific regulatory guidelines such as technology export compliance rules, experience working for or supporting specific federal agencies, general technical areas of expertise, and computer-related experience [subdivided to include such items as hardware; hardware operating systems; computer-aided software engineering (CASE) methodologies and products; application development tools and languages; communications protocols; communication controllers, hubs, and hardware; network operating systems; databases; system tools; and software.

Appropriate way: “Mr. Jones managed a lead contamination groundwater investigation at Ft. Baltimore, Maryland. He negotiated technology-based cleanup criteria with the Maryland Department of the Environment in the decision document.”

One of the most important information-management activities your company can undertake is to create, update, archive, and make available for retrieval a résumé for each member of your technical, management, and support staff. Use the same software application and version that you use to produce your proposals, and format each résumé in a style that will be compatible aesthetically with the rest of your proposal text. Store hard copies of all résumés in alphabetical order in three-ring notebooks for ease of access.

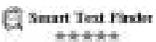
Establish an electronic subdirectory of all company résumés so that they might be searched for a combination of appropriate keywords based on the position descriptions in the RFP. (Example data base/search tools listed below.)

And you would be well served to generate and maintain a genuine database (using database software such as Microsoft Access) of résumé information to facilitate rapid searches to meet position description parameters or prepare tables and graphics providing information about your technical and professional staff. Many times RFPs will request the number of staff with specific degrees, certifications, or levels of experience. Use a well-planned form to capture the employee information that will populate the database.

Creating, word processing, editing, proofreading, and updating résumés is a time-consuming and ongoing task. But, without résumés readily accessible, much of your proposal response time will be consumed preparing them. And, having more information than is required by the average RFP is always preferable to having to search for that information under the pressure of preparing a proposal.

more...

Example Résumé Data Base/Search Tools—Available Commercially

	Search Express from Progressive Software Solutions	http://www.progressivesoft.com
	Isys desktop from Odyssey Development	http://www.isysusa.com
	Smart Text Finder PC utility from Spring Technologies	http://www.spring.com
	Search 32 from ANet	http://www.anetsoft.com
	UltraFind for Macintosh	http://www.ultradesign.com/ultrafind.html
	dtSearch from dtSearch Corporation	http://www.dtsearch.com
	Super Text Search by Glenn Alcott Software	http://www.galcott.com

Project Descriptions (Project Summaries)

A cumulative, regularly updated hardcopy and electronic file copy of your company's contracts, both as prime and sub, is a vital building block in the information foundation. Create project descriptions at the time of contract award and update them at the completion of specific tasks, or semiannually, and then again at contract completion.

As with résumés, storing hardcopies of each project description in a three-ring notebook allows ease of access. In the front of the binder, include a current list or matrix that includes all project description titles, contract and purchase order numbers, and client agencies in some logical order. It would be advisable to put your boilerplate project descriptions in the format required by your major client(s).

Specific information can always be added or removed in the tailoring process. Project or division managers should oversee and approve the updating process to ensure completeness and accuracy. As with the proposal response process, the updating of résumés and project summaries will require top-down management support, otherwise it will rarely be given the attention it deserves.

Effective Project Summary Outline

- Title:
- Name of client:
- Address of client:
- Contract number:
- Contract type:
- Contract value (with options):
- Period of performance (with options):
- U/OTB:
- Telephone:
- E-mail:
- Contracting officer:
- Telephone:
- E-mail:
- Company point of contact (POC):
- Subcontractors:
- Brief description:
- Detailed description:
- Method of acquisition (competitive/noncompetitive):
- Nature of award (initial/follow-on):
- Technical performance/accomplishments/innovations:
- Programmatic performance:
 - Contract transition
 - Business management
 - Personnel management
 - Reporting
 - Schedule control
- Cost-price-management history:
- Risk mitigation approach:
- Performance metrics:
- Quality/process improvement:
- Lessons learned:
- Best practices:
- Client performance evaluation highlights (award fees, CPARs, customer-approval rating):
- Average number of personnel utilized per contract year:
- Percentage turnover:
- Incumbent capture:
- Incumbent retention rate:
- Add-on/follow-on work:
- Termination history:

Project descriptions or summaries should focus on project successes cost savings to the client, schedule adherence, awards (including repeat business from the same client), value-added service provided, conformance with performance metrics and application of innovative technologies. Be specific, and be quantitative in your narrative descriptions. Highlight applicable lessons learned, such as the development of appropriate time-saving techniques or the application of certain automated project management tools. As client evaluation factors for award are weighted increasingly toward past performance, well-written and photo-documented project summaries become more and more valuable. Clients buy from companies that have performed similar work and can demonstrate and validate that fact effectively and appropriately in their proposals. You might consider investing in a matrix camera or digital camera to take client-approved photographs on site for your company's projects.

Sometimes in small businesses, because of the corporate culture or the pathway of company growth, one division may be reluctant to use staff and contractual experience from other divisions when responding to a procurement. This is one example of the change of thinking that needs to occur as a small business enters the competitive arena. Each division of your company must harness fully the collective human and contractual expertise and knowledge base resident in the entire firm.

One important caveat: Be certain to obtain your client's permission to prepare an in-depth project summary about your company's support for that client organization. In particular, private-sector clients, as well as law enforcement and intelligence agencies, can be extremely sensitive about having the scope of work and specific points-of-contact made public. It is always the best policy to confirm what you intend to do with your client point of contact.

Proposal Boilerplate (Canned or Reuse Material) As Knowledge Assets

Translate boilerplate into client-focused text. As your company prepares more and more proposals, it is important to extract certain boilerplate sections from past proposal documents, copy the text and graphics from these sections, and archive them in a central corporate library, proposal data center, or knowledge base. Boilerplate must still be tailored for each application, but it represents a rich collection of fodder for the writers and planners of future proposals. The accompanying list (next page) presents examples of boilerplate files, which are actually knowledge assets.

Proposal writers should not have to start from scratch on every proposal effort. You should create an electronic proposal toolbox or knowledge base so that proposal writers can consult the latest reuse material under one electronic umbrella. Invest the time and resources early in your corporate life to

Examples of Boilerplate Files



Company Assets

- Company core competencies (technical discussion)
- Company bonding, registrations, and certifications
- Licenses
- Maps (office locations, project locations, number of projects by state or region)
- Customer base
- Patents
- Trademarks
- Company organizational charts
- Company best practices
- Industry certifications and accreditations (e.g., Software Engineering Institute (SEI) Capability Maturity Model (CMM), ISO 9001:2000, and IEEE)
- Facility and personnel security clearances
- Industry and business community awards, commendations, and recognition (e.g., SBA Entrepreneur of the Year, Ernst & Young)
- Customer endorsements and commendations
- Small-minority-business involvement; HUBZone involvement
- Corporate-sponsored community service and outreach activities
- Company videos
- Facilities diagrams
- Best management practices (BMPs)
- Technical and business articles and books authored by company staff
- Interview guides
- Vendor manuals

Contractual Resources

- Project and product descriptions or summaries
- Project performance metrics
- Award fee statistics per project
- Project success stories

Human Resources

- Resumes
- Personnel diversity data (minorities, women, veterans, handicapped individuals)
- Incumbent capture rates
- Employee turnover rates
- Employee recruitment plan and metrics
- Employee retention metrics
- Staff by project, office, technical discipline, degree

Business Development and Proposal Development Assets

- Strategic plans and benchmarking data
- Market segmentation analyses
- Competitor information
- Bid and Proposal (B&P) spending patterns
- Winning proposals
- Multimedia presentations to clients
- Teaming agreements
- Teaming agreement SOWs
- Proposal templates (e.g., executive summaries, cover letters)
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) documents
- Proposal lessons learned (from client debriefings)
- Sales volumes by client sector, line of business (LOB), and geographic area
- Tactical business plans

Corporate Infrastructure and Process Assets

- Documentation capabilities
- Business processes (procurement systems and mechanisms, financial systems, invoicing procedures, cost accounting, scheduling, automated tracking tools)

Project-Specific Assets

- Customer evaluation reports [A/R Contract Approval System Support (ACASS), CPARS, PPAIS, and PPTMS ratings]
- Contract deliverables
- Return value analysis (EVA) results by project
- Work breakdown structures (WBSs)
- Project management plans

Computer-Related Assets

- Software development capabilities and practices
- Software source code
- Non-operational hardware and software test-bed environments
- Computer equipment and resources

Financial Assets

- Budget forecasts
- Capital expenses
- Annual revenues

Relationship Assets

- Cooperative agreements with colleges and universities, particularly HBCUs
- Strategic business alliances (with organizations such as Microsoft Solutions, Lotus, Dell, and Oracle)

Public Relations Assets

- Ads placed in professional and trade journals
- Trade show modules (text and graphics)
- External news releases

Engineering and Manufacturing Assets

- Engineering white papers (position papers)
- Manufacturing defect rate data
- Engineering drawings
- Engineering change proposals (ECPs)
- Test procedures
- Requirements data

Policies and Plans

- Make-or-buy policy
- Management plans
- Health and safety plans
- Technology transfer plans
- Professional compensation plans
- Design control plans
- Software quality assurance (SQA) plans
- Phase in/Phase out and transition plans
- Subcontractor management plans
- Configuration management (CM) plans

develop these knowledge assets. They will be used again and again to develop your proposals.

Marketing Targets

As your company grows, it will reach a point when it needs a systematic, formalized mechanism to track its business opportunities. A variety of excellent data base software packages, such as Microsoft Access or Lotus Notes [1], can be employed for this purpose. Database software allows for the generation of customized business reports and provides a quickly retrievable information source, for example, for planning and bid/no bid decisions. General access to the PC on which marketing targets reside should be controlled carefully through key lock or network password protection.

Corporate Library

An important step for small businesses working in the competitive environment is to establish a centralized library, proposal data center, or knowledge base (electronic and hardcopy) in which previously submitted proposals and presentations, RFPs, proposal debriefings files, résumés, project summaries, technical materials, FOIA-requested materials (competitor proposals and monthly progress reports for specific projects), professional and trade journals, potential teaming partner information, public relations materials, and photographs reside. The library is best administered by the business development group.

Cataloguing materials can be done using a variety of alphanumeric schemes that best fit your needs and uniquely identify each informational entity in the library. For example, all proposal documents could be catalogued with the prefix 1, followed by a two-digit calendar year designator, a three-digit federal agency code of your choosing, and so forth.

Be prepared to dedicate at least one large office with lateral and vertical file cabinets to your company's library. The volume of hardcopy information multiplies very rapidly. Using magnetic-backed drawer labels in the library is particularly advantageous. As your company's collection of materials increases in certain areas, the labels can be switched easily from drawer to drawer.

Personal experience has shown that storing a duplicate set of diskette, CD-ROM, or tape copies in appropriate containers along with the paper copies of proposals and other library documents is very beneficial. The original storage medium for a given document can reside with the publications group, but the duplicate medium can be used for electronic searches to locate specific verbiage, numbers, for example, that would be difficult to find manually.

Having a backup of electronic files is always a good idea. An alternative to a duplicate set of stored diskettes, CD-ROMs, or tapes is network storage, such as an intranet or in Lotus Notes. Intranets allow companies to connect their own people as well as their vendors.

Participants using browsers inside and outside the company share a common interface and communications environment. All of a company's business processes can be executed online in a

secure manner. Important intranet standards include TCP/IP and HTML. "Think of the intranet's design just as you do the physical organization of your company. If there is a locked door in front of an office, lock that door to the virtual office. If you have a secretary acting as a gatekeeper in front of certain offices, require passwords to access those files in the virtual office. Model the virtual world on your real world."¹⁷

A significant advantage of an intranet is the "increased productivity that results from quick, companywide communications and data sharing. Some of the many functions that intranets provide include repositories for volatile company information; easy access to company handbooks, guidelines, and forms of all kinds; and real-time calendaring and scheduling services."²⁰

Resources for more information regarding intranets include <http://www.lotus.com>, <http://www.microsoft.com>, <http://www.netscape.com>, <http://www.novell.com>, and <http://www.oracle.com>.³



As data volumes of proposal-related files increase due to high-end desktop publishing software and the use of integrated text and graphics, most proposals can no longer be stored effectively and efficiently on high-

density (1.44 MB) floppy diskettes. With files such as style files, graphics files, text files, and mirror files, a mid-sized set of proposal volumes produced with desktop publishing software can range from 40 MB to more than 200 MB⁴.

Storage media are now more appropriately CDs, Zip disks, removable drives, flopticals, magnetic tape, and multi-gigabyte hard drives. Effective information management is a critical factor in achieving proposal and marketing success.

Although it appears administrative and mundane, nothing could be farther from reality. Even very large companies have not done a good job in documenting and tracking their human and contractual talent and experience. Your company, being small at present, has the opportunity to start on the right footing. Build an appreciation for the integrated nature of externally directed business development, internal sales support, information management, and corporate image.

To be effective, the information management activity within your company must receive the support of senior management.

