

BQ

BIDDING QUARTERLY



PUTTING YOURSELF FIRST IN 2018

ISSUE #3 | PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
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BID MARKETING
EXPERTS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Ben Hannon

Nigel Hudson

Beth Wallace

Alison Gurd

Graham Ablett

Pippa Birch

Simon Wellstead

Holger Garden

Jon Williams

Peter McPartland

Peter Bryans

Andrew Haigh

TABLE OF
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION BY BEN HANNON

In order to really put yourself first, you have to think about how you personally want to develop. Personal development is, by its very nature, subjective. The question must therefore be asked, 'what does personal development mean to me?'

Perhaps a new skill set or certification will really help you progress or provide much needed motivation? Or maybe development is not about your career? Maybe to put yourself first, you need to take a step back and create a better work / life balance. In the 2018 Bid & Proposal Salary Survey, 76% of respondents chose work / life balance over pure financial reward, so it's worth considering what drives your decision making.

Whatever it may be, it feels like we are often working to the beat of someone else's drum and fail to make time to assess and develop. However, sticking to developmental goals is not a straightforward task and if you aren't fully invested in what you are doing, those extra letters after your name won't change anything.

So how can you set and achieve your goals? The simple, unsurprising answer is 'planning'. You may still be able to achieve your goals without a plan, however the likelihood of success is far greater with proper preparation. It's the same with bidding; you can have some degree of success by reacting to opportunities, however by being proactive your chances of success increase exponentially.

Think of it in terms of 'reactive development' and 'proactive development'. You can develop your skills by being reactive – adapting to your surroundings, learning by doing or gaining experience. However, by being proactive you can fully assess your position within your organisation (and wider profession) and pinpoint the areas of improvement that require the most attention. With this targeted, proactive approach it will be easier to develop your skills and get ahead of the competition.

The real challenge lies in finding the time to put such a plan together, one which I am faced with myself.

I am often asked about what I want to do to develop my skills and if there are any courses I want to take. Unfortunately, with so much going on in day-to-day work, it is easy for personal development to get lost in the abyss of being too busy. So what can you do to counter this?

Personally, I've found that a great way of developing my skills is by simply getting out of my comfort zone. This has involved taking charge of Bid Solutions' communications, presenting at industry events and writing articles (such as this one!). For other people, it could be as simple as attending a networking event and speaking to their bid / proposal peers. Yes, talking to strangers isn't advised when you are a child, however it is wholeheartedly encouraged within the bids and proposal profession – you will almost certainly learn something new!

In whatever way you decide to go about personal development, you will only get out what you put in. Developing a full plan of action is ideal, however if this is too daunting, break it down into a quarterly or monthly plan. By taking little steps forward in the short term, you can steadily improve in the long run. Simply think, 'what am I going to do this month that will help me improve?' and see it through.

Whatever works for you, take charge and avoid standing still.

In this issue, our panel of Experts provide fantastic insight into personal development, including; training / certification; personal benchmarking; and seeking a professional coach or mentor. This range of ideas, suggestions and personal stories will hopefully provide you with the motivation to take your own steps towards personal development.

Ben Hannon

Ben Hannon CF APMP
Recruitment Director

NIGEL HUDSON

What makes someone outstanding? It's their ability to understand value and consistently deliver it better than their peers. They're likely to be obsessed with delivering the performance expected of them, so do they know they're better than others? Only when they know what others are doing, which requires them to keep an eye on the competition.

Keeping one eye on others and one on our performance isn't easy in bidding. All those deadlines prevent us from stepping back from the coal face. But we need to stop digging if we are to compare our capabilities with those of our peers. If we do, we're likely to just glance over our shoulder at those working alongside us. Is their win rate higher than ours? Is their proposal quality better? Do they 'shine' brighter? Hmm. When was the last time you tracked a colleague's win rate, critiqued their proposals, or respectfully asked to shadow them in a meeting?

Be brave: look beyond your immediate team or company. Benchmark yourself at an industry level. Only then will you be able to undertake a meaningful skills gap analysis and create a personal development plan that reflects the competition in your employment market. It can lead to you walking confidently into a job interview knowing you're the one to beat – and potentially the one worth the highest salary.

Sounds easy? Not so. It requires you to know where to find the information, and have enough bidding professionals in your network to see how you compare. If you're not one for asking questions, or shy away from building new relationships, then you might need assistance in developing your career.

Benchmarking Yourself against Industry-Leading Talent

Where, then, to start?

Job adverts will display high-level profiles for each role; recruitment consultants will provide feedback on your CV; passing exams and winning awards will acknowledge your competence; and, of course, interviews are a good way to find out if there's someone better than you.

You might also check the APMP Practitioner Certification competencies. But as you'd expect from an association of proposal management professionals, their competency areas are skewed towards process management effectiveness rather than measuring the quality of output at each stage.

4 Ideally you should get a mentor who can provide honest feedback on your performance and guide your development. This expert should know the job specifications for bidding roles in our industry, and the associated competency frameworks that map the differences between jobs of progressively higher grades. More importantly, they should understand the behaviours required to excel at each task. (Excellence is usually found in the 'how' more than the 'what'.) And, if they don't already work for one, they should know the consulting firms that provide the training and coaching to help advance your skills.

