

# BQ

BIDDING QUARTERLY



## OLD FATHER TIME

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**FOREWORD**



# **WATCHING TIME**

**MARTIN SMITH**

**I USED TO BE ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO AIMED TO BE FIVE MINUTES EARLY TO EVERY MEETING. I JUST DIDN'T LIKE BEING LATE. IT FELT BOTH UNNECESSARY AND A LITTLE DISRESPECTFUL TO THOSE THAT HAD TURNED UP ON TIME. IT WAS SO INGRAINED THAT I ALWAYS RAN MY WATCH FIVE MINUTES FAST TO GIVE ME THE 'WIGGLE' ROOM EVERY BUSY SCHEDULE DEMANDS.**

### And then I changed. Or rather, *Time* changed.

I'm now frequently running late to Teams calls or find myself rescheduling meetings at the very last minute. That's not because they are less important than they were, more that the consequences of rescheduling have much less impact. No one has spent hours travelling to a meeting – and those attending are far more understanding than they were pre-Covid.

I no longer wear a watch – a concept that would have been totally alien to me just 12 months ago. Whilst this could be interpreted as the reason for my tardiness, it would be misguided. The shackles of the more rigid 9 to 5 daily regime have not just come off; they have been totally dismantled. My diary is more fluid than it has even been. It no longer matters if I play with my son for two hours when he gets home from nursery because I can make the time up in the evening, or early the next day. No one judges or gets frustrated with the personal stuff that now blends seamlessly into my work commitments because everyone has had to accept juggling has become our life (not just a part of it). I truly hope we do not fall back into the old ways. However, with big tech companies already renegeing on their 'work from home forever' pledges, it feels increasingly likely, if not inevitable.

'*New time*' hasn't been without its challenges. All those extra hours I've gained by avoiding travel and flexing my day have been repurposed to make me super productive – or so I thought. The problem is, whilst my newfound flexibility has increased my output, it also feels like it's accelerating me to a faster burnout.

With '*old time*' you could unwind on the commute or catch up on some reading or personal calls. Like many, the commute from my office to my home life is now just separated by a door – zero transition time – and that is often the hardest part. Switching my focus from the demands of a global client to finding the right puzzle or game quickly enough demands a whole new level of patience – something that (as those of you who know me will testify) isn't necessarily a skill I would list on my CV.

“ I NO LONGER WEAR A WATCH - A CONCEPT THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN TOTALLY ALIEN TO ME JUST 12 MONTHS AGO. WHILST THIS COULD BE INTERPRETED AS THE REASON FOR MY TARDINESS, IT WOULD BE MISGUIDED. THE SHACKLES OF THE MORE RIGID 9 TO 5 DAILY REGIME HAVE NOT JUST COME OFF; THEY HAVE BEEN TOTALLY DISMANTLED. ”

Then there is the anxiety I feel when taking time off during the '*old time*' 9 to 5 regime. I now think nothing of getting up at 5 a.m. and cracking on with projects or working on a weekend if I need to – but taking time off through the working week (if I catch up with my schedule) still feels a little harder to get to grips with than I expected. Clearly with '*new time*' comes new checks and balances that we need to find. Covid-19 and lockdown are still dominating most work patterns; the trick will be how we unwind our activities once we finally get to grips with the disease. If we get it wrong, there is a risk we will all end up working many more hours than we did pre-Covid.

I find '*time*' is full of contradictions. I start many calls with something along the lines of "*Time is flying by...*" and yet end most with "*It seems so long since I saw you*". When Sarah Hinchliffe suggested Old Father Time as a theme for BQ10, my mind was instantly awash with 1,000 different ideas. It resonated with me instantly because I'm constantly questioning my time and how I divide it.

It's just over four years since we launched BQ. The mathematicians amongst you will note this should be our 16th edition – but hey, it's '*new time*' so does it really matter? If Covid-19 has taught me one thing, it's that my perspective of what is really important was out of kilter – worrying too much about the small stuff and achieving deadlines that were mostly self-imposed.

BQ10 epitomises why I launched Bidding Quarterly. I've been blown away by the quality of the contributions from our panel of experts and guest writers – their shared experience, wisdom, advice, guidance, excitement, sadness, vulnerability, honesty and humour is beyond anything we have previously published. It's our biggest and best publication.

Rick Harris brilliantly kicks us off with some words of wisdom for the younger generation; and words of comfort for those of us ticking the closer-to-50 box. Nigel Hudson, who never fails to inspire me with his contributions, leaves us on a high with his words of encouragement on embracing the new, staying curious and adapting to the changing world. In between, we have 18 fantastic articles that cover time management techniques, self-care in challenging times, differentiating between common and best practice, and social learning techniques. You'll learn about 'reader drag', 'bid unicorns' and diminished attention spans. We also have a brilliant Spotlight feature with Anne McNamara – I strongly urge you to get behind her ReBuild campaign.

I really hope you enjoy BQ10 and take as much from it as I have. You'll see we are also launching some new initiatives with Win in 60 Seconds, BQ Vault and the BQ Book Club. If you'd like to get involved, I'd love to hear from you.

**Martin Smith**



THERE IS A POINT IN EVERYONE'S LIFE AND CAREER WHEN YOU ARE MUCH MORE AWARE OF OLD FATHER TIME THAN 10, 20 OR 30 YEARS BEFORE. OLD FATHER TIME IS A LURKER. ONE MOMENT HE IS NOWHERE TO BE SEEN AND THE NEXT, HE IS RIGHT BEHIND YOU.