Proposal Lessons-Learned Database

To ensure that your company will derive both short- and long-term benefits from both proposal successes as well as losses, it is advisable to develop and maintain an automated proposal lessons-learned database including information such as that listed (above) and using commercially available software applications such as Lotus Notes® or Microsoft Access®. Proposal man-

Client name
 Brief scope of work
 Phase of project performance
 Contract type (ID/IQ, CFFP, FFP, T&M)
 Proposal due date
 Internal proposal B&P number
 Contract value to our company
 Status of proposal (win or lost)
 Proposal manager and other key staff
 Was a debriefing conducted with the client organization?
 Date of debriefing
 Has our company worked for this client before? (yes or no)
 What was our relationship with the client before the RFP was released?
 Was our proposal determined by the client to be in the competitive range (shortlisted)?
 Did we conduct advanced marketing with this client?
 Winning contracting firms
 Winning bid amounts (\$)
 Our bid (\$)
 B&P budget estimate versus actual direct labor and ODCs
 Specific reasons why we were not selected (check all that apply):
 Technical approach
 Lack of understanding of client mission and requirements
 Past performance
 Contractual experience
 Staff qualifications
 Management approach
 Company size
 Financial condition
 Direct labor costs
 ODCs
 Subcontracting plan
 Teaming arrangements
 Geographic location of staff, projects, or offices
 Missing information
 Late delivery of proposal
 Noncompliance with RFP-driven proposal structure, format, or page count
 Additional relevant information
 Client's source of feedback

Lessons Learned Database



Sample Information for a Proposal Lessons-Learned Database

agers should be responsible for providing the specific information for the lessons-learned database when proposals are won or lost. Once the data have been captured, they should be subject to senior-level review to help ensure impartiality.

By carefully tracking the reasons for wins and losses, you can begin to discern patterns in your business development performance with regard to specific client organizations, particular lines of business, certain types of contract vehicles, and proposal costing strategies. Are you consistently receiving low scores on ID-IQ contracts on which you submit proposals? Is your win percentage on Navy proposals particularly low in the Pacific Northwest? Does the lack of an established office near Wilmington, Delaware, seem to impact your chances of being selected for contract award for particular DuPont projects? Are your management plans missing the mark far too consistently? Those patterns must be discerned and communicated to appropriate business development and operations staff within your company, and then, most importantly, translated into prudent shifts in marketing, proposal development, and operational strategies and processes.

In addition, through this database you can begin to generate a solid basis for estimating Bid and Proposal (B&P) costs for specific types and sizes of proposal efforts. This is critical for efficient staff and equipment resource planning and allocation, as well as more accurate B&P fiscal and resource projections. It is worth noting that your company must strive—from the top downward—to develop a business culture that allows for appropriate and constructive introspection. The lessons-learned database will be most valuable when internal company politics do not skew the interpretation of the information that the database contains.

For example, let's say that your company received a low score under the key staff evaluation factor because your proposed proj-

ect manager had allowed a previous contract for the same client to run significantly over budget and behind schedule. Although this fact does not place this PM candidate in the best possible light, it is important to record the causes for your loss as completely and accurately as possible, and then act upon the patterns discerned in the causes. For example, management plans in your future proposals may have to emphasize specific strategies that your firm has implemented to monitor and control costs and schedule effectively and successfully.

By carefully tracking the reasons for wins and losses, you can begin to discern patterns in your business development performance with regard to specific client organizations, particular lines of business, certain types of contract vehicles, and proposal costing strategies.

more...

Applying IT Solutions: Evolutionary Informational Data Systems

As your company grows, staff in various office locations need easily accessible and usable proposal-related information that can be modified to reflect local and regional requirements. Ongoing advances in information and communications technologies continue to facilitate data and information sharing across distributed locations and networks. Scenarios ranging from virtual proposal centers to CD-ROM data sharing have come into usage.

Lotus Notes® scenarios

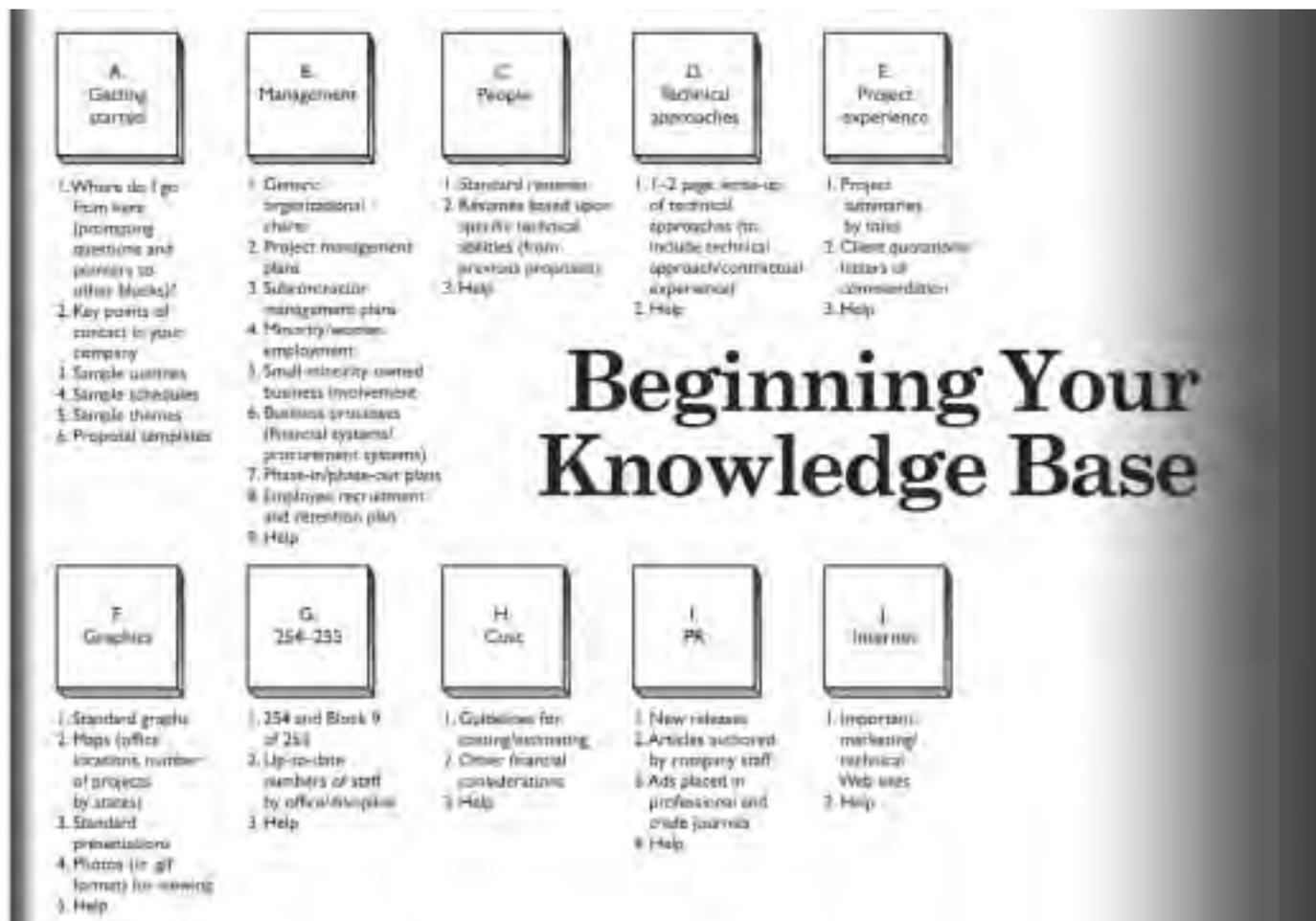
One powerful automated solution to this ever-growing requirement is a Lotus Notes-based domain of information we will refer to as proposal building blocks. Lotus Notes groupware provides a searchable, sortable document storage and management system for group use. As illustrated below, the proposal building blocks are represented by icons on a Lotus Notes screen on a PC. From their desktops and with no third-party interaction, your field office or corporate staff can click on these icons to access proposal guidelines and key internal points of contact for support along with sample outlines, résumés and proj-

ect summaries, technical narrative, and standard graphics. Each icon should have a HELP function associated with it to further enhance this system's self-containment. The building blocks should be designed to guide proposal managers and technical staff through the proposal-building process.

Drawing upon Lotus Notes' replication feature, electronic files can be updated, amended, or deleted from the proposal building blocks domain by a corporate-based systems administrator in a controlled manner and made available to your staff nationwide in real time. Everyone in the company will be able to access the latest materials. Such a system facilitates localized customization of proposals that are built upon a common, corporate-approved source domain of information. Distributed office locations can have access to the latest narrative on your company's business processes, résumés of recent new hires, key success stories from ongoing projects, and the most current letters of commendation from your clients.

CD-ROM scenarios

To address these same information requirements in very small companies, critical proposal files, which are password protected or encrypted, can be loaded onto a CD-ROM or removable drive (e.g., Zip, Jaz). This technique can also be useful for staff who travel frequently and need rapid access to proposal information. Data security is the primary concern with this scenario of information sharing.



Guiding geographically distributed staff through the proposal building process—beginning your knowledge base



Intranet scenarios

An intranet is an internal information distribution system supported by a server or multiple servers that uses Web technology and graphical user interfaces. An intranet can be used to make the information depicted on the previous page available to your staff at multiple geographic and office locations. Search engine software, such as the [ht://Dig](http://Dig) system (<http://htdig.org/main.html>) developed at San Diego State University and InfoMagnet from CompassWare Development (<http://ipw.internet.com/search/InfoMagnet.html>), can be employed to find and filter relevant information on your company's intranet.

Small Business Knowledge Management Success Story—This Stuff Really Works!

Small-Scale, Pilot Knowledge Management (KM) Initiatives Applied to Proposal Development

Small-scale pilot KM initiatives are critical to launch and sustain, and then to leverage and propagate their success throughout your organization. Successful pilots become proofs of concept that can be transplanted and adopted in other parts of your organization. Most important, knowledge initiatives focused on measurable and achievable business benefits will have a higher probability of acceptance and sustained success.

My employer, RS Information Systems, Inc. (RSIS), in McLean, Virginia, funded and proactively supports the RSIS Business Development Knowledge Base as an integral part of an enterprise-wide KM initiative. This knowledge repository is a robust Web-based, password-protected interactive tool that RSIS staff professionals can access remotely to qualify marketing oppor-

tunities and develop proposals and presentations. Approximately 35 RSIS staff currently access the knowledge base on PC workstations and laptop computers, although the system can serve more than 1,000 end users.

Using the Info-router search engine manufactured by Active Innovations in a secure networked Windows NT 4.0 environment, company employees can browse thousands of indexed files or perform keyword searches to identify relevant files in multiple application formats, including MS Word, Corel WordPerfect, HTML, XML, RTF, and PowerPoint, as well as PDF (Adobe Acrobat), Excel, and MS Outlook e-mail files. Queries result in lists of files prioritized by relevance and presented to users in the familiar format of a Yahoo or Google search result.

The RSIS knowledge base captures the staff's domain-specific technical knowledge, as well as its programmatic and client-specific expertise. In addition, the repository

archives current best-of-breed proposal narrative, graphics, and oral presentation slides. Currency is a critical parameter of the knowledge base's validity and value.

The direct business development benefits of the Business Development Knowledge Base have been rapid proposal prototyping, as well as informed bid/no bid decision making. By leveraging the knowledge base, RSIS proposal managers can generate first-draft proposal documents quickly with minimal B&P expenditure and little impact on billable technical staff. The proposal response life cycle can then be used to enhance and polish proposal documents, rather than expend time and resources tracking and locating résumés, project summaries, and other company information assets.

By September 2000, we had progressed to the point where three people could and did develop a 50-page technical and management proposal, including résumés and project descriptions, to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory (GFDL) at Princeton University within 24 hours from RFP release to client delivery! Without the knowledge base, it would have taken those same people at least a week to produce the proposal. RSIS marketing staff and capture managers also use the Business Development knowledge base to make informed decisions on the feasibility of pursuing a given procurement opportunity by assessing past and present contractual experience and technical skill sets of professional staff.

We progressed to the point where three people could develop a 50-page technical and management proposal in 24 hours.

more...

Balance of Tools, Disciplined Methodologies, and a Supportive Business Culture

Structured processes for knowledge transfer and capture ensure the sustained value and validity of the RSIS knowledge base. Best practices, lessons learned, client commendations and awards, performance metrics and standards, emerging technologies, staffing success stories, incumbent capture statistics, and information regarding rapid contract transitions are routinely funneled into the RSIS Proposal Development Department.

Sources of this information span executive management, monthly technical progress reports for projects nationwide, division-level leadership, and direct interviews of select subject-matter experts and other technical staff. The knowledge transfer and sharing expertise and experience of RSIS professional staff are also captured annually as an integral part of the corporate résumé update process. All levels of management reinforce these knowledge transfer processes regularly. Successful KM at RSIS results from the dynamic integration of supportive, forward-looking executive leadership; a business culture of and organizational commitment to mutual trust and sharing; the passion of people at all levels of the organization; and technology-based, user-driven solutions and tools.

Development Drivers and Challenges

The RSIS Business Development Knowledge Base, and indeed the company's entire KM initiative, began late in 1998. Given the reality of 120 total company staff in 1998 and only two full-time professionals in proposal development at the time, the need to do more with limited resources was immediate and critical. We had no centralized, electronic repository of information. There were no institutionalized or even ad hoc processes in place to identify, audit, collect, archive, and leverage key knowledge within the company.