Learning from others is the best way to accelerate your knowledge and career. So keep your gaze wide. Never be jealous, but always envious of those more successful than you. It's how you become a bigger fish in an ever-growing pond.



Being asked to contribute for this article has made me reflect about my own personal development throughout my career. Each year, the process was pretty much the same. Stress about filling in as much as I could about how I had met (and exceeded!) my personal objectives. Think about next year's too, if I had time. Have a cursory thought around whether I a) had a plan for my career, b) whether it had ever been articulated and c) whether it had really changed that much with what had happened in the last 12 months. Then came the part I really hated thinking about – personal development. I would count the number of lines I had to fill in for the template and try to come up with a plan. I picked the plan back up the next year to see whether I had by some miracle actually done anything remotely similar that I could tick.

My line manager discussions pretty much matched that process (and it didn't really change how senior I became) but two turning points for me that made a real difference – a mentor and a coach. I could spend the rest of the article just explaining the difference between the 2 (a common conundrum, I have since found) but suffice to say that if it wasn't for 2 key individuals, I wouldn't have had the career I did (and still do) and wouldn't have developed in the way that I did. Both, unsurprisingly, are great ways to develop yourself.

Is it just unique to me? No, not at all. In 2017, I started working with a client undertaking career conversations with senior commercial leaders after they had been through quite an arduous assessment centre process. It is immaterial whether it is for commercial, procurement, sales or bid teams, I have been sad to discover that whether you are in public or private sector, there remains a bit of a void as to the importance of personal development.

There are definitely some key themes that have come out of this most recent work for me:

BETH WALLACE

Firstly the general lack of awareness about the 70:20:10 principle. Wikipedia says it was created around the mid-late 1990s and if only I had had this for my own early career conversations. 70% of learning comes from on the job training, 20% from others and only 10% from formal learning.

70%: What projects or tasks can be done whilst undertaking your current role that can either build on your strengths or develop areas that need attention?

20%: How do you network? Do you attend seminars for continuous personal development? Do you need a coach to look at specific areas to work on? Do you need a mentor who can guide you through some of the political or cultural complexities of your organisation or to bounce off some career conversations with? How do your customers work? What do they think of your service? Can you sit with them for a day and gain a better understanding about how they work?

10%: What 1 or 2 pieces of formal training would really help you to either learn something new or to skills refresh.

From a commercial/procurement perspective, that could be technical skills such as negotiation refresh, risk modelling, and financial analysis. It can also cover behavioural skills such as influencing skills, presenting with confidence skills. You'd be surprised about how many people still see personal development as being purely about what courses they can attend. I'll state the obvious – it is only 10% out of 100%.

Secondly, personal development contemplation and discussions need to include thinking about your longer term career aspirations and actually looking at your current role profile. What should you be doing day to day? Are you doing it well enough? What parts of your role don't you do – or don't like doing – and can you improve on it? If you have a strength at something, can you share with others? Where would you like your career to develop – do you want promotion, flexible working hours, a career change, thinking of retirement? What timescales are you thinking of? So what do you need to do over the next 1, 3, 6 and 12 months to make sure you are going the right direction.

Thirdly, this isn't just a one person activity. I am saddened but not surprised that there is quite a mix of support from line management at all levels. By buy-in and support I mean that's both enough time and space to be allocated to the conversation with your line manager (mobiles and other

distractions put away and clearly separating out the objectives conversations from the personal development chat) as well as testing, challenging and then supporting the agreed personal development plan. Give yourself time and space to reflect on your personal development needs and demand the same from your line manager to talk it through with them.

Lastly, don't be disheartened that you have to come up with a whole list of things that you've never done before. In the conversations I have with these senior commercial leaders, you'd be surprised about how many of our suggestions in the career conversations they are already undertaking but don't realise that actually it is classed as personal development. The biggest of these is networking and it actually becomes more important the more senior you become. It isn't necessarily about just external networking, what opportunities are there to internally network too. Not only is it a great way to learn from others, it is a simple and fantastic way to promoting your own "brand" too.

In summary, it doesn't matter what your role or career is in, it is so important to think about personal development. Spending the time thinking about – and doing – your own 70:20:10 personal development plan will reap its own rewards in the long term.

ALISON GURD

It's the start of a new year which means a large number of readers will be asked to write their objectives and development plan for 2018.

So we all find last year's objectives and look to see if they can be reused, heave a sigh of relief that only a few minor amends are needed and get them to the boss just before the cut-off time. The objectives are broad enough to cover a multitude of actions so that you can always be measured successfully and all you have to do now is your job so that your appraisal will be just as easy to complete.

But hold on a minute. You were asked to write your objectives and your development plan. Why did you stop short and only do your objectives? My theory is people don't like drawing attention to themselves and a personal development plan does exactly that. It touches on the person doing the job, rather than the job that needs to be done. It can be uncomfortable talking about yourself,

Development is about Actions not Words

especially areas for development, and there aren't always quick solutions at hand. So in our busy work environment (and when is proposal management anything but busy??) we sweep the development plan under the table and focus on the next deadline.