# THE ORIGINAL GANGSTA

## OLD FATHER TIME

**RICK HARRIS**  
CP APMP and CEO of APMP

He has little regard for your current focus on life. He doesn't care if you are taking your children to start university or preparing a board room report. He is there, silently watching. He doesn't judge and doesn't praise, but he is there.

How well you interact with Old Father Time is the key to the remaining years of your professional life. Some people ignore him like he's not there. They fight him by trying to work right through him, thinking maybe he will go away if they work hard enough. He won't.

Other people look over their shoulders frequently, quickening their life and work step. They try to create distance for him. But they can't. We live longer and work longer but the saying is still valid - Father Time is undefeated.

Old Father Time first made himself known to me last year - at 61 years old. One day I was working on a challenging project, and there he was. He was quiet but I could see him. I said nothing and he said nothing to me, but we both knew he was there. The usual thoughts popped into my head: "Wow, where did you come from?" and "Really, now, we're here, already?"

I put a lot of thought into his appearance and wondered why I was so surprised. After all, I had gotten married, had children, watched them grow, kept moving forward in my career until I achieved the position I had wanted from the very start of it all.

And then my hair started leaving my scalp and went from jet black to a bit of grey, then salt and pepper, and, finally, to mostly - okay, all salt.

Despite that, I felt more innovative, more confident, and much more at ease with myself and what got me here. When others made mistakes, I was more forgiving. I didn't sweat the smaller stuff like I had when I was younger. I realised that most people came from a good starting place; from the same point I did. They want to do what's right and good in the world.

**“ HE ENCOURAGES ME TO TAKE STOCK AND LOOK AT ALL I HAVE ACCOMPLISHED IN BUSINESS AND WHAT I STILL WANT TO DO. HE HELPS ME PRIORITISE WHAT IS IMPORTANT AND DISCOVER UNTAPPED POSSIBILITIES. ”**

I also realised my life had steadily improved; no matter who was running my country, no matter which party they were from or whom I agreed with more. I understood what happiness was/is, why it is so important and how much I played a part in making that happen.

My advice is to embrace your Old Father Time when he makes an appearance in your life. I gave mine a nickname - the OGOFT - the Original Gangsta Old Father Time. I see him. I am aware of him and I like him because he is here for a reason. The OGOFT is telling me, as quietly and as nicely as possible, that it's not all about me - it's always about others. His (not so) sudden and (not so) predictable appearance in my life is the way it should be.

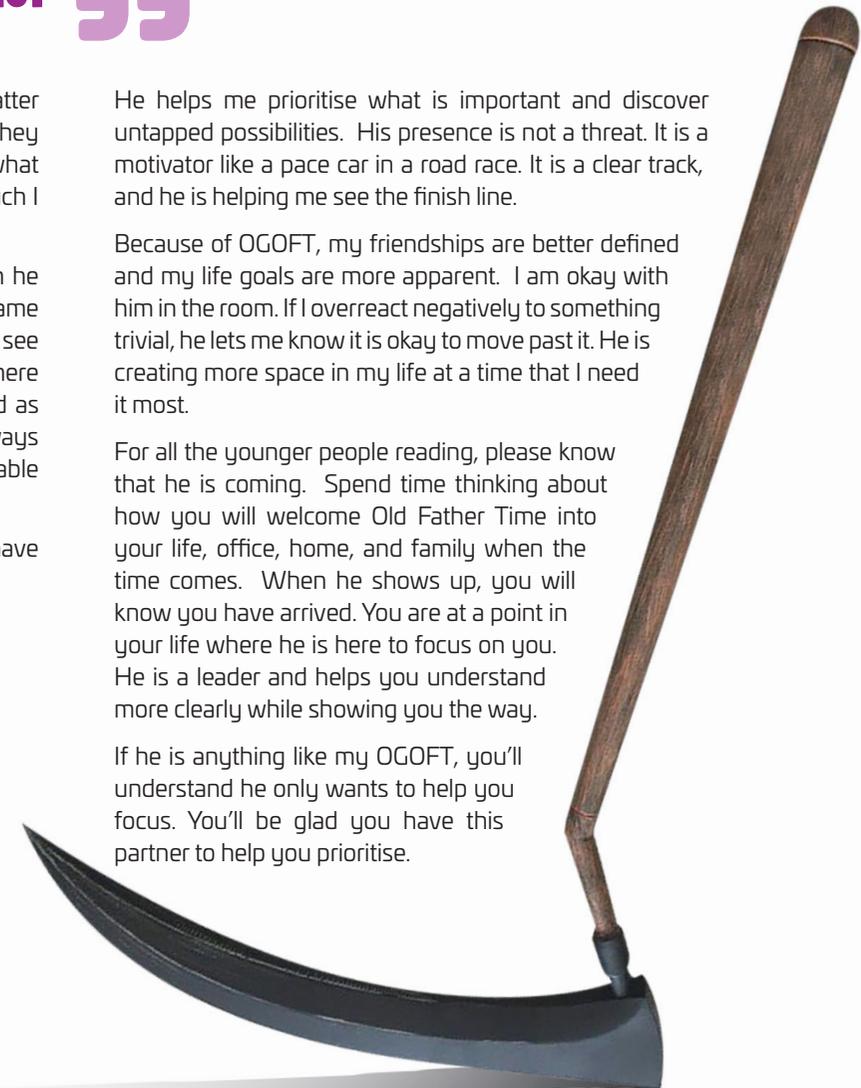
He encourages me to take stock and look at all I have accomplished in business and what I still want to do.