On the other hand, we had a significant number of electronic directories and files of proposals, presentations, résumés, and project summaries. One individual prior to 1998 had actually attempted to extract, catalog, and organize proposal-related information into some semblance of order, but that initiative had never been completed. After having developed and received management buy-in for the architecture of the initial proposal system in mid-1999, one of my staff (a full-time proposal manager) and I began the arduous task of manually sorting through scores of proposal directories and hundreds of related files. This was done in addition to a full-time proposal development workload. Within seven months, five years' worth of electronic files for proposals, presentations, résumés, project summaries, awards and commendations, white papers, public relations materials, and other information had been reviewed, purged as appropriate, and organized into the pre-approved architecture.

The initial search engine selected was dtSearch, manufactured by dtSearch Corporation, which is incorporated in Virginia. Unfortunately in late 1999, dtSearch required frequent, time-consuming, and manual indexing and re-indexing. Server space demands were significant as the number of proposal modules increased. Search results were not as user-friendly as they needed to be for our requirements.

By mid-2000, one of my proposal managers, who is also our knowledge engineer, along with one Web developer and I migrated the prototype knowledge base from dtSearch to Microsoft Index Server. With this application, which was fed continuously by established knowledge transfer processes, the current RSIS Business Development Knowledge Base was fielded in the fall of 2000.

Our knowledge engineer and one Web developer now maintain the repository, which was migrated to Inforouter in November 2001. System maintenance requirements are modest at present. Incoming information is evaluated during the course of several days and then rapidly indexed into the knowledge base. As vice president of knowledge management for the firm, I provide both oversight for the KM initiative enterprise-wide, as well as hands-on collection and analysis of various knowledge assets.

Concurrent with our efforts to architect and populate our fledgling knowledge base, I worked closely with RSIS executive management to secure their support to institute knowledge transfer and collection processes in a disciplined and repeatable manner nationwide. Monthly technical progress reports were sent to me, as well as to the technical managers. Those reports were then combed for relevant technical innovations, lessons learned, staffing successes, best practices, and so forth. Résumés were generated for every new hire, and annual résumé updates were linked to the performance appraisal process. Eventually, knowledge-sharing experience was a key element incorporated into each RSIS résumé for all staff nationwide. Project summaries are now created according to a structured, consistent, and comprehensive template when contracts phase in. Summaries are updated when major new tasks are added and then again upon contract completion. On a regular basis during business development review meetings and strategic planning meetings, critical knowledge is shared from across the many defense, civilian, and law enforcement contracts that RSIS supports.

The culture of knowledge sharing with the company has extended to the establishment of technical Centers for Excellence (CFEs) and our Birds-of-a-Feather program. Through these institutionalized programs, domain-specific technical knowledge and best practices can be applied rapidly to provide our clients with proven solutions in near-real time. Recently, an important, relevant development in corporate communications and public relations was integrated directly into a civilian agency proposal within one hour of notification.

Sustainment and Future Enhancements

As part of our KM continuous process improvement (CPI) program, we envision the following enhancements to the maturing RSIS Business Development Knowledge Base by the middle of 2002:

- Additional structured categories to facilitate rapid retrieval of select full-text proposal modules
- Linkage with photographic light boxes for browsing the current inventory of stock and company photographs
- Monitoring and reporting of performance metrics (time and B&P cost savings) associated with the KM processes at RSIS for use in future planning and funding decisions.

Transferable Lessons Learned

There are four key ingredients in the RSIS KM success story. The first was a KM champion, an individual who understood and articulated the tangible benefits of knowledge management to executive management, as well as business development and technical staff. The second comprised the executive leadership, support, and vision necessary to grasp the value of KM and then fund the processes and clear the internal impediments to knowledge sharing. The third entailed the disciplined and repeatable processes put in place enterprise-wide within the company to funnel knowledge and information into one central point in near-real time. And the fourth included the Web-based KM tools.

Experience has demonstrated the value of starting your own company's business development KM initiative as soon as possible in the corporate life of your firm. This approach does two things. One, there will be less raw information and data to review, purge, and categorize. And two, the sooner your staff develops and hones their knowledge-sharing skills and behaviors, the more quickly your firm will emerge as a learning organization—one that adapts and prospers in a business environment of fast-paced and unpredictable change.

Leveraging Federal Performance Appraisal Systems to Your Company's Benefit

An important element of your company's proposal information repository is the evaluations and appraisals conducted by your clients about your project support. Make certain to request and archive the most recent appraisal results from the following three federal evaluation systems, as appropriate.

The Construction Contractor Appraisal Support System (CCASS) is an automated database of performance evaluations on construction contractors. The system provides past performance information for federal government contracting officers to aid them in their process of evaluating construction contractors' past performance. CCASS is a tool to track the performance of construction contractors throughout the DoD and federal government.

CCASS was developed to determine responsibility for construction contracts on sealed bid solicitations. CCASS was later mandated for use by all DoD agencies in the Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS), Subpart 236.2. The DFARS implements the regulations within the Federal Acquisition Regulation. These requirements include that performance evaluations be prepared for each construction contract of \$500,000 or more; or over \$10,000 if the contract was terminated for default; that the performance evaluations be retained for six years; and that past performance evaluations may be reviewed as part of the determination of responsibility prior to award. Contractors should aggressively demonstrate in their proposals how they have addressed and corrected past faults.

The Service and Supply Contract Appraisal Support System (SSCASS) and the A-E Contract Appraisal Support System (ACASS) comprise the other two performance evaluation systems currently in use by the DoD. Your company can certainly trumpet your excellent scores accrued under these federal performance appraisal systems in your proposals.

Endnotes

1. Elbert, Bruce, and Bobby Martyna, *Client/Server Computing: Architecture, Applications and Distributed Systems Management*, Norwood, MA: Artech House, 1994.
2. Blankenhorn, Dana, "11 Lessons from Intranet Webmasters," *Netguide*, October 1996, p. 82.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
4. Tittel, Ed, and James Michael Stewart, "The Intranet Means Business," *Netguide*, July 1996, p. 122.



Success Story Appraisal Ratings:

Project prowess—company (author's) ACASS ratings are consistently in the strike zone

REPORT CARD

USACE—Omaha	Excellent
USACE—Mobile	Excellent
USACE—Norfold	Excellent
Air Combat Command—Brooks AFB	Excellent

Robert S. Frey is Vice President of Knowledge Management & Proposal Development for RS Information Systems, Inc. Besides authoring several books on proposal management and development, Frey conducts proposal management seminars throughout the United States. He is an instructor in Technology Management at UCLA. He is also a member of the Professional Journal's Editorial Advisory Board. Mr. Frey can be reached at rfrey@rsis.com.

PROPOSAL TRAINING

for
ORGANIZATIONS
and
INDIVIDUALS

Training opportunities abound in most industries—but what about the ‘small’ world of proposals? Is useful training available for the proposal professional? What types of classes are provided? At what cost?

BY GREG WILSON, CACI

The training of personnel should be a key aspect of any organization’s personnel plan. Training motivates employees, empowers them, enhances their skill levels, and promotes retention. APMP recently distributed a survey to a variety of organizations that offer training related to commercial and government proposals. The results displayed in the following matrix show that many opportunities exist for companies and employees that want to expand their proposal skill base.

There are quite a few different types of training detailed in the matrix. Many training sessions are scheduled periodically at public seminars across the country. Often the best way to find the most accurate schedule for these events is by visiting the company Web site. In other cases, the training provider will charge a flat rate for coming to the client site and conducting a class. Others provide training at the provider’s site, or have a Web-based train-



ing tool. Course formats range from formal classroom settings to open forum discussions. Whatever your proposal training needs, there is likely to be a provider and course that meets that need.

This training course data were compiled from questionnaires answered by company representatives. The matrix is not an all-inclusive list; not every training provider responded to the questionnaire. No judgments are made here about training effectiveness, quality, or return on investment. For more information, please contact these organizations directly.

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Greg Wilson is a proposal professional at CACI, Inc. who has written previous articles for Proposal Management on proposal products and services. He can be contacted at Gwilson@caci.com.

Vendor	Courses
<p>H. Silver and Associates 1960 East Grand Ave. Suite 1000 El Segundo, CA 90245 Phone: 310-563-1240 Fax: 310-5630-1220 http://www.hsilver.com wbudding@hsawins.com</p>	<p>Hands On Proposal Workshop Complete proposal-training package for any member of proposal staff. Participants learn every step of the proposal process from gathering and analyzing customer intelligence to the request for proposal, from planning the proposal in detail to preparing and reviewing actual text and graphics.</p> <p>Technical Marketing and Proposal Preparation Discusses every step of the proposal process from the pre-proposal effort and customer intelligence gathering to understanding the hidden requirements in the RFP and writing the proposal content, to pricing the proposal, and finally, most importantly, all the insiders tips, tools and techniques required to win.</p>
<p>Len Duffy The Proposal Group 801 Swift Court Towson, MD 21286 Phone: 410-825-1120 Fax: 410-825-2504 www.lenduffy.com Proposal.Group@lenduffy.com</p>	<p>Capture Management Workshop A rigorous 4-day planning session designed to develop winning strategies based on a thorough understanding of the Key decision makers in the source selection process.</p>
<p>PS Associates, Inc. 2142 Fremont Ave. Placentia, CA 92870 Phone: 714 403-3868 Fax: 714 985-0441 www.psassociates.com dana@psassociates.com</p>	<p>Proposals: On Target, On Time Interactive one-day seminar covering the essentials of preparing winning proposals, whether small three-page letter proposals or large 100+ page proposals in response to complex RFPs. Covers the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 cardinal rules of proposal writing • Identifying the four types of evaluators and how to write to them • Translating messages from clients into winning proposal themes • Key techniques for planning the proposal projects • Master strategies to show the benefits to the client, not just the nifty features of your approach.
<p>Lore International Institute 1130 Main Avenue Durango, CO 81301 Phone: 800-866-5548 or 970-385-4955 Fax: 970-259-7194 www.LoreNet.com impact@lorenet.com</p>	<p>Proposing to Win A workshop format—supported by proposal consulting and Web-based tools. The workshop imparts advanced tools and techniques to produce superior proposals, in less time, with better results.</p> <p>Consulting Services Include RFP analysis, pink and red-team reviews, assistance drafting, and coaching presentations.</p> <p>Lore WinSite Provides online proposal tools.</p>
<p>The Sant Corporation Contact: Laura Benken 8260 North Creek Drive Suite 200 Cincinnati, OH 45236 Phone: 513-631-1155 Fax: 513-791-4580 www.santcorp.com lbenken@santcorp.com</p>	<p>Turning Prospects into Customers: How to Write Winning Proposals and RFP Responses Taught by Dr. Tom Sant, author of <i>Persuasive Business Proposals</i>. Dr. Sant focuses on providing the skills that not only improve the efficiency of business communication, but also improve the effectiveness of it. Visit http://www.santcorp.com for a complete agenda.</p>
<p>The Seibert Group, Inc. P.O. Box 11053, Cincinnati, OH 45211 Phone: 513-598-4647 Fax: N/A www.seibertsales.com info@seibertsales.com</p>	<p>How to Write Persuasive Sales Proposals A one day, hands-on, workshop-style class that teaches students how to structure persuasive sales proposals. Students receive a framework for writing a proposal and start drafting the text for the proposal.</p>
<p>Shiplely Associates 653 North Main Farmington, Utah 84025 Phone: 888-772-9467 Fax: 801-451-4660 www.shiplelywins.com postmaster@shiplelywins.com</p> <p>Shiplely Limited offers courses and training in Europe. Course availability and prices vary. Contact: Shiplely Limited 3 North Street Workshops Stoke Sub Hamdon, Somerset, UK Phone: +44 1935 825200 Fax: +44 1935 825965 www.shipleylimited.com information@shipleylimited.com</p>	<p>Various Courses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winning Business in a Changing Economy • Winning Strategic Opportunities • Writing Winning Proposals, Capturing Commercial Business • Effective Executive Summaries • Strategic Sales Presentations • Customer-Focused Sales Writing • Word Skills for Proposals • Capture Planning for Strategic Wins • Managing Winning Proposals • Writing Winning Proposals, Capturing Federal Business • Writing Winning Proposals, Capturing Federal Services Business • Winning in the Cost Volume • Winning Through Oral Proposals • Managing Red Team Reviews • Business Development Executive Clinic
<p>Advantage Consulting, Inc. Address: 7611 Little River Turnpike, Suite 204W Annandale, VA 22003 Phone: 703-642-5153 Fax: 703-658-0159 www.acibiz.com AdvantageConsulting@acibiz.com</p>	<p>Various Courses, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Federal Proposal Management • Proposal Writing for Technical Staff • Oral Proposals—Building a Winner! • Winning Commercial Proposals • Business Development for Technical Staff and Line Managers • Building & Maintaining Customer Relationships