A personal development plan gives you an opportunity to look holistically at yourself. Are you doing everything to the best of your ability? Do you suit the job; does the job suit you? It could be that you need to improve in a technical part of your role where your company will support your training, or it could be something behavioural that is holding you back from promotion. If you don't consider how you can develop in the workplace you will find yourself falling out of love with your job, your colleagues, and your boss. A good people manager will always find time to help those that want to help themselves, but they are not going to force you to prepare a development plan because if they write it for you it won't change a thing. You have to see the value of having a plan.

So even if the deadline for this year has passed, or you are self-employed and feel liberated from this corporate merry-go-round, why not take some time to develop yourself. Think about the feedback you got last year, good and bad, and what you can do with this powerful intelligence. I recommend preparing six goals (four achievable and two a little harder). Take three positive traits and ask yourself how you can use these to strengthen your career. Then take three development areas – what can you do to improve? Write down your six statements and determine the best way to measure success – it may be to share with a trusted colleague or friend or perhaps you'd prefer to keep a journal. The important thing is to take action. Enjoy the challenges you set yourself, and remember to celebrate your successes.

7

GRAHAM ABLETT

Twenty-three years ago, I walked in to the head office of a multinational French conglomerate called Bouygues for a job interview. Set in lovely, well-furnished offices and based in leafy Surrey, I faced a friendly interview team. On the strength of that I managed to get a job as a trainee manager working out of one of their local depots. My depot operated outsourced Council services such as highways maintenance, street lighting, street cleaning, refuse collection and a winter gritting contract. This was a very 'operational' job which I enjoyed, but found myself soon looking to try something new. When an opportunity presented itself back at HQ, I leapt at the chance. 'Project Engineer' – how exciting! Working in the new business team – very happy. What did it involve? I honestly had no idea...

So, I wasn't quite sure what I was letting myself in for, but I was full of excitement. I admit I felt a bit more at home in the corporate environment that HQ provided. A few more suits than overalls. A bit less hairy. Anyway, I was getting used to my surroundings when suddenly I was presented with OJEU notices to sift through... blimey a whole new world unfolded in front of me. PQQs, RFPs and ITTs. I immediately loved the deadline driven nature of it, the thrill of the chase, beating the competition and the way it helps you understand lots of different aspects of how a company works and how it gets contracts.

Learning the Art and Science of Bidding

Two great guys helped me. Tim, the Business Development Director, and a near to retirement Estimator called Nigel. They quickly explained what bidding was and how it worked. It was good to get their two very different perspectives – and they often had healthy debates. But largely after those initial insights, I was left to work it all out myself with the two other Project Engineers, another Tim and Gilles. I'm still in touch with these blokes and now we've all moved on, but back then we were all very much in the same boat. I do recall a few 'no, no, no, no, no' comments from Nigel when he saw I was getting it wrong, but apart from that it was Tim, Gilles and I working it out ourselves.

We were building resourcing and finance models, did reconnaissance on incumbents' operations (including once being stopped by the police for following a refuse vehicle to a landfill site!) and wrote the responses and built the documents that were submitted to clients and prospects. Though we gave it our all, we pretty much made it up as we went along.

We sometimes managed to borrow ideas from our French counterparts in the business (who were more experienced). Then we learnt the hard way what not to do to get a bid signed off and how to use the repro room when the guy who ran it went home and you needed to print overnight. At the time, all the essential skills we needed.

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO GET A ROUNDED
PERSPECTIVE TO YOUR LEARNING.
IT'S ABOUT THE RIGHT BLEND.**

GRAHAM ABLETT

Though people say that learning on the job is essential and that gaining experience is so valuable, there's a point where other forms of learning should be applied. I learnt some harsh realities in that first job and many could have been avoided with a little training and some proper coaching. Then you can practice on the job and the more you do, the more your skills become permanent.

It was two jobs later and probably around six years in to my bidding career before I had any formal training. I thank Martin Smith for this. Before he joined Bid Solutions, Martin employed me at Dell and it's here that I got my first bit of formal training. Funnily enough this was delivered by Strategic Proposals (liked it so much that years later I joined the company!)

During my time at Dell I also had the pleasure of working with some great people. Some who had more experience than me. We all came together from different places and basically under Martin's guidance, built the Opportunity Management team. Coupled with the formal training from Strategic Proposals, I got coaching from Martin, plus loads of

learning from the fantastic healthy debates we had in the team. Helen Clark, Rob Dale, Steve Webster, Phil Nathan, Jon Darby, John Bradford, Peter Tucker, Fiona Flower and Marcus John all played a huge part in this. This combination helped me to understand how important it is to get a rounded perspective to your learning. It's about the right blend of:

Formal training: developing and honing your bid, proposal, document, graphics, presentation, procurement and other relevant industry skills.

Coaching: on-going coaching from a mentor (could be your manager, but preferably someone a step away from pay and rations).

Healthy debate: with colleagues in your team around new ways to try and do things to improve your chances of winning and efficiency.

