**HOLGER GARDEN**

**Will you leave me in peace while I get the work done!**

*“I got eight little fingers and only two thumbs*

*Will you leave me in peace while I get the work done!”*

‘Working On It’ by Chris Rea in ‘New Light Through Old Windows’

I’ve learned some essential lessons about managing stress in bidding, and about managing others’ expectations so I can do a better job of helping my clients – and, crucially, of managing my own wellbeing. I plan ahead to avoid scenarios that make me feel I can’t cope.

Stress management is needed for mental health and wellbeing. Research has shown stress to result from demand / resource imbalances**1**. Our stress response is mediated by resources and perceived ability to cope, both factors that can increase – which means stress can be controlled**1**.

I’ve learned the best way to control stress is to plan for best use of resources, leading to highest perceived ability to cope with demands. My resource planning includes five key influences: *time*, *expectations, productivity*, *comparison* and *communication*.

**Time** isusually my most important resource. I work with bid teams to determine realistic timescales for producing strategies, writing plans and draft responses, and the supporting inputs and resource schedules. We include time for receiving review feedback, editing drafts, and compiling the submission.

With much less experience, I allowed myself to work without bid plans agreed from the start. This meant there was no guiding plan to align everyone, so contributions were unco-ordinated and too late to be useful. I did a lot of stressful ‘heavy lifting’ to recover the bids. A plan agreed, and reviewed regularly, is essential because it reinforces the need for everyone, including those not resident in the bid office (e.g. SMEs and senior management), to play their part on time.

The plan sets timescale **expectations**, which we need to complement with specific daily goals, including how others’ inputs matter. I get the best from others when I’m clear about what I need, and about effects of changes. I once worked on a bid in which a changed commercial proposal came at 7pm on the day before a noon deadline for a printed submission. The changes caused significant edits to most sections. I worked all night to make the edits, including formatting. In those days, I didn’t sufficiently appreciate the importance of being clear about expectations, so the team saw no problem presenting late changes. I should have been clear about the impacts of late changes. Needless to say, my stress in the morning was extremely high as I rushed to compile the printed copies.

Feeling that my **productivity** is high is a great way to reduce stress, linked to a higher perception of achievement and ability to cope. Since clients judge me on results, I’ve learned the importance of being where I do my best work. Some days, I need to be with team members to review topics, benefiting from ‘bouncing’ ideas around in the room. Other days, I need to be alone to use information to produce responses. A day’s writing in an environment fostering concentration and clear thinking – which may vary from the bid room to my home or a remote flexible office – increases my motivation and makes me feel I’m ‘winning’.

One of my greatest stressors has been **comparison** of my work with others’, but I’ve learned that comparison isn’t usually meaningful or useful since different team members work on different subjects with different requirements and constraints. However, it is useful to share ideas on ways to be productive, learning from others’ experiences.

I’ve worked in bid teams with a strong competitive culture causing friction. I find *healthy* competition stimulates momentum, but the real measure of progress is delivery against the plan. I used to be anxious seeing other writers tap away furiously while I sat thinking, but I learned that a good writing plan pays dividends for faster writing of more convincing messages. The key is to have enough confidence in your own work to avoid being drawn into the spiral of self-doubt from seeing others working.

**Communication** of issues and sharing concerns are great stress alleviators. Other people see solutions from different perspectives. Teams are more receptive to people who raise concerns as they arise than to those who don’t or who are unclear.

As George Bernard Shaw said, “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” For me, this means checking everyone understands what they need to do, so the right team contributions lead to strong bids in which stress is managed well.

1. *Lazarus, R.S., & Folkman, S. (1984). Stress, Appraisal and Coping. New York: Springer.*