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Solutions for 7 Unsolvable Problems of Proposal Management

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We're changing how people learn about business development and proposal writing

The Unsolvable Problems

- 1) It seems like you are never prepared at start-up
- 2) People argue over proposal quality
- 3) People don't follow the process
- 4) Reviews aren't helpful
- 5) There is a train wreck at the end of every proposal
- 6) Training is only for the chosen few
- 7) You can't convince people to bid less and win more

Unsolvable Problem #1:

It seems like you are
never prepared at
start-up

Unsolvable Problem #1:
You are never prepared at start-up

Does this sound familiar?

- Even when it's your own recompetete you're still not ready
- You don't have all the staff you need to bid
- Your team isn't finalized
- People claim you have win strategies, but you can't find them written down anywhere; in fact, you have nothing in writing

Unsolvable Problem #1:
You are never prepared at start-up

The solution:

- Perform Readiness Reviews
- Prepare a list of questions and action items for each review that:
 - Tells what intelligence to collect and actions to take in order to position yourself to win
 - Add up to what you need to write a winning proposal
 - Streamlines the transition from BD to proposal
 - Can be used to measure progress
- Use Proportional Scheduling

Unsolvable Problem #2:

Your team argues
over proposal quality

Unsolvable Problem #2:
You team argues over proposal quality

Does this sound familiar?

- “I don’t know how to define it, but I’ll know it when I see it”
- Reviewers are free to identify anything about the document they don’t *personally* like
- People argue over which approach is the “best” or whether something is “any good”

Unsolvable Problem #2:
Your team argues over proposal quality

The solution:

- **Define proposal quality:**
The degree to which the proposal reflects the things you have identified as being necessary to win
 - Start by preparing a list of what it will take to win
 - Plan your content to fulfill the list
 - Validate whether you have achieved those things or not
 - Bring your assignment, reviews, and how you measure progress into alignment with your goals
- Then argue over what is necessary to win instead

Unsolvable Problem #3:

People don't follow
the process

Unsolvable Problem #3:
No one follows the process

Does this sound familiar?

- No one refers to the process documentation during the proposal. Probably including you.
- Neither authors nor reviewers are accountable
- There is no way to measure successful performance other than whether you win (months later)

Unsolvable Problem #3:
No one follows the process

The solution:

- The process must:
 - Be in writing and everyone must have a copy
 - Be a tool used in every step, and not a policy or reference document
 - Set expectations for every step including who is responsible, who is involved, what needs to be accomplished, and why it is important
 - Be easier to use than to do without
- You must give people a chance to opt-out

Unsolvable Problem #4:

Reviews aren't
helpful

Unsolvable Problem #4:
Reviews aren't helpful

Does this sound familiar?

- Reviewers make grand pronouncements regarding what they see in the document
- Some even contradict each other
- Since the comments are too little and too late, you ignore most of them
- Considering the disruption and lost time, you may have even been better off if you had skipped the review

Unsolvable Problem #4:
Reviews aren't helpful

The solution:

- Make a list of everything (decisions, attributes, criteria, standards, themes, solution components, etc.) that needs to be validated
- For each item on the list, identify how it will be reviewed, who will lead, who will participate, and when it will be performed
- Review the plan before you implement it
- Reviews become
 - Measurable
 - Adaptable
 - Accountable

Unsolvable Problem #5:

There a train wreck
at the end of every
proposal

Unsolvable Problem #5:
There is always a train wreck at the end

Does this sound familiar?

- People won't stop making changes
- Last minute changes are forced, even though they run the risk of introducing errors
- No one is satisfied but it's accepted, because proposals always have problems and always require late nights

Unsolvable Problem #5:
There is always a train wreck at the end

The solution:

- Change how you measure progress
 - It's not about control or deadline enforcement
 - It's not about crossing off items on the outline or how many days are left
 - It is about whether you have achieved the things on your list of what it will take to win
- Use a content planning approach that makes it easier for the authors to give you what you need
- Use a review approach that is in alignment with the instructions you provide the authors
- Make it harder to play passive aggressive and run out the clock

Unsolvable Problem #6:

**Training is only for
the chosen few**

Unsolvable Problem #6:
Training is only for the chosen few

Does this sound familiar?

- There is no budget for training
- You'd like to do training internally, but have to work on the curriculum in between proposals
- By the time people have an opportunity to apply what they've learned, they have already forgotten most of it

Unsolvable Problem #6:
Training is only for the chosen few

The solution:

- Lower the cost by an order of magnitude
- Use distributed learning, with and without instructor interaction
- Minimize the time commitment
- Bring “training” closer to “doing”
 - Build guidance into every step of your process and build your process around checklists and templates instead of flow charts
 - Provide coaching in addition to management

Unsolvable Problem #7:

You can't convince
people to bid less
and win more

Unsolvable Problem #7:
You can't convince people to bid less and win more

Does this sound familiar?

- Your company bids every opportunity it can find
- Bidding less to win more sounds like... well... bidding less.
- Your company's growth strategy is to find more opportunities to bid

Unsolvable Problem #7:

You can't convince people to bid less and win more

The solution:

- **Don't try to convince people to bid less**
- Instead, ask whether they have completed the readiness review process
 - It gives you an objective basis to determine whether you are ready to bid
 - If they have answered the questions, they are ready to bid
 - If they haven't, then (by definition) you don't have the information you need to win
 - Tell them you are ready to start as soon as they answer those questions. Will they have them tomorrow?

More Information

- These approaches came from a written process that you can order a copy of to use on your own proposals
- Learn more at <http://www.captureplanning.com>
- To contact the speakers:
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