Testing against best practice: challenge what you do compared with others that you see and hear at proposal and bidding industry events.

Learning the Art and Science of Bidding

Asking for advice: get guidance and points of view on your proposals from team mates. For example, ask them what they think of the executive summary you have just drafted with your sales lead. This helps learning and sharing of ideas, as well as continuous development.

Asking for feedback: proactively ask for this from the people you are working with. How did you perform? How could you do better? And then from clients.

And to make this really work, you really need a simple plan of just how you will bring all of the above points of reference in to play to your advantage.

I was lucky enough to have people around me help make most of the above happen, but it was more by luck than my good judgement. Think about how you are learning the art and science of bidding and consider if you are making use of all the different angles and perspectives that you can. Good luck!

Pippa Birch

Personal development was an important part of my employment. Training plans, annual appraisals and performance targets were mandatory, generally with a financial bonus attached. Continued Professional Development (CPD) was a must if you wanted to progress. The company paid for training and authorised time off to attend courses and travel to technical evenings.

Things changed when I went freelance. If I'm not working, there is no money coming in. I spent the first three years of freelancing terrified there wouldn't be work the next week, month, year. When I wasn't working, I was being a Mum. No time for training or CPD. Then reality struck. How could I sell myself as an effective writer/manager when I didn't invest in my own professional development?

I decided to take the leap and signed up for an APMP Foundation two-day course, having not fully grasped who or what the APMP was. I was worried that the bid I was working on would have an extension and I wouldn't be able to stop working for those few days. I was also concerned I wasn't earning anything and, on top of that, had to shell out course fees, APMP membership, train tickets and ludicrously expensive accommodation in the Big Smoke!

Best. Decision. Ever.

Why? I met people from outside of my small circle and found that there are other individuals who do what I do. I found out there are hundreds of bidding professionals across all sectors, the UK and the world that I can learn from. I discovered a vast amount of resources out there to support learning and development in the bidding profession.

Crucially, I improved my offering to my clients through updating my knowledge and focussing attention on improving my own skills. And this improvement guarantees that the bids I am involved with are not only compliant, but provide that extra bit of wow factor – winning my clients the work they want.

Since taking that first step in 2015, I have completed Foundation and Practitioner certification. I have become an active member of the APMP, speaking at two conferences, mentoring other Practitioners and hopefully inspiring other freelancers and bidding professionals. I have satisfied myself I am doing the right thing; the investment of time and effort improves what I offer to my clients.

In 2018, I am looking to continue my journey with Professional APMP certification. As always, this will require a level of commitment to really do it justice. I am fully booked with work up until October, so not sure how I will fit it in. The trick is to get started, and the rest will slot into place.

My advice for fellow freelancers?

Invest the time.

Invest the money.

Invest in yourself.

Only then can you truly offer your clients a rounded, current and professional service.

SIMON WELLSTEAD

I got bored. Tuned out. Mentally exited the building.

It happened as soon as Martin told me the topic for this edition was 'personal development'.

The concept isn't the problem. I couldn't be more on board with that. My issue is with the phrase: how it's used and what happens (or doesn't) as a result.

Have you ever spoken about personal development outside of work? Or wondered why you don't?

It's called *personal* development yet it seems to play little, or no, part in our personal lives. Weird.

When people say those two words, I imagine they are - 90% of the time - about to enrol on a course, sign up to a webinar or walk into an annual performance review.

And I think this can be where we go wrong.

Personal development has become too heavily linked to our jobs and corporate procedures. It is something that pops up in our 9-5 lives rather than becoming the never-ending pursuit of knowledge it should be.

Redefining personal development

Before becoming a creative director, I spent 14 years in sales and business development. Like most people, I encountered personal development opportunities every now and again. Sometimes they were worthwhile, most of the time not.

Honestly, my heart was never fully in it. It was just another to-do.

But when I jumped back into the creative world a decade or so ago, I started to see personal development in a whole new light.

I suddenly realised I could learn just as much, if not more, from the world outside the office as the world within it. I trained my brain to constantly seek out, recognise and extract greatness from unexpected places.

I discovered I could apply what I had seen and learnt to various aspects of my life, including work, to become better.

Learning to learn differently

Most of us are conditioned to relate personal development to our professional capability. It takes a real shift in mentality to open our eyes to the opportunities that totally unrelated sources offer.

TV is a great example. I often watch *Gold Rush*, a series that follows teams of gold miners in Alaska.

It's dramatic and entertaining (like any primetime TV show should be) but it's also packed with surprisingly valuable lessons that can translate perfectly in a business context. If you're open-minded enough to see the potential, that is.

At least once an episode, something happens on the show that impacts the way I think, live and work.

There's nothing really special about *Gold Rush* per se (although you can probably tell I'm a big fan!).

Personal Development: A New Perspective

It's not so much about what I'm watching but how I'm watching it. You can find similar value in lots of other shows.

Hobbies are another example. Let's say you're a cyclist who enters competitions at the weekend. Your experiences and stories are worth more than a quick chat with colleagues over coffee. There are bound to be things in there that you could apply to your job. It might relate to what you've learnt about determination, perseverance or your competitive approach - it could be anything.