	Course Locations	Type of Instruction	Course Types	Primary Application(s)	Certifications & Degree Options	Course Duration and Average Cost
	Various—see Web site	Formal Classroom Workshop/ Discussion	Proposal Management Acquisition Management	Government, Commercial, and International Procurement	Certificate of Completion Provided	Workshop—3 days Public Session—\$1495 Onsite—\$14,950 Technical Marketing and Proposal Preparation—2 days Public Session—\$1395 Onsite—\$13,950
	Client Site	Workshop/ Discussion	Proposal Management	Government Procurement	None	Normally 4 days, dependent on the complexity of the procurement. Two pricing approaches: If a follow-on proposal management engagement, \$1,500 per day. If a stand-alone effort, \$10,000 total.
	Washington Denver Chicago Los Angeles In-house	Workshop/ Discussion	Proposal Management	Government and Commercial Procurement	None	One-day \$495 per person on public courses. \$3,000 generic, \$4,500 tailored to your company for in-house training, plus travel expenses.
	Schedule and location determined by contract with organization Win Site access provided by subscription	Workshop/ Discussion Web/Computer-based One-on-one	Proposal, Contract, and Acquisition Management. Presentation Skills Negotiation Skills	Government, Commercial, and International Procurement	Proposing to Win certifications available for individuals and organizations.	Proposing to Win workshops are between \$12,000 (two-day) to \$18,000 (three-day). Average cost per attendee is \$895. WinSite subscription—\$6,500/year for the minimum of 10 seats.
	Various—see Web site	Workshop/ Discussion	Proposal Management	Commercial Procurement	None	8 hours—\$295/person
	Client location. Seminars occasionally scheduled	Formal Classroom Workshop/ Discussion	Proposal Management	Commercial Procurement	None	\$1,500/day plus travel and living expenses for the instructor. Maximum of 15 students per class.
	Client location worldwide, Shipley Associates Corporate HQ, public seminars, or mutually agreed locations. Seminar schedule available on Web site	Various: Workshop/ Discussion, Web-based, Guest Lecture	Proposal, Acquisition, Sales, Marketing Management	Government, Commercial, International procurements	Certification offered for “Shipley University”	Various course lengths and prices Average cost of 1-day course—\$5,250 Average cost of 2-day course—\$11,075 Average cost of 3-day course—\$14,013 Average cost of 1-day public seminar—\$395 per person (\$295 for APMP members) Average cost of 2-day public seminar—\$948 per person (\$848 for APMP members) Average cost of 3-day public seminar—\$1,295 per person (\$1,095 for APMP members)
	Client location for groups of 12 or more, or as individual attendee at Advantage Consulting office in Annandale, VA	Workshop/ Discussion	Proposal Management	Government Procurement	None	Individual attendee at ACI session, \$395 including course materials, continental breakfast, and lunch. Fees for workshops at client locations are based on location and number of attendees.

Taking the Arrogance Out of Proposal Writing

How Arrogance Creeps into Proposals

BY JAYME A.
SOKOLOW,
PH.D.

ar-ro-gant: 1. Over convinced of one's own importance; haughty. 2. Marked by or arising from haughty self-importance. (*Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary*)

Arrogant: Severe, Proud, Insolent
(*Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*)

We face many challenges in writing winning proposals. Organizing to win involves many people and different kinds of activities, and often continues for several months. Proposals must be complete and compliant. They must persuade skeptical reviewers that our company is the best-qualified applicant. Persuasion is tricky because the narrative sections of most proposals combine approaches that usually are consid-

ered opposites: bravado and modesty, brevity and depth, and innovation and conservatism.

There are two axioms all proposal professionals probably know (reference Beveridge & Velton):

- It is the height of marketing arrogance to believe that you know your customer's business better than he or she does.
- Arrogance has lost far more competitions than incompetence.

These axioms focus squarely on the dangers of arrogance in proposal writing.

The pressures of competitive bidding may encourage applicants to use an arrogant style—making exaggerated or unsubstantiated claims about their capabilities, features, or benefits—to strengthen their own case and undermine their competitors. Proposals may be written in ways that disrespect their customer's viewpoint or prior work, make recommendations in a very didactic manner, or offer solutions that suggest that the customer will not be consulted.



Reviewers, however, are usually repelled by an arrogant tone or arrogant claims in proposals. Like most of us, they heartily dislike applicants that appear enamored of their self-importance.

Although the author has never come across any statistics or case studies of arrogance in proposal writing, there is ample anecdotal evidence that many proposals either deliberately or inadvertently make exaggerated or unsubstantiated claims that reviewers may perceive as arrogant. We have all been cautioned by Red Teams to tone down overly exuberant language and to make sure that all our claims are thoroughly documented.

Proposals, however, do not have to use arrogance as a persuasive technique. There are more effective and less grating ways to be convincing.

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Logical Arguments in Proposals

Although we usually associate arrogance with a style or tone, proposals most often appear arrogant because of their logical flaws or logical inconsistencies. When applicants make unsubstantiated or exaggerated claims about their capabilities, experience, or solutions, they often anger reviewers for two reasons.

The most obvious one is style or tone. Even a thoughtful proposal can undercut itself if it conveys an approach that is preachy, impertinent, and contemptuous of the client. Here, for example, is a particularly egregious example in a proposal of a company implying that it knows the customer's business better than the customer:

In its Statement of Work, the Department of Energy states that contamination is a problem at its Las Cruces, New Mexico Nuclear Waste Facility because of underground seepage. This is incorrect. It is caused by the improperly designed fuel containers currently used by the Department of Energy. Our Green Fuel Container will resolve all contamination problems.

While these kinds of proposals exist, most of us do not deliberately submit applications that are designed to repel the very people we want to impress. More commonly, proposals appear arrogant because *we make claims that are not supported by sound evidence or compelling rationales.*

In everyday life, we usually use inductive or deductive reasoning to make decisions and persuade others. With inductive

reasoning, we make a general claim based on specific examples or facts. With deductive reasoning, we make a specific claim based on generalizations. While inductive and deductive arguments are commonly found in proposals, most proposal narratives are based on a logical model of claim, evidence, and rationale.

This model has been authoritatively analyzed by Stephen Toulmin, a British logician and historian of philosophy who taught for many years in the United States. According to Toulmin, a claim is a point you want to prove in your proposal. Using Toulmin's model, you want reviewers to accept a claim as:

- True if it applies to you or is applied by you to competitors.
- Not true if it derives from your competitors.
- Good or bad.
- Worth doing or not worth doing.

Claims try to answer four basic questions: Is it true? What is it? What is its quality? What should be done about it? In the logical model of claim, evidence, and rationale, all arguments are presented as answers to these questions.

In proposals, claims are usually supported by evidence, which commonly includes facts, statistics, exhibits, opinions, and predictions. Table 1 illustrates the kinds of questions that reviewers are likely to ask about the quality of evidence in proposals.

To some extent, the power of evidence is subjective. If you are convinced that your evidence is true and does not need to be substantiated, the reviewers may find it unpersuasive. If you believe that your evidence may be controversial or challenged, then you probably will have to treat the evidence as a claim and demonstrate its truth by answering those classic questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?

For example, reviewers will uncritically accept national HIV/AIDS statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They are less likely to accept your company's unpublished internal survey, especially if it is used to substantiate a questionable claim.

The rationale behind an argument is the logical principle that connects the evidence to the claim. Toulmin believes there are seven basic types of rationales that are commonly used in arguments. Not surprisingly, each of the seven has a typical weakness. Table 2 illustrates the seven kinds of rationales and their particular weaknesses.

Some proposals may not clearly distinguish between evidence and rationale. As a result, the presentation of evidence is often considered so obvious that a rationale seems unnecessary. Whether a rationale is spoken or unspoken, there must be some logical connection made between your arguments, the evidence, and the requirements in the Request for Proposals, or reviewers may contest or deny your claims.

Arrogance and Logical Flaws in Proposals

Arrogance in proposals arises when claims are made without supporting evidence or a convincing rationale. You can avoid the perception of arrogance by using Toulmin's model of logical

Table 1: Reviewers' Tests for Evidence in Proposals

Proposal Evidence	Tests
Facts	What is the source of the facts? Is the information credible? biased? qualified?
Statistics	What is the source of the statistics? Do they cover a significant size? Do they cover a sufficient time? Is the reporting method valid?
Exhibits	Is the exhibit genuine? Is the exhibit typical of the phenomena it represents?
Opinions	Who is the opinion maker? Is the opinion maker credible?
Predictions	Who is making the prediction? Is the prediction maker credible? Is the prediction consistent with other evidence? Is the prediction consistent with itself?

Table 2: Common Proposal Rationales and Weaknesses from a Reviewers' Perspective

Proposal Rationale (With Examples)	Characteristic Weakness
<p>What is true of some is true of more or all. <i>In our factory, an informal survey of complaints indicated that 56 percent came from the Products Division. Consequently, to improve our factory we should concentrate on addressing complaints from all divisions.</i></p>	This rationale is no stronger than its sample.
<p>What is true of many or all is true of some. <i>Seventy percent of Ford Escorts sold in 1998 have faulty steering. Therefore, all Ford Escort owners should have their cars inspected by an authorized dealer.</i></p>	First you must determine what is true of many or all.
<p>Two cases are parallel. <i>Our company has trouble increasing its efficiency. The Jones Company improved its efficiency by decentralizing its operations. Therefore, we should decentralize our operation too.</i></p>	The two cases are not wholly parallel.
<p>Alternative claims are false. <i>Because the weather has been unseasonably warm, there will be a shortage of air conditioner repairers because they are very busy at this time of the year.</i></p>	There may be an unforeseen or counterfactual claim that is true.
<p>One situation is caused by another. <i>When we installed our new machinery, output increased 20 percent over the next six months.</i></p>	If one event comes first and another follows, the linkage could be a coincidence or simply an illusion.
<p>One situation is the sign of another. <i>In 2001, we doubled the size of the sales staff. Over the next year, our sales volume tripled. Therefore, it was a good idea to hire more sales staff.</i></p>	The linkage could be a coincidence or simply an illusion.
<p>Two cases are analogous. <i>A good engineering staff is like having a great manager of a baseball team.</i></p>	The statements being compared are too dissimilar.

argument to make strong and credible claims.

Here is a typical claim from a technical proposal:

The Jones Gyro package is the state-of-the-art solution for underwater, surface, or air missile launches.

Simply stating that your technical solution is state-of-the-art proves nothing. A reviewer is likely to respond, "Of course, Jones thinks his gyro package is the best in the business. All applicants make the same claim about their devices. Why should I believe Jones? What arrogance!"

To avoid the perception of arrogance, the claim must include compelling evidence and a sound rationale that can pass muster with reviewers. A revised version of the same claim that follows Toulmin's model is:

Claim: The Jones Gyro package is the state-of-the-art solution for underwater, surface, or air missile launches.

Evidence: It has been used successfully on 75

underwater, surface, and air missile launches over the past five years.

Rationale: Because it has performed successfully in 100 percent of all missile launches for the US Department of Defense, it is the most reliable gyro for your missile launch program.

Although the first statement may appear like an obvious example of a claim without evidence and a rationale, sometimes technical proposals make grand claims that are supported with little more than the window dressing of phrases like "cutting edge," "state-of-the-art," and "world class," as if these words were sufficient to demonstrate that the claim is true. Red Team reviews can help ensure that every claim you make is defended with solid evidence and a convincing rationale. They can also help eliminate such hackneyed phrases as "world

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Arrogance is hardly a newly identified problem in persuasive writing. In the mid-eighteenth century, the English author Samuel Johnson wrote expansively on the subject. He considered arrogance a happy by-product of boldness and intelligence, but he also understood that it had a number of negative connotations. Below are two of his definitions.



Arrogance: Popularity

“Few have abilities so much needed by the rest of the world as to be caressed on their own terms; and he that will not condescend to recommend himself by external embellishments must submit to the fate of just sentiment meanly expressed, and be ridiculed and forgotten before he is understood.” Rambler, October 26, 1751.

Arrogance: Audacity

“The mental disease of the present generation is impatience of study, contempt of the great masters of ancient wisdom, and a disposition to rely wholly upon unassisted genius and natural sagacity. The wits of these happy days have discovered a way to fame, which the dull caution of our laborious ancestors durst never attempt; they cut the knots of sophistry, which it was formerly the business of years to untie, solve difficulties by sudden irradiations of intelligence, and comprehend long processes of argument by immediate intuition. . . . Men who have flattered themselves into this opinion of their own abilities. . . readily conclude, that he who places no confidence in his own powers owes his modesty only to his weakness.” Rambler, September 7, 1751.

class” because they only lull you into thinking that you have proven your claim.

Because proposals commonly use discriminators to separate themselves from their competitors and exploit their competitors’ weaknesses (ghosting), the next examples come from attempts

to convince reviewers that your company is superior to its rivals. The first statement represents your competitor’s claim while the second argument is your contrasting claim using Toulmin’s model of argument.

Competitor’s Claim: Smith, Inc. is the only firm with the specific engineering skills necessary to perform the Statement of Work.

Your Claim: Of the many firms capable of performing this contract, Jones, Inc. has the most qualified personnel.

Evidence: Jones, Inc. will assign 12 engineers to this project. Sixty percent of our engineers have master’s degrees in engineering; twenty percent have masters in business administration; and eight-nine percent of them have worked on projects very similar to the one described in the Statement of Work.

Rationale: With its highly qualified and experienced personnel, Jones, Inc. is most qualified to complete this engineering project according to the Statement of Work.

Competitor’s Claim: Howard Van Lines provides the best move management services for

Improving Credibility of Claims - With Specificity, first to features, then to benefits	
Least Credible	Recommendations for Programming
	Technical Recommendations for Improved Programming
	5 Technical Recommendations for Improved Programming
	5 Proven Technical Recommendations for Improved Programming
	5 Proven Technical Recommendations for Reducing Costs while Improving Programming
	5 Proven Technical Recommendations for Reducing Costs by 40 percent while Improving Programming
Most Credible	

Table 3

federal agencies.

Your Claim: Berger Van Lines has demonstrated that it can provide move management services that are more efficient than any other company on the General Services Administration Federal Supply Schedule.