He helps me prioritise what is important and discover untapped possibilities. His presence is not a threat. It is a motivator like a pace car in a road race. It is a clear track, and he is helping me see the finish line.

Because of OGOFT, my friendships are better defined and my life goals are more apparent. I am okay with him in the room. If I overreact negatively to something trivial, he lets me know it is okay to move past it. He is creating more space in my life at a time that I need it most.

For all the younger people reading, please know that he is coming. Spend time thinking about how you will welcome Old Father Time into your life, office, home, and family when the time comes. When he shows up, you will know you have arrived. You are at a point in your life where he is here to focus on you. He is a leader and helps you understand more clearly while showing you the way.

If he is anything like my OGOFT, you'll understand he only wants to help you focus. You'll be glad you have this partner to help you prioritise.





# IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME

**SARAH HINCHLIFFE**

## **HOME TIME**

There are four types of time in our household.

First, there's the time on the numerous clocks - one in every room. More or less accurate, they set the baseline to make sure we keep in tune with the rest of the world.

Second, there's Hinchliffe-time. Planned, structured, disciplined. Every day has objectives with scheduled tasks and activities. If Saturday or Sunday dawns without a plan, that's soon fixed by the end of breakfast. It's pretty frenetic. The stuff of a 'finisher-completer'. My days end blissfully as long as I've achieved something. Does that make me a nightmare to live with? If my husband wasn't so laid back, he might think so.

Which brings us nicely to Chellingworth-time - Mr Chellingworth (Ray) being said husband. His time and my time are complete opposites. He leads a kind of "*que sera, sera*", whenever, whatever, existence. He hastens to point out that, before retirement, he was a fully paid-up member of the proposal community and regularly met his deadlines. My riposte is, "Of course, darling, but never here, never at home." Does that make him a nightmare to live with? If I wasn't actually quite patient, maybe.

Finally, there's Copper-time. He's the dog. Fortunately, being a lurcher, he's not that demanding but he still expects to be catered for in the walking and feeding department when the mood takes him.

## HALF TIME

Hopefully you've got my drift by now, so pause for a ponder. What's your version of time? Is it the same as or different from those around you? Does it complement, dovetail or clash?

## AWAY TIME

As bid professionals, we need an acute awareness of time.

We are driven by an immovable bid submission deadline. The customer sets the clock.

We do this job because we have an inherent respect for time. And a natural ability to plan, schedule and monitor, to keep things on track and get them back on the rails if they veer off.

We are focused, driven, obsessed with time.

Yet many people we rely on see time in their way and not ours. Let's think of a few stereotypes:

- **The subject matter expert (SME) who has a high utilisation target and no spare time. For them, writing bid content is just a nuisance to be dashed off in between the all-important day job of earning real money for the company.**
- **The senior manager, whose time is so precious. They can only just manage to issue a 'must win' instruction, then disappear before popping back up at final document review to lob in some cryptic feedback.**
- **The lawyer who sucks through teeth like a builder and says, "I'll schedule to read the 173 pages of terms and conditions the week after next and let you know if there are any show-stoppers."**

Our gut reaction is to get frustrated and annoyed with people like this – how dare they not take bidding seriously and jeopardise such a critical business-winning activity? But negative responses are not helpful.

Rather than stereotyping, the important thing is to take each person as an individual and consider whether they are deliberately trying to de-rail your schedule. Probably, like Ray, they just have a different agenda, different priorities and a different perspective on time.

Let's make a working assumption that most people are not actually out to get you. Then we can happily use our soft skills to get the outcome we want, leaving them feeling good and us feeling satisfied. To achieve this, we need to use a few of the many traits of a true grit bid professional:

- **Patience: holding our breath and counting to ten rather than exploding with outrage**
- **Tenacity: not getting despondent but hanging on in there**
- **Empathy: asking questions and listening to answers to understand the other person's view**
- **Communication: keeping everyone briefed and engaged**
- **Pragmatism: being agile and adaptive, finding a different way**
- **Persuasion: using logic, charm, and a pinch of guile to get what we need, on time**

Is this how I have learnt to live with Chellingworth-time? Well, yes. We're in our 27th year and so far, so good. And it's served me well professionally too.

## FULL TIME

The moral of the tale is...learn to live with difference. Handle the emotion in slow time and stay upbeat in real time.

Oh, and if you want to know where the dog fits in – he just does – life revolves around him – think of him as the daily checkpoint, the housekeeping and the hygiene factors!

And you may be asking: "What about those truly nefarious people?" I can think of a handful in my life. If all soft skills fail, I've used head-on confrontation, peer pressure, escalation and walking away – not lightly and not always successfully, but thankfully I've survived. A subject for another day perhaps, if I have time.

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WHAT'S YOUR VERSION OF TIME? IS IT THE SAME AS OR DIFFERENT FROM THOSE AROUND YOU? DOES IT COMPLEMENT, DOVETAIL OR CLASH?

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# THE CURRENCY OF TIME



**TIM SNELL**

**“ALL WE HAVE TO DECIDE IS WHAT TO DO WITH THE TIME THAT IS GIVEN US.”**  
**J. R. R. TOLKIEN**

If 2020 taught us one thing, it's that time marches on – pandemic or not. Our task is not to languish in wishful thinking for more hours in the day; it's to recognise that we all have the same 24 hours. We have to work out how to use those hours to create the impact we want in the world.

Bid professionals often find themselves running a linear race towards the deadline – a horizontal story (or the “horror story” to quote a good friend of mine) that begins with opportunity identification and ends at contract award. Like any good story, there are allies and obstacles, and unexpected twists and turns that guide us ever onwards. One thing remains the same – time stops for no one.