The list goes on and on. Inspiration and knowledge are everywhere.

Over the course of an average week, I could adapt how I work because of the way my kids play; the acoustic arrangement of a song; a nugget of wisdom from someone I chatted to; or any number of other things.



SIMON WELLSTEAD



Personal Development: A New Perspective

Something as simple as breaking from routine can also jolt our thought processes enough to spark new ideas or gain new perspectives. I know about 20 different routes home from the office; mixing the journey up keeps me on my toes, exposes me to new sights and sounds, and quickly yanks me out of a creative rut.

Believe me when I say that nothing is off limits and there is no such thing as too 'non-professional' with personal development. If someone doesn't take you seriously then that's their loss. Don't let it be yours too.

Making your box bigger

All too often, I see people pen themselves in by sector or speciality. When it comes to personal development, this is so limiting.

A major online retailer can learn just as much about innovation from a snowboard designer as it can from a book titled *5 Ways Online Retailers Can Be More Innovative*.

To be clear, I'm not trying to rubbish opportunities that link directly to careers. There is a definite need for this type of personal development.

But that's precisely my point.

There are many types of personal development, of which job-based is only one. Perhaps the others get missed because hardly anybody even knows they should be looking for them.

The way I see it, this isn't about thinking outside the box. It's about making your box bigger; bringing a new, rich and exciting range of influences into what you do to become a stronger and more skilled version of you.

It wasn't until I did this myself that I found out what I was really made of.

Catch Gold Rush every Wednesday at 9pm on Discovery.

HOLGER GARDEN

In the bidding world, we spend our time helping others to achieve their goals – e.g. a bid writer supporting her / his client to prepare a winning bid so that the organisation can deliver products and / or services to enable the end client to achieve a business goal. The 'channel of needs' keeps the bidding profession and its clients moving, but how much attention do we pay to our own growth as individuals?

No one but you is going to get you to where you want to be. Oscar Wilde said, "Be yourself; everyone else is already taken." That means we have to live by our own values and beliefs. It also means we have to develop ourselves in ways that make the differences we want to see in our professional and personal lives. To achieve our development, we have to remember to give ourselves permission to put ourselves first.

How do you put yourself first without overlooking others and their demands on you? One way is to take a steer from the world of coaching so that you can challenge yourself during your busy week. As coaches, we are seasoned question askers. We ask our clients insightful questions that unlock their full potential.

Being busy in your bid work may mean you have insufficient time to consult a coach to develop your action plan for the development you want to achieve. Have you ever thought about coaching yourself? This can be a surprisingly effective way of creating long-term goals and their associated journey goals. Self-coaching helps you to challenge yourself by putting yourself first through questions that help to shape your personal development strategy.

Consider some of the questions that we ask in coaching, and imagine using these questions for yourself when you put time aside during your week:

Self Coaching to Shape your Personal Development Strategy

GOAL: WHERE ARE YOU HEADING?

1. What more can I achieve with my existing skills and experience?
2. What do I want to do that I don't already do?
3. What do I want my bidding career to look like?
4. How long have I been thinking about taking myself to the next level in my bid work?
5. What would it mean to me to achieve more with my skills and experience?
6. How would others regard me if I achieve more?

REALITY: WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

7. What's great about my bid work this week?
8. What have I learned about bidding this week?
9. What did I accomplish this week?
10. Who else will benefit from my learning and accomplishments?
11. What can I pass on to others to help them?
12. What didn't go so well in my bid work this week?
13. How can I turn that around for a better outcome next time?
14. Is my work giving me energy and enthusiasm for the future, or is it draining me?
15. How efficient am I being with my time, and how do I know?
16. What's stopping me doing right now the things I'd like to do in my bid work?
17. What evidence do I have that I don't already have the required skills and experience?
18. Am I focusing more on what I can't yet do or on what's within my reach as new skills?
19. What do I believe is holding me back in my bidding career?

OPTIONS: WHICH ROADS CAN YOU TAKE?

20. How can I find out more about development opportunities in bidding?
21. If an identical version of me existed, what growth would I be encouraging that person to strive for?
22. How can I create more value in my work for myself and others, with less effort?
23. What new skills and experience do I need so that I can take myself to the next level?
24. What will really make the biggest difference to my skills and abilities?
25. How can I be most resourceful here?
26. What would my career look like if I took action now?
27. If I don't take action, what will it cost me in the long run?
28. Who else will benefit from my new skills when I gain them?
29. What's the first step I need to take?
30. How can I make a plan of action?

WILL: HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT TO DEVELOP YOUR CAREER?

31. On a scale of 0 to 10, how keen and committed am I to progress my career in bidding?
32. What am I willing to start to create change in my bidding career?
33. What am I willing to stop to create change in my bidding career?
34. If I changed my belief about my own abilities, what would be possible?
35. What's the worst that can happen if I try this new thing?

HOLGER GARDEN

You might find you need to practise self-coaching for a little while before it becomes natural for you, or you might find teaming with a trusted colleague or friend to be effective if you want someone else to guide the questioning for you.