Evidence: In 2001, Berger Van Lines received the US Navy's prestigious Rickover medal for its "stellar move management services." And in the US National Park Service's recent report, National Parks for the 21st Century (2002), Berger Van Lines was lauded for its "outstanding reliability, efficiency, and low costs in the field of move management." No other move management company has ever received these two accolades.

Rationale: Berger Van Lines has documented its ability to provide highly efficient move management services for the US Navy and the US National Park Service. It will provide the same level of outstanding services to all other federal agencies.

Avoiding the Perception of Arrogance

Toulmin's logical model of claim, evidence, and rationale can help you avoid the perception of arrogance in proposals. Using this model, you can make any claim as long as you support it with evidence that addresses the evidentiary questions in Table 1 and a rationale that addresses the weaknesses in Table 2. The most effective approach is to be very specific about both your features and benefits, which are at the core of any winning proposal.

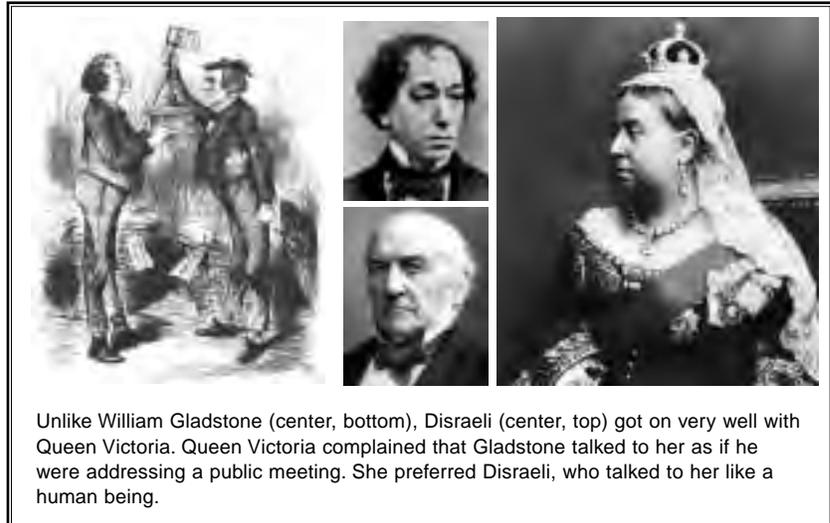
Table 3 illustrates how your claim becomes more credible as you add specifics first to the features and then to the benefits.

This formula will help you shape proposals into more direct, clear, and persuasive documents while avoiding the perception of arrogance. With Toulmin's model, you are likely to see one or more of the following results in your proposals:

- You will support your claims with evidence and a rationale that reviewers find credible.
- You will temper some of your claims while supporting them with evidence and a rationale that reviewers find credible.
- You will eliminate claims that cannot be adequately supported.
- You will avoid the perception of arrogance because your claims are not merely asserted but thoughtfully and logically defended.

All of us understand that you cannot win contracts with proposals that are meek, modest, and self-effacing. The challenge is to convince reviewers that your claims are valid without going overboard in the opposite direction.

Arrogance usually appears in proposals when claims are made without evidence and rationales. Whether this approach is deliberate or inadvertent, the consequences are the same. Reviewers conclude that you are too puffed up with your own self-importance because you will not deign to substantiate your assertions. By using Toulmin's logical model, you can avoid the perception of arrogance while helping reviewers positively answer those two critically important questions: Why you? Why your approach?



Unlike William Gladstone (center, bottom), Disraeli (center, top) got on very well with Queen Victoria. Queen Victoria complained that Gladstone talked to her as if he were addressing a public meeting. She preferred Disraeli, who talked to her like a human being.

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The Business Development Capability Maturity Model: an Introduction

The BD-CMM is a process improvement map for assessing business development and proposal management effectiveness. It encompasses the full business development lifecycle and organizational components.

BY HOWARD NUTT

The Business Development Capability Maturity Model (BD-CMM¹) provides its users, including proposal management professionals, with a framework, a path, and a guide for achieving dramatic process improvement in their organizations. Currently being developed by Shipley Associates, the model will soon be released into the public domain. Its germination was fostered by the wish to have a process improvement map that organizations could use for assessing business development and proposal management effectiveness. The model's scope encompasses the full business development lifecycle and organizational components, including advance marketing, sales, proposal development, and sales account management. By encompassing the full scope of business development, it acknowledges that no one component can exist very long in isolation and that successes, when realized, are the orchestrated work of a team.

The BD-CMM is based on the existing capability maturity principles and models originated by the Carnegie Mellon Software Engineering Institute (SEI). The original CMM developed by SEI addressed process maturity for software engineering (SW-CMM), and subsequent models have been constructed for systems engineering (SE-CMM), human resources (People CMM), and program management (PM-CMM).

DEFINING THE LEVELS OF MATURITY

The BD-CMM defines levels of maturity through which an organization must pass in order to achieve the next level. As shown on the following page, each level is defined such that multiple areas of process improvement take place within the level, but each area's activities fall within the overall characterization, or definition, of that level. The definitions for each level are very broad to allow for a wide variety of organizational behaviors, but clearly describe a progression of increased maturity.

The first row of the model labeled Key Process Categories indicates the four major categories deemed appropriate for business development. In comparison, the SW-CMM is organized around three process categories (management, organizational, and engineering) and the SE-CMM includes three process area (engineering, project, and organizational).

"Themes" associated with each process category are named on the second row. The thematic definition is modeled after the

People CMM, which uses this construct (developing capabilities, building teams and culture, motivating and managing performance, and shaping the workforce).

The first column shows that the Version 1.0 adopts the SW-CMM nomenclature for the BD-CMM. The level definitions have been tailored to apply to the business development process.

PROCESS LEVELS

The Key Process Areas are aligned by Key Process Categories and Level. For example, the Key Process Area "Individual Skills Development" is an area where an organization should focus to improve its process to achieve Level 2 maturity.

The BD-CMM framework not only provides characterization for each level, but also establishes a definition of the improvement required to move to the next level.

Level 1—Initial

The Initial level, characterized by *ad hoc*, chaotic processes and limited management commitment, evolves to the Repeatable level through the introduction of a disciplined process. In terms of proposal development, organizations operating at Level 1 rely on heroic efforts by a few talented individuals to craft approaches to customer requirements and respond to customer solicitations, while supporting them with virtually no resources and infrastructure.

Level 2—Repeatability

Once the disciplined process is adopted at the Repeatable Level, repeatability replaces the chaos of Level 1. For most companies, this process *repeatability* relies on individuals who have been successful in winning new business and remains proposal-centric. At Level 2, interest in improving business development results focuses on the proposal management process, and is most often embodied in what worked for one or more past efforts.

Level 3—Defined

The logical evolution from the Repeatable level to the Defined level is establishment of a *standard, consistent process*. For most companies, this transition moves them away from a proposal-centric approach toward lifecycle process management, so that they

¹ CMM is a registered trademark of the Software Engineering Institute of Carnegie-Mellon University. For information on the CMM, visit the SEI Web site at <http://www.sei.cmu.edu/publications.html> and search for "CMU/SEI-93-TR-025."

Key Process Categories	Customers	Management	People	Capabilities
Themes	Increasing Customer Value	Managing Performance and Quality	Building Competencies and Teams	Leveraging Professional Resources
Levels	Key Process Areas (KPA's)			
5. Optimizing	Innovation		Transformation	
4. Managed	Relationship Management	Quantitative Process Management Enterprise Influence	High-Performance Teams	BD System Integration Infrastructure Management
3. Defined	Solution Development	Quality Assurance and Metrics Organizational Tactics	Organizational Competencies Development	Sales/Capture Processes Support Systems
2. Repeatable	Response Generation	BD Administration Quality Control and Measurement	Individual Skills Development	Sales/Capture Procedures Work Environment
1. Initial	Ad Hoc			

The BD-CMM is being developed as a comprehensive structure that defines the characteristics of best-in-class processes and provides an improvement path capable of guiding achievement of optimum performance.

focus on the up-front sales or capture effort and overall process integration as critical success factors. Level 3 practitioners emphasize the value of training, tools, and resources as process facilitators.

Level 4—Managed

The Managed level is reached by a process characterized as *predictable*. Companies operating at this level typically are highly focused on customer relationships as essential drivers for process, actions, and infrastructure. In addition, they understand that business development must leverage the full range of enterprise resources and greatly value high-performance teams as enablers to win strategic bids.

Level 5—Optimizing

The Optimizing level results from *continually improving process*. Companies at this level are innovators in customer relationships, internal management approaches, and process, as well as focused on managing ongoing changes in both process and infrastructure. Level 5 organizations are further characterized by business development entrepreneurship throughout the enterprise by all employees to identify and champion new opportunities for business growth. Successful entrepreneurship is rewarded with professional growth.

The levels of the BD-CMM as a series of plateaus do not necessarily reflect equal degrees of improvement. Just as introduction of a disciplined process is much less difficult than organizational adoption of that process, the progress from Level 1 to Level 2 is much more easily accomplished than the progression from Level 2 to Level 3. The process improvement required to move to successive levels becomes increasingly more difficult to achieve.

A key characteristic of progression from level to level within the model is the increase in management visibility into the process. Typically, at Level 2, management maintains visibility between phases of the ongoing process—understanding at major milestones what has been accomplished to date, based on the quality of the outputs of that phase.

At Level 3, the insights are enhanced to embrace rigorous two-way communication at major milestones within process phases. Examples include readout and feedback at Color Team reviews, designed to assure quality. The enabler of management insight is the quality-management thread in the Managing Performance and Quality Key Process Categories. As Quality Management matures from Quality Control, to Quality Assurance to Quantitative Process Management, interactions with the Enterprise provide continuous information and feedback loops across the organization.

WHAT CHARACTERIZES AN ORGANIZATION AT BD-CMM LEVEL 2?

BD-CMM Level 2 is characterized by a business development process that addresses individual opportunities by reusing successful past practices. Basic processes are established to track cost, schedule, and functionality, and the necessary discipline is in place to repeat earlier successes on business development opportunities with similar applications. Management has visibility into the business development process only at major milestones.

The following six Key Process Areas comprise Level 2:

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Response Generation

Key practices cover activities for understanding customer requirements and needs and for preparing a response to the customer as the basis for a transaction.

Sample Issue: To what degree are responses prepared in accordance with customer needs, instructions, and requirements?

Sample Proposal Practice: Defined methodology to “strip” or “shred” the customer solicitation and allocate requirements to the proposal outline.

Quality Control and Measurement

Key practices encompass activities for controlling quality of business development outputs, both internal and external to the performing organization.

Sample Issue: Is the quality of business development process outputs monitored and controlled at critical, internal milestones?

Sample Proposal Practice: Documented participation and content for bid/no-bid decision meetings.

Business Development Administration

Key practices define the administrative infrastructure necessary to maintain the required discipline in the business development process and to monitor performance and manage resources across multiple opportunities.

Sample Issue: Is an individual (or group) charged with responsibility for managing business development practices?

Sample Proposal Practice: Established “owner” for the proposal process who oversees process compliance.

Individual Skills Development

Key practices focus on providing participants in business development with the individual training necessary for them to complete assigned tasks.

Sample Issue: To what degree are funds dedicated for ongoing business development training (including for proposal development)?

Sample Proposal Practice: Standard line item in the business development departmental budget or the company training budget for training in specific skills.

Sales/Capture Procedures

Key practices cover the documented and repeatable techniques employed for making a sale and developing business.

Sample Issue: Does the organization follow a written policy for performing sales/capture activities?

Sample Proposal Practice: Formal policy that directs the organization to follow specific steps, involve specific personnel or departments, and adhere to a notional sequence of events in the process.

Work Environment

Key practices focus on establishing and maintaining the physical infrastructure necessary to support a repeatable business development process.

Sample Issue: To what degree are workspaces (i.e., physical or virtual proposal centers, as appropriate) and resources provided to support efficient and effective business development?

Sample Proposal Practice: Meeting rooms provided for team collocation, or another form of appropriate collaborative workspace in place.

WHAT DIFFERENTIATES A COMPANY THAT ACHIEVES BD-CMM LEVEL 3?

BD-CMM Level 3 is characterized by use of a standard business development process consistently across the organization. All business development activities use an approved, tailored version of the standard process. Management has visibility into individual activities and can prepare proactively for risks that may arise.

The following Key Process Areas comprise Level 3:

Solution Development

Key practices cover developing and managing the process of tailoring solutions to customer needs and requirements.

Sample Issue: Are customer solution preferences documented and communicated throughout the response team, including proposal staff?

Sample Proposal Practice: Established methodology for bridging from capture or pursuit plan to a proposal plan.

Quality Assurance and Metrics

Key practices involve the assurance of quality business development outputs and products through activities for tracking, measuring and reporting on business development performance.

Sample Issue: Does management review in-process and consolidated reports and guide activities to manage risk and produce winning, customer-focused solutions?

Sample Proposal Practice: Formal, documented offering reviews required prior to and during proposal development.

Organizational Tactics

Key practices institutionalize standardized practices through documentation, tools, templates, and other key users aids and activate the organization’s ability to scale and tailor the process to unique acquisition requirements.

Sample Issue: Are appropriate personnel assigned and authorized to perform pursuit tasks in accordance with process requirements (tailored to the specific pursuit and customer)?