When we're in the fray, wearing the badge of 'busy', it's too easy to forget that time is the most valuable currency we all possess. How we spend it has a massive impact on our quality of life. So how do we shift our perception to the value of time and its importance as a currency – one we're empowered to choose how we spend?

Parkinson's Law is the adage that “work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion”. Anyone working in bids has seen this play out project after project. The logic, therefore, is that anything with a deadline focuses the mind, and helps us to prioritise what's 'important'. In effect, by placing limitations on something, we become

more creative about how we achieve what's needed within those constraints.

If this is true, and we all crave more time to fit everything in, to make an impact, or to leave a legacy, then we must understand that our time is finite. If we can't create more time, then we must recognise its value and begin to make choices about how we invest it.

I use Mark Silverman's Only 10s<sup>1</sup> methodology (from: *Only 10s: Using Distraction to Get the Right Things Done*) to help me get the right things done, and to make my unconscious choices conscious. This way, when I'm investing my most valuable asset in something meaningless, I do so from a place of agency, knowing that I'm 'choosing' to spend my time this way and catching myself when I really want to be doing something else.

By understanding that time is my currency (it's how I'm often paid, after all) and using the ideas from *Only 10s*, I've become more aware of what I put my attention on, who I spend my time with, and the activities that I choose to invest my time in. I've recommended *Only 10s* to clients who report a similar awareness and shift in their own lives. This has helped reset my internal compass, reprioritise my personal and professional goals and bring forward things that I have been putting off. (Sometimes these are joyful things that I wistfully say, “I'll do it next year...”.)

So what's a 10 for me? I've adopted the criteria that Mark suggests in his book:

- **I really want to do this today**
- **It has a deadline or a consequence if it isn't done**
- **It has been scheduled**

That might seem simplistic but it's the simplicity and the rationale Mark explains in his book that makes it so powerful.

At a day-to-day level, it has helped me (and my clients) to become much clearer on what's in and what's out of my daily 'to do' list. As a leader and a team member, this has meant getting really honest with myself and the people I collaborate with – determining what's important, what needs doing right now, and what's possible given the various constraints and demands we all face.

More importantly, it has given me the courage to say “No”, when I'm so used to saying “Yes”; “Yes” to people please, to keep the plates spinning and to keep wearing that badge of 'busy' that I can use as an excuse for missing the things that are truly important.

In truth, the decision criteria have become even clearer – if it's not a “Hell yes”, it has to be a “No”. That comes from a place of intellect and a place of feeling. With that kind of clarity, I have created more space for the things that light me up and ultimately lead me step-by-step toward my goals – the main one being to focus on what matters most.

**“You have no time left to kill, so how you spend your time now is how your live this life.” Mark J Silverman**

How are you spending yours?



**AS A LEADER AND A TEAM MEMBER, THIS HAS MEANT GETTING REALLY HONEST WITH MYSELF AND THE PEOPLE I COLLABORATE WITH - DETERMINING WHAT'S IMPORTANT, WHAT NEEDS DOING RIGHT NOW, AND WHAT'S POSSIBLE GIVEN THE VARIOUS CONSTRAINTS AND DEMANDS WE ALL FACE.**



2021



**STUCK IN  
YOU'RE NOT ALONE**

**TIME?**

**CHARLOTTE  
REES**

## WE'RE ALL FEELING A LITTLE STUCK: STUCK INSIDE, STUCK IN THE UNKNOWN, STUCK WONDERING WHAT'S NEXT FOR OUR CAREER AND PERSONAL PROGRESSION.

People are both mentally and physically exhausted, struggling to find the motivation needed to maintain momentum and keeping moving forward. It is difficult to differentiate between home life and work life, and many are finding it hard to prioritise what's important in the long-term.

Don't panic! We're all feeling this way. So firstly - don't be too hard on yourself. This has been a weird time for everyone and it's understandable if motivation is hard to find, but that doesn't mean we can't break the cycle. You have a responsibility to yourself to be your own motivator and instil a change in your own attitude to your progress.

It's time to take action!

If you're currently unsure of where you are heading or what your progression looks like, here are some steps to help you start taking charge of your situation in both the short- and long-term.

### DEFINE WHAT YOU REALLY WANT

In order to become 'unstuck', it's important to visualise where you actually want to go! We recently held a personal development workshop for some of our Women in Bids and Proposals (WIBAP) members that focused on this, starting with some 'big picture' questions, including:

- **What do you really want to achieve?**
- **Are you currently in the mindset to achieve these goals?**
- **What might you need to do differently to make sure you don't hinder your own progress?**
- **What other aspects of your life are important to you right now?**

Once you have an idea about where you'd like to be, you can define the steps needed to get there. If you need a little help with this part, we have a dedicated advice forum on the WIBAP website - brilliant people, with brilliant ideas, who would love to help!

### WRITE IT DOWN

Sometimes putting pen to paper and actually committing yourself to taking action can really drive a shift in mentality. So make a list! Everyone knows how much I love a list - it will give you clarity and purpose. Also, the feeling you get when items start getting crossed off will give you even more encouragement to keep going.

Within your bigger goals, set small achievable actions. Don't overwhelm yourself with just the huge, end-goal targets; you'll be more inclined to lose focus. Divide those larger goals into smaller ones that you can work to and manage.

Why not also find an accountability partner (maybe a friend or trusted colleague) who you can catch up with to check on your progress every so often? This is always a great reminder and driver to not let your plans slip.