The purpose of the questions in this article is to make it easier to explore what you want to achieve in your career, without having to sit with a blank piece of paper. The questions give you a template to which you can add more questions as you note down your answers.

You need to keep records of your thoughts arising from your responses to the questions. Your records will enable you to track progress over time. For example, you might find that something holding you back today (Qu.16 and 19) will no longer be a blocker in a month's time.

Where will you go next in your bidding career?
Will you try self-coaching to help make it easier to put yourself first?

Self-Coaching to Shape your Personal Development Strategy

JON WILLIAMS

Fit for the Bidding Battle

It's like going on a diet. I've tried 5:2. I wasn't fun to be around on the two days I had to starve. I've been carb-free: I'd have bitten your hand off for a bowl of pasta. Weight Watchers? Been there. Slimming World? Got the badge. At one point, I was even seeing a nutritionist who recommended that I ate 22 different dietary supplements a day.

And you know what? Each of them works brilliantly, for the first six months. And then I lose focus. My weight creeps back up. I need to remind myself of what works and get back to eating the right things – or, not eating the wrong things! Sometimes, it's simply that I'm bored; I crave variety.

Falling into bad habits. Needing fresh ideas. I can see parallels all round with the world of bids and proposals.

You know, ours is an incredibly fast-moving profession. Huge improvements in the standard of storytelling and writing. Proposal design that's improved beyond all recognition in the past decade.

Radical changes to what good looks like when it comes to the bid presentation. PowerPoint pitches are so passé these days; PowerPoint done badly is simply not acceptable.

A huge shift towards more work on proactive and renewal proposals – in our team, up from around 10% of the live deals we support to 40% in the past few years, as sales teams expect their proposal colleagues to align ever-closer to the business development lifecycle.

Clients that are evolving – the “long march of procurement” and their infernal online systems leading to tighter timescales, more bureaucracy, less freedom to innovate unless you understand buyer behaviour and the tricks of the trade. Technology that's changing, too, in its ability to make our lives easier. I no longer define a “virtual team” as “one working on a shared initiative, but not physically co-located”; these days, I just define it as “business as usual”.

Any of us who aren't taking control of our personal development, and continually monitoring best practice, risk falling behind the times. If you're still working in the same way five years from now as you are today, I guarantee your win rate will have fallen. And all professionals – even those at the top of their game – need to stand back from time-to-time and remind themselves of all of those great things they know they should do, but which get lost in the heat of the battle.

As someone who runs countless courses, and has helped huge numbers of people through their APMP qualifications, you'd probably expect me at this point to plug our training. And, naturally, we'd love to meet you! But I'd rather reflect on the wealth of knowledge that's out there that you can tap into at little or no cost.

Let me ask you five questions:

1. How many books did you read last year on bids, proposals, writing, design, projects, teams, sales, procurement? (My recent favourites: “The Challenger Sale” and “Pre-suasion”).
2. List three articles or white papers on bidding that you read in 2017. (If you read everything we'd shared, free, online, you'd be as up-to-date as can be. And lots of other people post fabulous insights, too).
3. How much time a week do you spend browsing LinkedIn – about bids and proposals, and about developments in your market sector?
4. When did you last look at each of your key competitors' websites, to see what they're up to?
5. If you're a member of APMP – and I'd argue that you should be, how many of APMP UK's free chapter events did you attend in 2017? Have you delved into their Body of Knowledge? Did you read the last issue of their online “Journal” from cover to cover? Do you subscribe to and read their weekly European newsletter?

Personal development isn't something someone else should do for or to us. It's personal. And if you can build a plan for 2018 that gives you fresh perspectives, you'll find that it helps to continually re-invigorate you and to help you to win ever more business. Bidding's such fun; embracing new ideas makes it ever more so.

PETER MCPARTLAND

Prepare Yourself for the Reality of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

When asked to share where I'm focusing my personal development in 2018 the answer was easy. I am focusing on learning more about Artificial Intelligence (AI) and importantly preparing myself for how AI will revolutionise management thinking about leadership, innovation and performance improvement.

Admittedly, AI has been around for 60 years, but with the immense volumes of data being acquired as standard and automated data capture capabilities from the Internet of Things, we are seeing an explosion in the progress of data science. This has lit the blue touch paper needed for AI to become a reality in numerous ways rather than just a concept.

Vocabulary such as Machine Learning (ML), Deep Learning (DL), Natural Language Processing (NLP), narrow AI, Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), AI-enabled, neural network specialists and intelligent technology will become common place before we know it. Ignoring AI is no longer an option as its impact will shape all of our roles in the future - in many different ways.

International Data Corporation (IDC) estimated the AI market will grow from \$8 billion in 2016 to almost \$50 billion in 2020. Forrester Research predicted a 300% increase in AI investments in 2017 compared to 2016 and China has committed to a plan they believe will position them as world leaders in AI by 2030, building an industry worth \$150 billion.

In my career so far I've seen how accelerations in mobility and the Internet both changed how

employers thought about their workforce and employees thought about their skillsets. There's a feeling of déjà-vu for me having written and presented in the early nineties about the importance of 'Adapting to a Changing Landscape'. Back then the letter 'e' with a hyphen became not just a common prefix but a catalyst for complete strategy rethinks, and the creation of huge new industries as well as careers.