Origins of the Capability Maturity Models

The Software Engineering Institute Capability Maturity Model (SEI CMM) originated at Carnegie Mellon University in 1986 with the development of a software process maturity foundation. The Department of Defense funded SEI to develop a yardstick for evaluating contractor software development capabilities. The goal of the Department of Defense was to improve the ability of contractor organizations to meet goals for cost, schedule, functionality and product quality.

The Software Capability Maturity Model (SW-CMM) resulted from this original activity. The SW-CMM has since undergone several revisions and spun off a Systems Engineering CMM and People CMM.

Since initial application of the SW CMM as an evaluation tool for the government, industry has responded with more and more contractors engaged in high risk software development reaching Level 5 of the model. These contractors understand the importance of the SW-CMM, but even more significantly they have embraced it as a facilitation tool for process improvement planning.

Initial measurements of process maturity were performed by trained government evaluators conducting software capability evaluations to qualify competitors for software development work. Over time, contractors have begun self-assessment on a project by project basis in order to determine potential areas of improvement.

They have also engaged organizations such as the Software Productivity Consortium to perform audits and assessments whose results have become an integral part of company marketing materials.

For additional information regarding the history of the CMM, visit the SEI Web site at <http://www.sei.cmu.edu/about/overview/sei/history.html>.

Sample Proposal Practice: Pre-defined criteria and levels of authority established for proposal managers based on size and type of proposal being developed—e.g., strategic versus routine opportunity.

Organizational Competencies Development

Key practices focus on career development and professional certification for business development personnel.

Sample Issue: Does management commit funds to motivate and support individual career development and professional advancement in business development?

Sample Proposal Practice: Formal training program institutionalized for career business developers, including proposal operations staff.

Sales/Capture Processes

Key practices cover standard techniques for customer interface and sales that are integrated into the overall business development process.

Sample Issue: Are sales and capture methodologies developed, maintained, documented, and verified by systematically analyzing business development performance and direct customer feedback?

Sample Proposal Practice: Formally institutionalized system to gather proposal lessons learned internally and externally, and to assure management review on a defined, periodic basis.

Support Systems

Key practices include standards for physical facilities, communications, collaborative work environments and other systems supporting business development.

Sample Issue: Do established support systems provide for both routine and surge aspects of sales/business development/proposal operations?

Sample Proposal Practice: Established use of collaborative software, with proposal personnel trained and skilled in use of technology to manage proposal development and manage document configuration.

HOW CAN A COMPANY PROGRESS TO THE ADVANCED CAPABILITY LEVELS?

Like other CMMs, the BD-CMM assumes that Level 3 represents the minimum “goal state” to which most organizations should aspire. Thus, Levels 4 and 5 represent an advanced state toward which companies should aspire as part of longer-term process development and continuous improvement.

At BD-CMM Level 4, detailed measures of the business development process and results are collected. Both the process and products are quantitatively understood and controlled. The following Key Process Areas comprise Level 4:

Relationship Management

Key practices address the process of building customer focus and collaborative customer relationships that drive solutions to customer needs and requirements in a decidedly proactive manner.

Sample Issue: To what extent do early marketing and customer contacts influence candidate solutions and the technical, management, and cost baselines that must be developed to support decidedly customer-focused outcomes?

Sample Proposal Practice: Comprehensive set of “hot buttons” documented in the proposal plan and used by management to assure flow-down into the proposal.

Quantitative Process Management

Key practices cover developing and managing the business development process through a well-defined system of metrics, internal/external quality feedback, and quality management initiatives.

Sample Issue: Does the organization use a metrics-based system for routinely collecting, analyzing, synthesizing, and applying customer feedback at critical milestones throughout the business development process?

Sample Proposal Practice: Comprehensive, searchable database of customer lessons learned that permit win probabilities to be predicted accurately at the preliminary bid/no-bid review.

Enterprise Influence

Key practices reflect a higher level of integration of business development management within the overall business enterprise, such that the business acquisition mission within the organization actively influences all ancillary business decisions that potentially affect the company’s ability to win business.

Sample Issue: Does the organization have and does management use integrated strategies that align compensation systems, product development planning, resource investment, and similar elements to maximize the organization’s position to acquire strategic new, repeat, and follow-on business?

Sample Proposal Practice: Comprehensive set of trade studies available for the proposal based on customer-specific studies to validate the value of the offering in the customer environment and application.

High-Performance Teams

Key practices cover developing and maintaining business development-related competencies across the entire organization, thereby permitting effective use of teams across the enterprise throughout the business acquisition cycle.

Sample Issue: Is there a documented plan through which Sales/Business Development characterizes and leverages the use of cross-functional teams throughout the process, to maximize creativity and optimum solutions?

Sample Proposal Practice: Pre-defined teams with project-specific expertise and direct customer knowledge available to support the proposal effort.

Business Development System Integration

Key practices focus on the extent to which the business development process has established linkages with other relevant enterprise processes to facilitate efficient, effective interchanges between business development process needs and inputs/feedback from ancillary enterprise processes.

Sample Issue: To what extent does the owner(s) of the documented sales/business development process pursue ongoing feedback and lessons-learned analysis among parallel, supporting processes such as program management, financial analysis and forecasting, and similar functions within the organization?

Sample Proposal Practice: Established participation in relevant process improvements across the company organization, focused on well-defined inputs and outputs throughout the business acquisition.

Infrastructure Management

Key practices address the organizational ability to manage the complete range of resources needed to maximize both the performance and efficiency of business development process opera-

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tions, including feedback into process improvement activities.

Sample Issue: To what level is consideration of the adequacy and effectiveness of sales/business development resources a systematic part of process metrics, lessons learned feedback, and process improvement planning?

Sample Proposal Practice: Consistent, predictable planning for continuing proposal requirements in terms of specific organizational needs, including clear understanding of return-on-investment and other performance measures.

BD-CMM LEVEL 5

At BD-CMM Level 5, continuous business development process improvement is enabled by quantitative feedback from the process and from piloting innovative ideas and technology. The following Key Process Areas comprise Level 5:

Innovation

Key practices highlight that an organization that is continually optimizing its business development operation proactively seeks to innovate how it adds customer value, manages performance and quality, and builds competencies and teams

Sample Issue: Is there a defined strategy, supported by management, through which the business development enterprise engenders specific innovations in customer interaction, business leadership, and team operations to achieve next-generation business development objectives?

Sample Proposal Practice: Substantive ability to respond to the customer's vision of future acquisition strategies (including such elements as next-generation electronic procurement) based on targeted organizational training in specific competencies.

Transformation

Key practices related to infrastructure in a continuously optimizing environment focus on how capability growth and related changes in structures, systems, and processes are planned and managed to support a fundamental ability to respond to emerging opportunities for process improvement.

Sample Issue: To what degree are improvements in infrastructure and resource capability planned and managed in a proactive manner consistent with specific changes in the business acquisition environment?

Sample Proposal Practice: Established methodologies to assess and apply new technologies for team interaction, document management, and similar prerequisites for future operations.

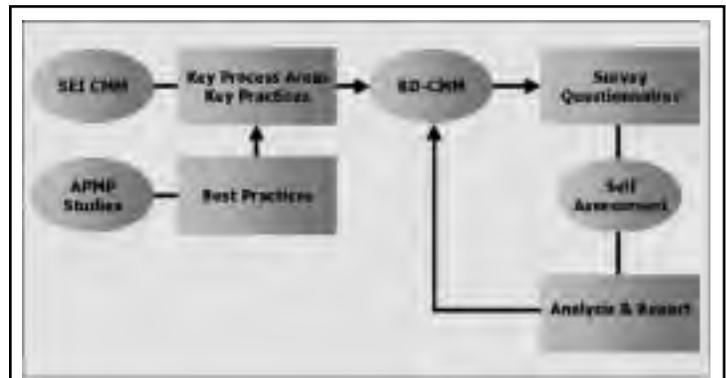
HOW CAN YOU GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BD-CMM AND APMP'S PARTICIPATION IN ITS DEVELOPMENT?

APMP members are urged to contribute to the development of the BD-CMM. For more information about the model, contact Howard Nutt at hwnutt@shiplewins.com. Or you may contact the current chair of the APMP Steering Committee, Charlie Divine, at charliedivine@swbell.net.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is the focus of this CMM on "business development" rather than "proposal management"?

The decision to focus on business development in the CMM has



Selection of the CMM Approach

There are a number of process improvement methodologies available and in use across industry. Shipley chose and the APMP Steering Committee supported the CMM approach in preference to other process improvement methodologies for two primary reasons.

First, most competing methodologies focus on how to analyze and understand processes within specific organizations and do not try to identify specific industry standards by which processes can be improved with predictable results. By comparison, CMM's attempt to define industry practices that correlate with increasing levels of process maturity, and the resulting CMM itself seeks to provide (1) an industry standard or "framework" by which relative maturity can be assessed; (2) a clear path to evolve processes to achieve increasingly mature states; and (3) specific guidance on best practices and their applicability and implementation.

Second, Shipley decided to follow the CMM approach because of the level of industry acceptance of this model as a preferred approach to communicating process improvement within a "best practices" context. Currently, CMMs are widely accepted for software development, systems engineering, program management, and human resources, and industry literature validates that companies who apply these approaches derive specific process-driven benefits.

This combined focus on industry standards and industry acceptance of the CMM approach makes it especially appropriate for business development and proposal professionals. The profession continues to struggle to gain acceptance of its value and validity, yet is supported by a body of proven best practices. Adopting a model built on best practices leverages a quantified baseline through which to validate the combined experience of both APMP members and the Shipley process team. At the same time, the industry-accepted concept of maturity growth implicit in the CMM gives the profession a way to communicate its vision to the rest of industry.

At the same time, embracing the CMM will allow Shipley to participate at some point in the current trend toward merging process maturity concepts. This trend is embodied in the Integrated CMM (CMMI) through which organizations are beginning to integrate their maturity concepts for program management, systems engineering, and other processes. In fact, some level of broader process integration is embedded at BD-CMM levels 4 and 5; however, Shipley believes that our initial development must focus on the business development and proposal processes themselves, before we are ready to collaborate with the rest of industry on a formally integrated model.

essentially the same motivation as the APMP Board of Directors in refocusing the APMP mission statement on business development, rather than keeping it more narrowly defined on proposal management. Over the last 10 years, there has been a growing recognition that proposals and the proposal process must be understood within the context of the larger business development process.

Why do we believe that application of the BD-CMM will lead to substantive process improvements in BD organizations?

Shipley's experience suggests several reasons for companies to improve their business development processes. Most commonly, they want to increase sales or proposal win rate. Often, they want to be able to win more strategic business or to improve their return on business development investment. Others are trying to gain efficiencies and reduce costs. Meanwhile, our most sophisticated clients want to maintain overall competitive advantage by honing their processes based on emerging best practices.

Over the years, what we have seen at Shipley and what has been reported at various APMP conferences is that there is a pattern of best practices that facilitate companies' ability to achieve these goals. Thus, BD-CMM development has focused on aligning the progression of industry practices that lead to the performance levels achieved by those companies identified as "industry benchmarks." Concurrently, we have applied the broader learning from Shipley's process consulting business, some of which has been reported at APMP conferences and much of which resides only within Shipley's "lessons learned" materials.

In general, we believe that the structure of the BD-CMM will help companies identify and achieve appropriate goals for business development process improvement. Moreover, Shipley's experience with clients suggests that companies that consistently win the most business in competitive environments have processes that meet the BD-CMM criteria at higher levels. However, the BD-CMM will still have to be validated over the next couple of years, as it is applied to specific companies of various sizes and in various domains (government, commercial, and international), with different business focuses (product, service, and system integration), in difference industries.

Can a single model be applied industry-wide, including smaller companies with limited resources?

CMMs are intentionally defined at a high level and focus on best practices that are scalable. Accordingly, a key development task for the BD-CMM is to define Key Process Areas in a manner that allows them to be meaningful for companies, regardless of industry, business type, size, or environment. In fact, our beta test of BD-CMM levels 2 and 3 included a range of companies, with the smallest having annual revenue less than \$10 million. The results suggest that our model will indeed have the kind of scalability needed to provide adequate vision and guidance without prescribing inappropriate or financially unrealistic practices.

Who "owns" the BD-CMM?

The BD-CMM is being treated as proprietary to Shipley until it is released into the public domain at the end of its development cycle. This complies with the guidelines for CMMs—that they should be owned by industry and reside in the public domain.

Who will assess BD-CMM levels of maturity?

Use of CMMs typically involves two types of assessment—self-assessments performed by companies interested in determining the maturity of their processes and audits performed by outside companies for the purpose of certification. We do not envision that a formal certification process will be developed for the BD-CMM, so our focus is on self-assessment. Beyond that, Shipley is restructuring our process benchmarking service around the BD-CMM, and APMP may want to offer self-assessment assistance and auditing as part of its future services to the membership.