### ACT NOW

As someone who's more likely to overthink than take spontaneous action, I know how hard this one can be. But sometimes you just need to act and wait for the motivation to follow - which often it will.

I'd also recommend tackling the hardest item on your 'to do' list early on. You'll feel so much better once it's out of the way.

### DON'T FORGET THE POSITIVES RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU

When you're aiming for goals, it's easy to get blind-sided into forgetting all of the great stuff happening now. Are there fantastic achievements happening right now that should be celebrated? It's important to acknowledge your wins, big or small.

### REMEMBER WHY YOU STARTED

There are always times where a negative mindset can creep back in. In those moments, remember what's driving you. Check your original plan and remind yourself why you started in the first place. You know what you want and there are things you can do to make it happen.

### FINALLY, PLAN TIME FOR OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE

We so often forget to take care of ourselves, ignoring the little things that matter on our mission to find 'success' in life. Remember the last item on the 'defining what you really want' list? Perhaps you want to make more time for seeing friends and family this year or maintain a self-care routine you started throughout lockdown.

Self-care is just as important for your mindset! Make self-care a priority within your plan - to really clear your mind, reboot your body and find extra motivation. This will bring an added level of positivity and productivity.

Remember, we're all taking this one day at a time. But each day is a day closer to emerging from lockdown and achieving our goals. Small steps each day really can make a difference!

# TIME ZONE CHALLENGES

## CAN THEY ACTUALLY BENEFIT PROPOSAL STAFF?

When Martin Smith approached me to contribute to this edition of Bidding Quarterly around the theme of Father Time, we agreed to catch up at a time that worked for both of us. Living in a vast country on the opposite side of the world, BidWrite's internal daily operations already straddle four time zones. So navigating an eight-hour time difference to catch up between Western Australia (where I am) and the UK (where Martin is) was pretty manageable.

But when I tried to hook our New Zealand-based Marketing Manager into the call, suddenly the three of us catching up proved to be quite the challenge. And we were all very willing to be flexible in our days (or nights)! Little did I know it, but the bones of my contribution to this issue were staring me in the face.

### WHAT'S THE TIME, MR WOLF?

As a business, "What's the time there?" is a question we grapple with daily. Like any organisation operating across multiple time zones, our own routines are well-formed. However, I can pinpoint several times over the last couple of years when our staff were pressed hard, working on JV bids involving European, US or Asian-based companies partnering with Australian companies.

The significant nature of such bids makes them interesting and therefore a fantastic professional experience for our staff. But they are also challenging – not only for the complexity of content, but for the practical issues that surround them.

Our tendency as consultants is to align with the rhythm set by our clients. While efficient and good for business, it can take its toll on staff. Home and professional boundaries blur, staff work against their

natural preferences and sleep patterns get interrupted, impacting performance, straining relationships and raising stress.

Although our aim is to maintain regular 'working hours' for our staff wherever possible, as a profession we've long known that after hours work is required from time to time. However, the growing internationalism of our client base and the relentless march of global business in general means that the very concept of 'working hours' is being increasingly challenged.

BidWrite considers itself extremely fortunate to have more than twenty hard-working professionals who are committed to their craft. They also work tirelessly to help our clients achieve the amazing results they do. We want to keep it that way.

So that got me thinking... Can time zone challenges be used to benefit proposal staff?

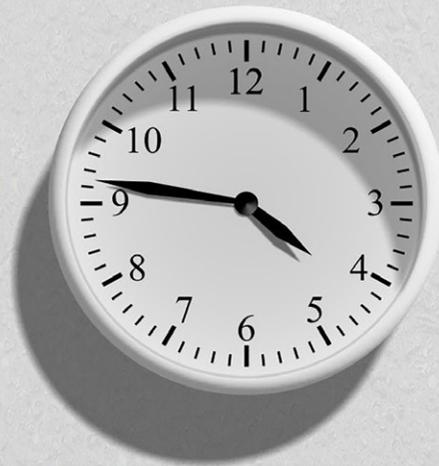
## FOUR WAYS TO USE TIME ZONES TO ADVANTAGE STAFF

Everyone is familiar with the ‘we work while you sleep’ approach to minimising the critical path to bid completion. Instead, what follows are four practical suggestions that focus on maintaining the physical and mental well-being of the very people who make our business so successful and our profession so well-regarded.



### YOU DO THE TIME, YOU TAKE THE TIME

As a management team, we openly acknowledge that in some circumstances time zone challenges are very disruptive. We don't celebrate all-nighters. In fact, we actively discourage the practice. However, when time zones require significant non-standard working hours, we encourage staff to take time-in-lieu to maintain a healthy balance between home and work.



### STRUCTURE YOUR OWN DAY

Busy bidding professionals tend to have equally busy personal lives and we appreciate the need for balance. When time zones impact negatively, staff can flex their working days to ensure they remain refreshed and engaged with the things that matter to them outside their working environment. Yes, we have professional expectations around this but the key to making this work is to lead with trust.



### SHARE THE PAIN

In cases where disruptive time zones can't be worked around, we agree to share the pain with the client. This may sound counter-intuitive for a profession where client centricity is so deeply ingrained. However, it reflects a true partnership, showing respect for staff and the profession. Ultimately, it results in better work.