My early readings on the subject of AI leave me excited and encouraged. It seems that whilst AI systems will have many strengths over a human when it comes to processing and learning it will be second best when it comes to satisfying a need for creativity, innovation or empathy. Skills linked to persuasion, emotional intelligence, imagination, collaboration, building rewarding cultures and remaining ethical are some talents that will be difficult to code.

For those of you that have ever read other articles I've written, this isn't a u-turn. I still remain confident that when it comes to bidding our leadership must still create the model conditions where everyone involved can do their most productive, courageous and inspired thinking – together as a team. People will remain at the heart of successful bidding.

However, there will be change. I can see a time when bid/no bid decisions are linked to much more sophisticated systems that automatically analyse the content of pre-bid capture interactions and make clear recommendations based on the data. Resumes and telephone interview responses are already capable of being auto-analysed by

AI systems in the recruitment sector to perform shortlisting. How long before our bids are produced by systems that create optimum responses based on intelligence gathering throughout pursuit activities; whilst those bids go on to be evaluated by machines not people, which provide a clear recommendation to a senior decision maker; where the decision maker has much less involvement in the process than we would traditionally expect?

The reality is that many roles at every level throughout an organisation involve what are essentially routine, process driven and analytical activities – which AI systems will be much more capable of performing. These systems also require significantly less supervision than humans to ensure consistency across departments.

AI systems won't replace humans in the workplace, they will simply redesign the roles we perform and hopefully how people think about work and how employers think about people.

People will matter even more. That's because it is people who will provide the skills needed to enable creative and innovative thinking. It is that thinking that will drive progress throughout this fourth industrial revolution.

In light of that, we need to start thinking now about the possibilities for AI and preparing ourselves for it – if you haven't already. Those who do will be best positioned to take advantage of opportunities for more enriched creative roles in environments which will be more closely linked to human well-being than human output.

For employees there normally needs to be a valid business reason for whatever training course you plan to attend – which, in turn, means the training course has to be directly relevant to your role. If you're experienced then you are likely to already know how to do your job, making a limited number of available training courses worthwhile. Therefore, training courses become a means to getting up-to-date in your field, rather than learning new things per se.

So where does this leave personal development? And, indeed, what exactly is personal development?

Wikipedia defines **personal development** as "activities that improve awareness and identity, develop talents and potential, build human capital and facilitate employability, enhance the quality of life and contribute to the realization of dreams and aspirations." To compliment this, Wikipedia also defines **human capital** as "the stock of knowledge, habits, social and personality attributes, including creativity, embodied in the ability to perform labor (sic) so as to produce economic value."

Personal development, therefore, is far more than picking and attending a training course.

Across prior roles I have often been told that my personal development is my responsibility, and is not something that others (especially line management) can dictate. Yes, they can advise or at least let you know what options are open, but it is up to the individual to set their own path which leads to their own objectives – even dreams and aspirations as per the Wikipedia definition. Years ago I thought this was a cop-out from my direct leadership, but now I agree completely.

Answering the question of 'what comes next?' in a work context doesn't have to be confined to our realisms (or even constraints, frustrations and perhaps pessimistic sense of our own abilities) that we face today and faced yesterday. In fact, answering the question doesn't even have to be considered in a work context at all. Why not open our minds to what we really want to achieve to make us happy and fulfil our dreams and aspirations...and then set a personal development plan to get there whether it is with or without our current employer?



If following dreams is too nebulous and impractical then let us trim the definition of personal development down to "activities that develop talents and potential, facilitate employability, and enhance the quality of life."

Personal development can now be thought of in terms of what skills and experience you want to obtain and what role you would like to do that may differ from what you're doing currently (especially if it is not fulfilling).

INTERNAL SECONDMENTS BROADEN EXPERIENCE AND OPEN UP OPTIONS OF MOVING TO A ROLE THAT DEVELOPS POTENTIAL AND YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

From my experience I have found that secondments or job-swapping is an excellent method to explore. This is subject to opportunity and how employers are structured, but can be weaved into performance reviews and voiced in such meetings and objective-setting. It can even be achieved through proactive investigation: make friends with other departments and start to broker the possibility of secondment or job-sharing.

In summary, by all means investigate and attend training courses but for your wider personal development I recommend internal secondments to broaden experience and open up options of moving to a role that develops potential and your quality of life.

References

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_development
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_capital

ANDREW HAIGH

Here you are, striving away day after day dealing with a relentless stream of complex and demanding bids. There have been countless evenings and nights when you have been working alone in the office to meet a bid deadline. And then, when you have had company, it was because it was "all hands to the deck" to overcome the crisis (not caused by you) of a strategically important bid not being on track to be completed on time. When the bid was won, little of the credit was given to you as it was the sales team's success. Your reward was stale coffee, cold pizza and yet another bid to complete.

There is an antidote available for this situation. You will probably be aware of the Bid Solutions Salary surveys. They show that bid professionals who have achieved professional recognition through formally recognised programs earn significantly more than their unaccredited peers who are doing the same job.