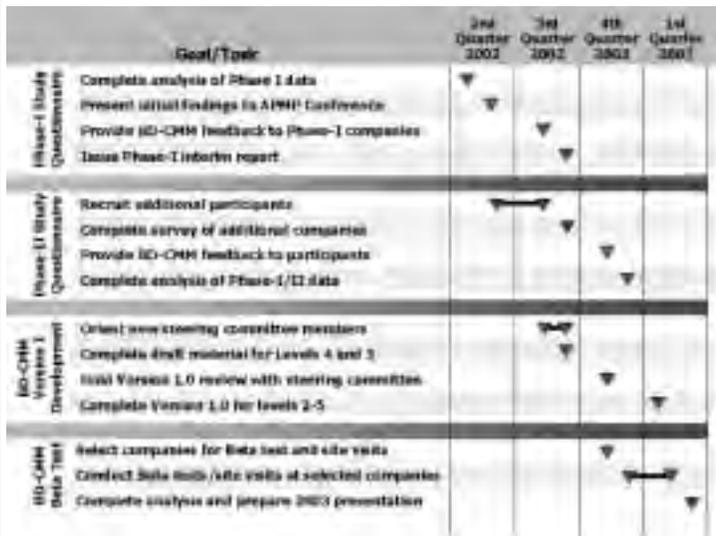
Does APMP endorse the model for its membership?

APMP's goal in supporting the Shipley effort is to build a BD-CMM that it can endorse for use by its membership. However, such endorsement will come once BD-CMM Version 1.0 is complete, based on the recommendation of the APMP steering committee.

What is the relationship between APMP Benchmark Study 2002 and the BD-CMM?

WHEN IS BD-CMM COMING?

Development of the BD-CMM is being coordinated with the APMP conference calendar to allow the final form of the Version 1.0 model and the results of initial validation activities to be reported at the Annual Conference in May 2003. The following timeline shows the major milestones for the program.



SCHEDULE—BD-CMM Development and Validation

Shipley conducted Benchmark Study 2002 on behalf of APMP during the spring of this year. The study was based on a two-part survey; Part One yielded feedback on industry metrics (questions 1-38) and Part Two comprised a BD-CMM self-assessment for levels two and three (questions 39-198). While the study of industry metrics was interesting in itself, much of the motivation to collect such metrics was to assess our ability to correlate results and the perceived process "maturity" of participant companies. In this way, survey responses provided specific data on processes in various industries, markets, and organization sizes that correspond to maturity levels.

Since the initial study last spring, additional data are being collected. The goal is to have a statistically significant set of metrics (Part One) and a sufficiently broad sampling of self-assessments (Part Two) to allow us to complete a viable BD-CMM Version 1.0.

If Shipley is collecting the data and developing the model, what is the role of APMP in the effort?

To date, most of the work has been performed by the study team from Shipley and David Bol, who chairs the association's Education Committee and served during 2001-2002 as chairman of the BD-CMM steering committee. APMP is now becoming more involved in the effort, and the steering committee has recently been restructured to provide input into the completion of BD-CMM Version 1.0.

APMP will take over ownership of the metrics database being built as part of Benchmark Study 2002. Accordingly, APMP Executive Director David Winton will be trained as a database administrator.

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The author gratefully acknowledges the contribution of Mike Humm in providing much of the source material for this article.

BOOKS

The opinions expressed in these reviews are those of the reviewers and do not necessarily represent the views of the APMP. New book reviewers and book review recommendations are always welcome. Please send your recommendations or comments to incoming Books Editor Joanna Hannigan Gaither at jgaither@anteon.com.

Thank you to Books co-Editors Amy Bennington and Jennifer Parks for serving the journal and APMP's membership so ably for the past two years.

Proposal Development

How to Respond and Win the Bid, 3rd Edition

By Bud Porter-Roth
PSI Research—Oasis Press
© 1998 Oasis Press, Central Point, OR
ISBN 1-55571-431-5

REVIEWED BY
BARRY SPANGLER,
PROPOSAL STRATEGIST

Just starting out in the proposal business? Looking for a basic primer on proposals that goes from qualifying the bid to delivery? Bud Porter-Roth's *Proposal Development* may be just the ticket. The book is divided into eight chapters:

- Organization
- Proposal Contents: Overview
- Proposal Contents: Essential Sections
- Proposal Contents: Boilerplate Files
- Proposal Content: Illustrations
- Post-Proposal Activities
- Evaluation
- Printing the Proposal.

There are also numerous appendices that contain checklists for each stage of the proposal.

Chapter 1, **Organization**, contains a synopsis of the more critical phases of the proposal including war rooms, writing, planning, and organizing the proposal. The chapter provides some thoughts on three levels of writing in a proposal: technical, marketing detail, and business detail. While not everyone will subscribe

to the writing approach, it provides an interesting game plan on how a proposal could be written. The discussion on strategy, war rooms, and style sheets is straightforward and covers the basics. Some areas (such as the section on proposal organization) are a little dated if you respond to government RFPs. The author puts to rest the fallacy of submitting alternate proposals. They are frequently used when the submitter cannot meet the basic requirements, and therefore never work. He ends this section with a strong caution against submitting alternates when you cannot be responsive to the RFP with your basic proposal. The section on qualifying the customer seemed out of place in proposal development, and would more aptly have been found in a business development book. Bid/no bids are normally against specific opportunities, and the customer is typically well known at that point. It is far more important to know what your competition may be doing to determine whether one should bid or not.

The second chapter, **Proposal Contents: Overview**, deals with the mechanics of producing various parts of the proposal. It covers physical layout of the Table of Contents, List of Illustrations, and Covers, and touches on the essential proposal compliance matrix and the importance of a good cover letter. I particularly liked the section on style sheets. It is practical and essential for multiple authors working on separate PCs.

In the third chapter, **Proposal Contents: Essential Sections**, the author details what goes into the executive summary, technical, management and cost volumes, and other sections of the proposal. In the executive summary portion, the author stresses the importance of showing an understanding of the customer's problem and providing a working solution focused on that problem. The technical section details that solution, but unfortunately does not deal in any depth on competitive aspects and the importance of refuting other technical solutions. It does address the importance of compliance to the RFP.

The fourth chapter, **Proposal Contents: Boilerplate Files**, is intriguing because it deals with boilerplate. In this reviewer's opinion, all proposal managers or proposal center leaders have at one time or another tried mightily to develop reusable text and illustrations for proposals and, for the most part, have failed. I was, therefore, interested in the author's perspective. While cautioning the reader that boilerplate files can be misused if overdone, the author goes on to talk about the "cut and paste" techniques to achieve compli-

ance with the RFP. This normally results in more effort than the boilerplate is worth, and is the reason most proposal managers cite for abandoning all but rudimentary use of boilerplate. The author even suggests the use of project management schedules as boilerplate, although these are certainly unique to most proposals.

Illustrations, although a short chapter, covered the essentials of line art and photographs for anyone unfamiliar with this aspect of proposals. I might have added a section on the use of "action captions" to this chapter, where additional information is given to the reader in the title of the figures.

Chapter six, **Post-Proposal Activities**, should be required reading for the budding proposal manager. It was well done and covered the most overlooked aspect of proposal management — the submittal may be just the beginning. With the increased use of orals and plant visits, proposal managers must factor this critical phase into the overall proposal process. The chapter stresses the importance of complying with, and even finding, proposal submittal requirements. My only complaint was the use of the term BAFO. This term was discontinued by the government with the rewrite of the FAR that occurred during acquisition reform.

The chapter on **Evaluation** of the proposal discusses how the customer grades proposals and contains a section on the use of in-house reviews (Red Teams). The author again stresses the importance of following the customer's instructions, and of asking the customer questions when the evaluation criteria are unclear.

The final chapter addresses **Printing** the proposal. It discusses the types of tabs and binders that can be used, citing pluses and minuses for each type. This is a fairly standard dissertation, but worth reading through.

The checklists included as appendices are pretty basic, but will help the new proposal manager verify that each aspect of the proposal is done.

At times, Roth's book tends to walk a thin line between commercial and government proposals. It is not always clear whether a section applies to commercial proposals, government proposals, or both. One omission I noted was the lack of information on how to develop and write a proposal using storyboards. For many professionals, storyboards are considered essential for building a comprehensive and compelling proposal.

I would recommend the book as a basic primer for the newly minted proposal manager. The experienced proposal manager may desire more advanced information. Because the book is in its third edition, one can expect the remnants left over from earlier editions to be somewhat dated. Although an update of these remnants is needed, overall the book is a useful and practical addition to any proposal center's library.



Accidental Magic

The Wizard's Techniques for Writing Words Worth 1,000 Pictures

by Roy H. Williams (dubbed The Wizard of Ads) and Wizard Academy Graduates
Copyright: 2001, Bard Press, Atlanta, GA
238 pp. Hardcover. \$ 24.95
ISBN: 1-885167-54-7

REVIEWED BY
JOANNA HANNIGAN GAITHER
PROPOSAL DIRECTOR, ANTEON CORPORATION

Fantasy fans have JRR Tolkien's Gandalf and Saruman. The government has its money wizard — Alan Greenspan — and proposal professionals have Roy H. Williams, the *Wizard of Ads* to inspire and encourage us to find new ways to reach our customers and win new business. Roy stands norms on their heads, and shows us how to spin them around and emerge armed with fresh new ideas and weapons, although we may feel a bit dizzy by the startling changes.

He has been called “a clear sound in a noisy room” and “Alice in Wonderland on Steroids.” Roy's first book, *The Wizard of Ads*, was voted Business Book of the Year in 1998. His second book, *Secret Formulas of the Wizard of Ads*, became the Wall Street Journal's #1 Business Book in 1999. Several of his books have been New York Times bestsellers.

Because of, or in spite of, Roy's walking away from a four-year college scholarship, he developed dazzling, unique marketing techniques and, by age 26, had acquired a reputation for writing “miracle-producing radio ads that reached over a million people.” Today he is CEO of Roy H. Williams Marketing, Incorporated. His firm's ads and columns are heard on more than 550 radio stations, and played by more than 40 TV stations across America. Roy is also a columnist for Radio Ink Magazine, and teaches one- to three-day writing, marketing, and creative skills building seminars and workshops from his home office in Austin, Texas, and at selected locations throughout the country. In his home state of Texas, he is known as the man with “moxie.”

His books provide insight into human behavior, make the reader think, and are easily digested. After spending a few hours reading *Accidental Magic*, you will be able to apply Roy's new writing techniques to

look at strategic development and capture management from a different perspective (Franking); paint a stronger impression of your company's capabilities (Moneting); jazz up a boring past performance write up (Seussing); and vamp and spin new introductory and summary paragraphs for your proposal (Frosting).

“Words are the most powerful force that has ever been,” Roy states in his fourth book, *Accidental Magic*, which describes ways to “write words that enable us to peer into and capture a window of time.” It is also a photo essay coffee table keeper, containing black and white snapshots for which students of the Wizard's Academy crafted persuasive vignettes. In a world of deadlines, page limitations, and extreme pressure from competitors, what proposal professional would not benefit by developing the following “magic” abilities:

Franking—Robert Frank's photos cut to the heart of an image and reveal amazing angles. ‘Frank’ writing captures the bare essentials of thoughts in a most interesting way. Maximize use of white space on your next page-limited proposal by changing: “Our team realizes that it must have a fully executable Transition Plan available for review by the contract start date. Accordingly, we include an outline of . . .” to: “Though it's not a part of the RFP requirements, the first draft of our dynamic, tailorable three phase transition plan is ready to be reviewed by you at contract award.” Franking enables you to hint at what is not said. Isn't that an inherent part of selling your proposal, leaving the customer wanting to hear and know more about you?

Moneting—Claude Monet's work brilliantly captures first impressions, radiates light, and eliminates empty voids. Text written in this style illuminates thoughts, radiates possibilities, and contrasts benefits. For example, hone in on your management approach by changing: “An important aspect of our management approach is to apply proven processes and techniques to handle multiple task orders . . .” to: “Our team clearly outlines how we effectively consolidate the handling of multiple task orders by describing and illustrating our proven task flow, delegation, training refreshment, and open communication processes. We support these processes by . . .” Monet your proposal via words that reflect and contrast, and use illustrations, color, and visual aids to ‘impress’ your customer and paint a winning picture.

Seussing—Dr. Seuss was famous for inventing new words and ingeniously using verbs to introduce new concepts. ‘Seuss’ up a dull introduction to a staffing section and you will create sentences and themes full of pizzazz and allure. Instead of writing: “Our team will provide numerous incentives to ensure staff satisfaction . . .” try: “We ‘incentivise’ our staff to ensure continuity of service in a number of ways. For a recent contract, we . . .” You may initially confuse a customer by inventing a new word, but you will likely also spark their curiosity and make the customer want to know more.

Frosting—Named after Robert Frost, this technique helps turn dull words into razor sharp weapons.

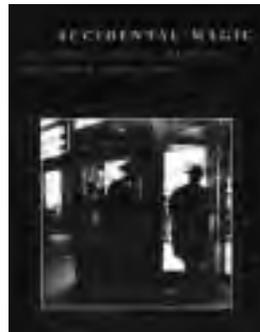
Use the “frosting technique” to change introductory words in your next Executive Summary from: “We offer a team that will integrate and improve your IT systems . . .” to: “Integrate and Improve. Innovate and Expand. Empower and Energize. These are but a few of the advantages our team will convey to your team. For example . . .” When frosting, think poetically (described by the poet Joseph Brodsky as a form of “accelerated thinking”) to surprise and persuade your customer.

The Wizard continually asks provocative questions about ‘saleability,’ such as “What is a teacher if not a ‘seller’ of knowledge? What is a consultant if not a ‘seller’ of new ideas?” To which I would add: What is a Proposal Professional if not a seller of ‘winability?’ See, he's got me Seussing.