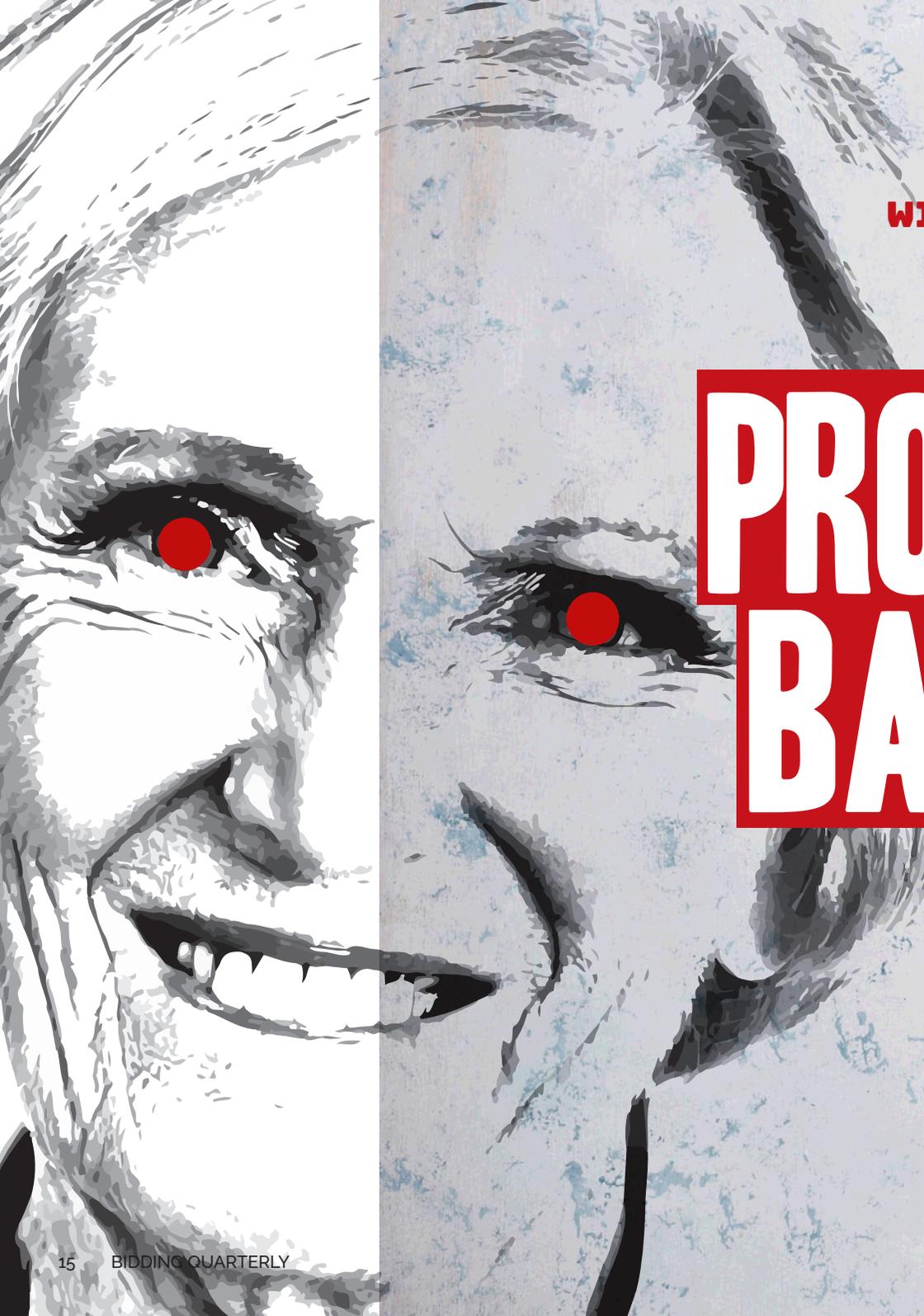
### YOU CAN'T BEAT MOTHER NATURE

In his fascinating book *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing*, author Dan Pink outlines the science behind owls (late risers), larks (early risers) and what he calls third birds (those somewhere in the middle). Using people's different chronotypes can have positive implications for bid team resourcing as it makes sense not to jam square pegs into round holes. For the record, I'm an owl so I'm happy to jump onto a work call at 11pm. But call me at 6am and you might have a different experience!

## A STAFFING BALANCE THAT HAS THE RIGHT PEOPLE AT THE RIGHT TIME

2020 was a tricky year. As leaders in our business, we saw the struggle and it crystallised the fact that looking after our people is a task never finished. Providing flexibility to deal with the fall out of time zone pain was one way we could make a tangible difference for our staff.

So if, like BidWrite, you find yourself increasingly working across multiple time zones, ensure a staffing balance that allows you to deploy the right people, for the right job, at the right time – for them. Perhaps chronotypes can even be explored at the recruitment stage! I'm certain there's plenty more we can do, but making a start is a good start.



**JON  
WILLIAMS**

# **THE PROPOSAL BAKE OFF**

**YOU KNOW  
WHO I HATE?  
MARY BERRY.**





**“ IF YOU CAN, MAKE YOUR LIFE EASIER BY GIVING A BIT OF THOUGHT AS TO WHAT YOU’LL SAY IN THE PROPOSAL BEFORE THE RFP HAS LANDED. DON’T TAKE ON MORE WORK THAN YOU CAN COPE WITH. ”**

**SEE, I LOVE COOKING. I CAN HAPPILY SPEND HOURS IN THE KITCHEN. CHOPPING, MIXING, WHISKING; IT’S ONE OF THE BEST WAYS I KNOW TO SWITCH OFF FROM WORK. ESPECIALLY WHEN WASHED DOWN WITH A GOOD GLASS OF RED.**

But baking? Along comes Dame Mary and her sidekick Paul Hollywood with The Great British Bake Off. And everything’s so daunting, so complicated, so prone to failure that it entirely put me off. There’s not been a freshly baked scone in our house in a decade or more.