The reasons for this are multifaceted; selection of applicants with an externally tested and recognised qualification reduces the hiring risk for a business and the hiring decision maker. A "standard" methodology and basis upon which people develop their bids, leads to less ambiguity and lower error rates in the activities which need to come together when a bid is developed. However, probably most importantly, companies pay more for people who contribute more. People who have got the qualifications have demonstrated their ability to contribute and higher contribution leads to higher reward.

If this is not enough to convince you to put aside a chunk of time to get your APMP Foundation examination under your belt (or to progress to the next level), we have an even more compelling argument.

The Perfect Antidote to Stale Coffee and Cold Pizza?

We recently ran a short survey of the people who had been through our Foundation training courses. We wanted to know what impact the training, and its preparation which they had had to do, had made to their daily working life. The results were instructive.

Over a quarter of our alumni responded. What they reported was highly encouraging and when we analysed the detail we found:

- **94%** reported that they had found the information they picked up on the Foundation course assisted them in the way they did their job.
- **54%** reported that gaining the qualification helped boost their status within their organisation.

and

- **13%** reported that the qualification had directly helped them earn a promotion or (for freelancers) win a new contract.

So next time you are feeling overworked and undervalued, you might want to reflect upon how your status might be affected by gaining a suitable level of professional recognition. And, if you already have recognition but it is not affecting the way you are treated in your current job, just remember that it will be so much easier to move somewhere else where your talents will be more appreciated (and paid for!).

Otherwise, there is still that cold pizza to look forward to?



ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



NIGEL HUDSON

Professional Development Expert

Nigel is passionate about professional development. He designed and delivered the APMP award-winning Bid Academy for Vodafone and co-authored Europe's leading proposal syllabus with Strategic Proposals. He's trained more than 4,000 people worldwide.



JON WILLIAMS

Proposal Management & APMP Training Expert

Jon and his team work with clients worldwide to help them establish winning proposal capabilities and to capture major deals. He has built and led numerous bid and proposal centres; managed, reviewed and benchmarked countless proposals; worked in over thirty countries, and trained many thousands of course participants.



PETER McPARTLAND

Bid Team Leadership & Innovation

Peter is recognised for his strengths in bid team leadership, innovation and performance improvement. One of the first law firm employees to achieve the APMP Certified Professional qualification, Peter is also a winner of an APMP UK national award for Innovation.



PIPPA BIRCH

Highways & Civil Engineering Expert

Pippa has been a Bid Writer for over 15 years, working as an employee for major companies within the Highways and Civil Engineering Sector for the first ten. She started freelancing in 2012 which led her to write for companies across a variety of sectors (construction, facilities management, custody and forensics).



BETH WALLACE

Procurement Expert

Beth has worked in a number of sectors, starting out in aerospace manufacturing but also working in financial services, media, hospitality and legal to name a few. Her career has spanned both negotiating deals as well as managing supplier relationships, from simple projects to complex outsourcing.



PETER BRYANS

Costing & Pricing Expert

Specialising in strategic cost modelling, estimating and pricing, Peter's 15 year career has seen him at Network Rail, Arup and Detica (now BAE Systems Applied Intelligence) and most recently in senior cost estimating and pricing roles at Aegis and Thales.



ANDREW HAIGH

Public Sector Bidding Expert

Andrew is an expert in bidding and tendering, specialising in competitive formal bids into EU Public Sector organisations. Andy is an authority on EU procurement legislation and can bring all these capabilities together to initiate and drive major complex bids through to a successful completion.



GRAHAM ABLETT

Proposal Management & IT Industry Expert

Graham helps clients to win specific opportunities as well as implementing effective and efficient proposal processes. He is a former board member of APMP in the UK, holding APMP Professional status, and is an APMP Approved Trainer.

ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



BEN HANNON

Recruitment Expert

Ben is responsible for consistently providing long-term success for our clients in an increasingly competitive market. He understands the culture and winning mentality that ensures we stand out from the crowd.



SIMON WELLSTEAD

Advertising & Marketing Expert

SMSW Media is a creative & marketing agency with one focus – maximising revenue for its clients. Simon's early years working in blue-chip sales means he understands what it takes to grow. His dogged determination to challenge at all levels means that he can cut through the crap and unearth true value propositions.



MARTIN SMITH

Managing Director, Bid Solutions

I am passionate about helping clients win new business. With increasingly savvy procurement professionals, more competition and new technology changing the way we bid, it is my job as Managing Director to ensure we offer you market leading people, tools, training and solutions to help you win more business.



ALISON GURD

Deal Management Expert

Alison is Head of the Proposal Team at BNP Paribas (Securities Services) in London. Alison has extensive experience in deal management, having undertaken sales, relationship management and proposal management roles during her career in the securities industry that spans 25 years.



HOLGER GARDEN

Construction Expert & Professional Coach

Holger is a bid manager and writer, and a personal / team performance coach. He spends most of his time supporting construction clients bidding for civil infrastructure and building projects, but his transferable skills have led to his work in the medical, charity and security arenas also. He works with businesses of all sizes to help them win more work.



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