Roy's critics have called him a “showman and poseur” and a man who uses psychology and emotion to appeal to the masses. As the Key Speaker at the May 2001 APMP Conference pointed out, use of the

right emotion, an appeal to the personal, and the careful use of innovations and creativity are the new discriminators of 21st century proposals. *Accidental Magic* plays right to those heartstrings. Open up your purse strings, buy a copy of one of Roy's books, and measurably increase your proposal impact quotient.

Roy's other books include: *The Wizard of Ads: Turning Words into Magic* and *Dreamers into Millionaires*, *Secret Formulas of the Wizard of Ads*, *Magical Worlds of the Wizard of Ads: Tools and Techniques for Profitable Persuasion*. Learn more about the wizard (and purchase his books for less than retail cost) at: www.WizardAcademy.com.



When Par Isn't Good Enough



BY **BARRY FIELDS**
APMP MEMBER SERVICES

Knowing that my golfing buddies would seriously question personal expertise as the basis for this article, I opted to research the winning approaches of the Professional Golf Association (PGA) players I so admire and wish I could emulate. I found (not much to my surprise) that almost every aspect of winning in golf has direct and pertinent application to successfully acquiring new business.

There are, of course, significant differences. In professional golf, competitors are individuals, playing for prize money in tournaments on several tour circuits, such as the PGA Tour, Buy.Com Tour, and Nike Tour. The proposal development circuit, by contrast, usually involves competition between large corporate teams vying for contracts in the federal and commercial marketplaces. Even so, there are two significant similarities — you must enter the competition if you want to win, and the winner's purse goes to the competitor that bests all others!

Focused Talent and Proper Preparation are Prerequisites

I analyzed the typical golfer to assess what qualities he or she possesses to successfully compete at the professional level. The first requisite is,

of course, talent. Even the most dedicated golfer could not possibly participate in the highly competitive professional golf arena without talent. In the business acquisition environment, the talent required to compete resides in the corporation's subject matter experts — the people who have “been there, done that, and done that well.” One difference between golf and business is that a company can hire resources with the requisite talent for a specific competition, while a golfer must rely on the capabilities he or she alone possesses. Without experienced people with directly relevant talent and experience in the *specific* area of the business pursuit, your chances of winning are small.

Your Opportunity for Success—Practice

Even the best talent can limit your opportunity for success, if they are not focused on your specific pursuit. Just as the answer to the New York City tourist's question “how do you get to Carnegie Hall?” is “practice, practice, practice!”—both golfers and new business acquisition (or capture) teams must practice to position themselves for the win. PGA players are noted for long hours spent on the driving range, honing their skills and correcting deficiencies seen in previous tournaments. Most of the time the golfer's teacher is on hand to provide additional instruction and to help refine the golfer's swing. The secret to Tiger Woods phenomenal success on the PGA Tour is attributed to his knowledge of the game, preparation, focus, and dedication to winning. His practice ethic is legendary — he is usually the first out on the driving range and the last to leave. You will normally find Bruce Harmon, the renowned golf teacher, helping him tone-up for an upcoming tournament. Harmon is credited for helping Tiger redefine his swing in recent years so that his talents were focused on winning the majors.

Most companies in a specific competitive marketplace have the requisite capabilities to perform the solicited effort. Focusing that talent on the solicitation's requirements is the key to winning.

Equating Golf with Business Development

This table correlates terminologies used in golf and in the new business acquisition arena.

Golf	Definition	Analogy to New Business Acquisition
Golf Course	The 18 hole layout upon which the tournament is contested	The Customer's Solicitation or Request for Proposal (RFP)
Course Knowledge	Understanding of the playing requirements of each hole on the course	Knowledge of the customer and understanding of the RFP—requirement by requirement
Par	Median course requirement for each hole. (Typically, 3 strokes for holes less than 300 yards, 4 strokes for holes less than 500 yards, and 5 for holes over 500 yards.)	Meeting RFP requirements as defined in the Proposal Preparation Instructions
Bogie	1 stroke over par	Minimum RFP Compliance—Correctable Deficiency
Double Bogie	2 strokes over par	RFP Non-Compliance—Major Discrepancy
Birdie	1 stroke under par	Proposal strength resulting in an above average evaluation against a specific requirement
Eagle	2 strokes under par	Major strength—a discriminator resulting in a most meritorious evaluation
Whiff	Missing a particular shot (golfer can still achieve par for the hole)	Minor weakness overcome by a major strength within a specific RFP area
Playoff	More than one golfer achieved the same final tournament score	Final Proposal Revision (FPR) or Best and Final Offer (BAFO) wherein more than one offeror has received a similar evaluation within the competitive range
"Going for It"	Hitting a risky shot in an attempt to win a hole	Taking an acceptable risk to maximize the probability of besting the competition in a specific proposal area
The "Big Dog"	The 1 Wood or Driver	Major discriminator which could require taking an acceptable risk
Caddy	An individual who carries the golfer's clubs and advises the golfer in the course of play	A proposal professional (either in-house or a consultant)



Practicing to focus and refine the business acquisition process requires the same type effort a PGA professional exerts to prepare for a tournament. In golf, small refinements such as adjusting a stance or grip can result in significantly improved shot accuracy. In business, the assessment of current practices and the definition of, and training in, an effective business acquisition process to modify those practices could be the key to capturing "must win" programs.

The difference between winning and being an also-ran may lie in acquiring the services of a proposal professional (either in-house or a consultant) to define the process and train the subject matter experts.

Proper Tools Improve Your Chances

There are many brands of golf clubs, shoes, and balls available to the PGA player. Each manufacturer touts its brand as the best, and lists the many tour winners using its product.

Interestingly enough, there is no clear-cut dominance by any one manufacturer (Calloway, Ping, Taylor-Made, Titleist, Nike, etc.), as evidenced by the different manufacturer logos seen on the apparel of the winner of any given tournament. The important thing is to consistently use the available tools that have been proven to work best for the individual golfer. One of Annika Sorrenstam's finest attributes, and a key to her status as the number one player on the LPGA tour, is her consistency in applying her talent and tools across all aspects of

more...

her game.

In the proposal arena, there are also several available brands of pricing tools, RFP software, requirements trackers, and desktop publishing tools. The key is to select the tools that best fit your business environment, train subject matter experts in their application, and be *consistent* in their use in all proposal efforts.

Course Knowledge and Good Advice are Critical

Understanding the layout, requirements, playing conditions, speed of the greens, hole placement, course hazards and competitors is a must in a golfer's preparation for a golf tournament. Few golfers miss the opportunity to play a practice round or two on the course where they will be competing at the week's end. A golfer's caddies pace off each hole and dutifully record these measurements in their notebooks.

Similarly, it is essential that the capture team understands the specific requirements of the new business opportunity, and if possible, develops a draft proposal based on a draft RFP (whether one is provided by the customer or not). Course knowledge is analogous to understanding the customer's requirements (the course layout), the specific proposal preparation instructions (speed of the greens and pin placements), potential proposal shortfalls (course hazards), and the competitive environment (playing conditions and competition).

A good caddy is the golfer's best friend, helping the golfer prepare for and play the round. The caddy can be seen referring to his notebook to give the golfer advice on the distance to the hole and best club for the shot. The caddy helps read the slope of the green to recommend the best putting line. And the caddy often provides a steadying influence on the golfer who has just missed a shot or received an unlucky bounce.

In the business environment, the proposal consultant normally plays the role of the caddy. Consultants help their clients maximize company strengths and mitigate weaknesses. Most importantly, consultants provide outside opinion, structure, and expertise to complement that of the capture team. The consultant's primary task is to ensure compliance with each proposal requirement, just as the caddy provides advice on the requirements for each shot.

Understand and Apply Your Capabilities to Minimize Risk: Play to Your Strengths and Play to Win

Tiger Woods is one of the longest hitters in professional golf, but not always. Sergio Garcia, Ernie Els, Phil Mickelson, Davis Love III, and John Daley can also pound the ball down the fairway. Tiger is a great putter, but Ben Crenshaw, Corey Pavin, and others are noted for excellence on the green. Tiger's short game is superb, but Vijay Singh and Phil Mickelson also have a great touch. Why is Tiger Number One?

One answer is that he has the best overall game and understands his own capabilities. When accuracy off the tee is required, Tiger will pull his two iron out of the bag to split the fairway. On

more occasions than not, a competitor will pull out a 1 Wood or Driver and fire the ball into the rough — resulting in an almost certain bogie or possibly double bogie. On some par 5 holes, although he could reach the green with a fairway metal but knowing the sand trap hazards, Tiger will lay-up to a position where he can hit a high, controllable wedge to the pin — ensuring par and possible a birdie.

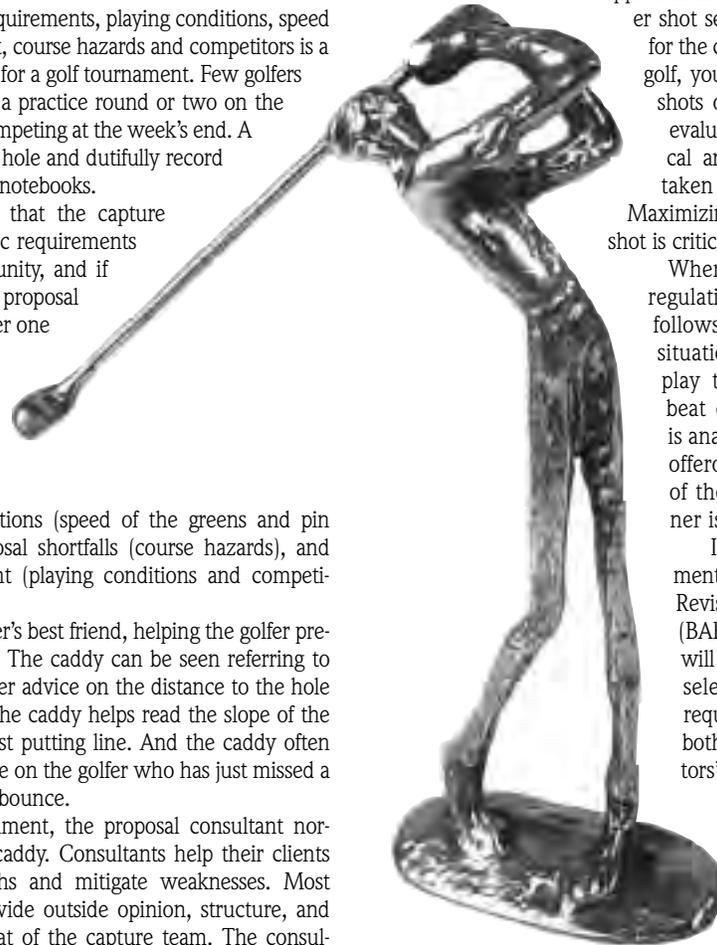
In the business world, understanding your own strengths and weaknesses is paramount in providing the discriminators that win proposals. Understanding the risks of a proposed approach and minimizing them through proper shot selection is a key to success, both for the capture team and the PGA pro. In golf, your final score is the total of your shots on all holes played. A proposal's evaluation score is the total of all logical and persuasive "shots" you have taken in each required section. Maximizing your effectiveness on each shot is critically important to winning.

When a golf tournament is tied after regulation play, a sudden death playoff follows. This becomes a match play situation, where the golfer must both play the hole properly and soundly beat each competitor. This situation is analogous to where more than one offeror has met all the requirements of the solicitation and no clear winner is evident.

In such instances, the government may call for a Final Proposal Revision (FPR) or Best and Final Offer (BAFO). The FPR/BAFO submittal will be the deciding factor in source selection. FPR/BAFO strategies require a complete understanding of both your own and your competitors' strengths and weakness. As in the golf playoff, you don't win by coming up short. It might be the time to take out the 1 Wood or Driver and pound it down the narrow fairway to enhance the probabilities of reaching the green with a

short iron — or hit the fairway metal to the bunkered green to take a shot at making a sure birdie or possibly winning eagle. Depending on the requirements, taking a risk could be the winning approach.

Finally, in a golf tournament the second place golfer's name does not get engraved on the trophy, and the second place offeror's name does not appear on the check! Par is not enough to win golf tournaments, and just good enough is not enough to win in the competitive marketplace. If you are not willing to put everything into winning your new business pursuit, perhaps you should not enter the tournament.



Barry Fields retired from Hughes Space and Communications Company in 1995 as Manager of Government Proposal Operations. A founding member and former CFO of APMP, Barry now serves as Member Services for the Association. In between rounds of golf and time spent at the fishing holes in Montana, he still does proposal consulting. He can be reached at b.n.fields@att.net.

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Proposal Management invites authors to submit their best research for peer review. Manuscripts may be of practical or scholarly importance to APMP's audience of proposal development, acquisition, procurement, business development, sales, and program management professionals.

Content

Proposal Management publishes the following types of peer-reviewed articles:

- Results of original research on proposal-related topics.
- Original contributions to proposal-related theory.
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- Tutorials on proposal-related processes or procedures that respond to new laws, standards, requirements, techniques, or technologies.
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The journal promotes APMP and its goals through the timely publication of articles, reviews, and references. The journal is a medium for promoting constructive, intelligent discussion and debate about business development acquisition and proposal management. Because the primary audience of the APMP professional journal is informed practitioners in the private, government, and nonprofit sectors, manuscripts reporting the results of research or proposing theories about topics should include descriptions of or suggestions for practical applications.

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