Until: lockdown, and needing to find ways to entertain a toddler. Cooking scones together can’t be too hard, right? So we tried. And they worked. Cakes, cookies, hot cross buns? Sure, Erin and I have had the odd disaster, but it’s become a regular thing now on the Fridays I take off each week to spend with her.

Those “Bake Off” judges, making it seem so complicated? They’re got a lot to answer for.

And I worry that, too often, the papers and presentations we frequently see in the bid and proposal profession fall into the Bake Off trap, i.e. “Let’s make it all sound incredibly complex. Let’s, in the process, deter people from engaging in a process that’s actually pretty straightforward.”

Get to know the client. Understand what they need. Don’t bother bidding if you don’t have any relationship or insight: this is most likely not your deal to win.

If you can, make your life easier by giving a bit of thought as to what you’ll say in the proposal before the RFP has landed. Don’t take on more work than you can cope with.

Answer their questions as well as you can, with passion. Get help from someone who knows how to write well, and someone who can make the document look good. Don’t forget to send it in on time.

And try to re-use the best stuff you’ve come up with to get you going next time. (Hey, sometimes using a pack of bread mix is fine to save a bit of time...)

I’m not quite saying that Erin could do it. She’s only two, for goodness’ sake. But it’s pretty simple, right?

So let’s not forget the basics as we all strive for competitive advantage. Indeed, perhaps focusing on the basics might be the very things that could differentiate us and help us to win the deal?

**(And no, I don’t hate Dame Mary. She’s a remarkable, inspiring woman – and perhaps the only person in the country who sounds posher than the Queen. But I’m sure you see my point!)**



**THIS IS ONE OF THOSE ARTICLES  
INSPIRED BY DOING SOMETHING NEW  
OUTSIDE OF BIDDING AND ENJOYING  
THE CLOSE PARALLELS.**

My something new has been to write a crime fiction novel over the past year in the extra time I've had due to being indoors more during the pandemic. I thought about it well before I ever heard of COVID-19, so I decided it was right to seize the opportunity.

I've found it to be a truly fun part of my adjustment to the new way of living. It's been such an exciting experience to apply the elements of storytelling – character points of view, emotional impact, scene entry and exit hooks, character goals, and plenty more. They obviously don't apply in those forms to bidding, but I think there's an overall principle that does apply.

By applying the elements of storytelling in fiction, we're able to describe events, actions and thoughts in ways that help the reader to feel the scenes. I use 'feel' to mean any of the five senses, all encapsulated in the guiding expression, "Show, don't tell."

Take Fred, for instance: “Fred was nervous when he entered the woods.”

That statement provides no sense of Fred’s actual experience in the moment because we’ve been told, not shown. The reader’s left unengaged with the words because they don’t provide anything relatable beyond a generic understanding of the word ‘nervous’. The problem with the lack of ‘showing’ in fiction is that it erodes emotional connection, which means, bit by bit, the reader loses interest and eventually stops reading.

It’s easy to fall into the same trap of bland statements in bidding, using up character, word and page count without leaving the reader engaged with the message. That happens when we tell instead of show.

Imagine Jenny is proposed as the traffic manager in a civil engineering contractor’s bid to Highways England for a road construction project over a mainline railway near the village of Dibley. Imagine also that she’s worked previously with the very stakeholders who don’t want to be unduly affected by the construction.

“Traffic Manager Jenny Jones brings her extensive experience of traffic management liaison.”

Some explanatory text would presumably follow such a statement, and we can’t say the reader will stop reading there and then, but it’s much better to make the sentence work harder on its own by showing something relevant about Jenny’s experience. When ‘empty sentences’, as I call them, are dotted throughout a proposal, they create ‘reader drag’, also merely my own term, which is bad news.

We might instead envisage something along the lines of:

“Traffic Manager Jenny Jones’ 25-year track record of leading traffic management on the strategic road network includes exceeding interfacing stakeholders’ requirements, e.g. KPIs set by the Dibley Village Roads Community Group and Network Rail.”

[Take it as read that the term KPI was defined earlier in the proposal.]

Again, explanatory messaging would be needed, e.g. the past projects and dates, the types of KPI to which Jenny had to work, how much shorter a time period and road length of traffic management (cones, barriers, etc) she required compared with the KPIs. The sentence isn’t trying to give the reader everything they need to know, but three relevant things about Jenny have already been shown:

- **She’s led traffic management for 25 years, so she’s no newbie to the discipline**
- **She’s done so on the strategic road network (A roads and motorways) which is Highways England’s primary interest**
- **She knows what it’s like to interface with the very stakeholders who will matter in that location**

We’re focusing on maximising the likelihood of engaging the reader by showing why Jenny’s the person for the job, not just telling that she’s really good. After all, the last thing we want to hear from a client who needs a new road near Dibley is, “No, no, no.”

So this is really about the well-tested principle of showing the benefits, not just the features; to show why it’s worth reading more – or, as fiction authors say, to maintain tension.

Another example: imagine multiple construction sites run as individual projects within one overall regional scheme for which global coordination and local management are essential.

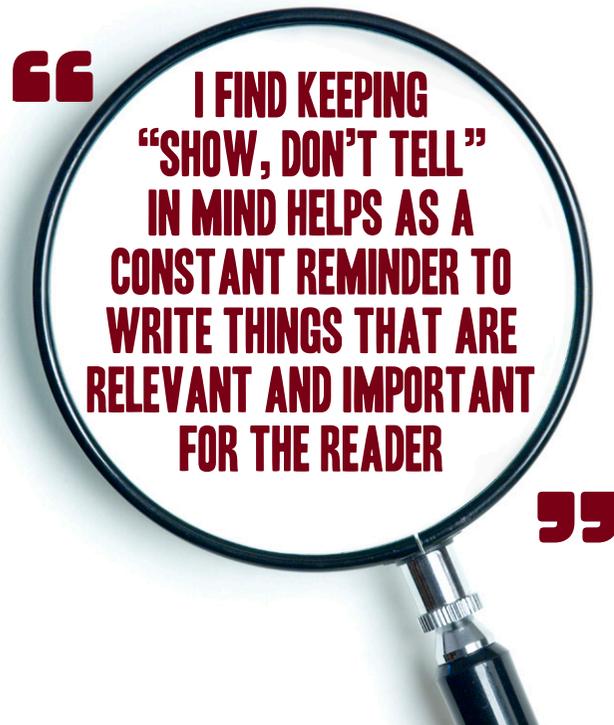
“We understand the importance of overall scheme-wide co-ordination of individual sites.”

That’s a sentence any bidder could write even without any understanding, so it doesn’t provide anything useful and it certainly doesn’t differentiate the bidder. The follow-up messaging would presumably provide the detail but, again, it’s better to make every sentence work harder by showing instead of just telling, maybe something like:

“[Client]’s first point of global co-ordination will be our programme director supported by the steering group leads – commercial; quality; environmental; health, safety and wellbeing – who will work with their site-based counterparts to enable the leads’ knowledge sharing (e.g. lessons learned) between sites for continuous improvement.”

The reader knows who the first point of contact will be, which functions will support that person, the mechanism (steering group) by which scheme co-ordination will happen, and an example of a benefit of knowledge sharing. The way continuous improvement happens might be explained next. Again, the showing doesn’t provide the whole proposal or the whole solution but does provide enough to show there’s a point and that something relevant is coming up.

I find keeping “Show, don’t tell” in mind helps as a constant reminder to write things that are relevant and important for the reader. It’s like an *aide memoire*, if you will, to avoid the temptation to reveal that “Our management system is aligned to [client]’s requirements” or “Our approach is geared to exceeding [client]’s requirements without showing what makes those claims true.”



**JEREMY BRIM**

# THE TIME IS NOW

**PERSONAL  
DEVELOPMENT**

**WINNING  
WORK**

**AFTER SPONSORSHIP BY SENIOR PEOPLE, THE SECOND BIGGEST SUCCESS FACTOR WE FIND IN BUSINESS GROWTH IS A HAVING A CONSISTENT WORK WINNING APPROACH AND LANGUAGE BAKED INTO THE DNA OF THE ORGANISATION, ENABLED BY STRONG PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT.**

**PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT HAS MOVED ON A GREAT DEAL IN THE LAST DECADE. BUT PERHAPS NOT SO MUCH IN WORK WINNING SKILLS. WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIETAL CHANGE WE NOW FACE, WITH AN EVER ACUTE FOCUS ON SUSTAINING ORGANISATIONS - IT'S TIME DEVELOPMENT IN WINNING WORK CAUGHT UP.**

In our research we have found a real shift in how capability is nurtured and advanced.

## LEARNING CONCEPTS THAT HAVE RECEDED:

- One size fits all
- Teaching people linear tasks
- Teaching everyone the same thing and teaching it once
- Fixed multi-day training programmes
- Crude assessments based on instant recall

## LEARNING CONCEPTS THAT HAVE ENDURED THE TEST OF TIME

- The concept that learning is important
- The idea of self-development
- Employers that invest in learning and development are good places to work
- The importance of development for all
- An understanding of how humans learn

We've also noted the 70-20-10 model for learning and development, a commonly used training formula created in the 1980s by researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina. The model outlined the optimum split of learning consumption, suggesting that individuals obtain knowledge, skills and abilities in their roles through a mixture of sources:

- 70% from on-the-job experience
- 20% from social sources such as interactions with others
- 10% from formal structured training

In 2018, Training Industry Inc released an updated report. They found the overall blend is now closer to 55-25-20, with higher quality and more impactful methods in live training and the huge availability of online content.

I've written lots on how we advise creating and driving momentum in win rates improvement, by mobilising structured learning for bidding 'champions' across your

business – creating an initial 'hockey stick' in bidding understanding. The 20%.

And we've talked about landing a single, well-sponsored bid process (usually digitally) where all staff can access it as their constant online bid process and digital reference point. This provides them with a consistent roadmap and governance to follow, perhaps with some embedded guidance or training material to refresh or up-skill bid teams right when they need it, on live bids. The 55%.

What I'd like to amplify this year is the glue between those two - the dramatic impact of the 25%, social learning.

Social learning theory suggests that people learn by observing the behaviour of others, their attitudes and the outcomes. Albert Bandura, a Canadian-American psychologist and Professor Emeritus at Stanford University, hypothesised that social learning spans the gap between behaviourism and cognitivism.

***"Most human behaviour is learned observationally: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action."* – Albert Bandura**

Bandura found that with traditional structured learning methods alone, most people only recall around 10% of the information taught within 72 hours. Staggering right? Research shows that social learning delivers a 75:1 return on investment (ROI) ratio compared to formal training alone and unlocks the spread of knowledge across organisations. It aids talent retention. When we share knowledge, we feel we're part of something bigger – improving employee satisfaction, engagement and attachment to the company.

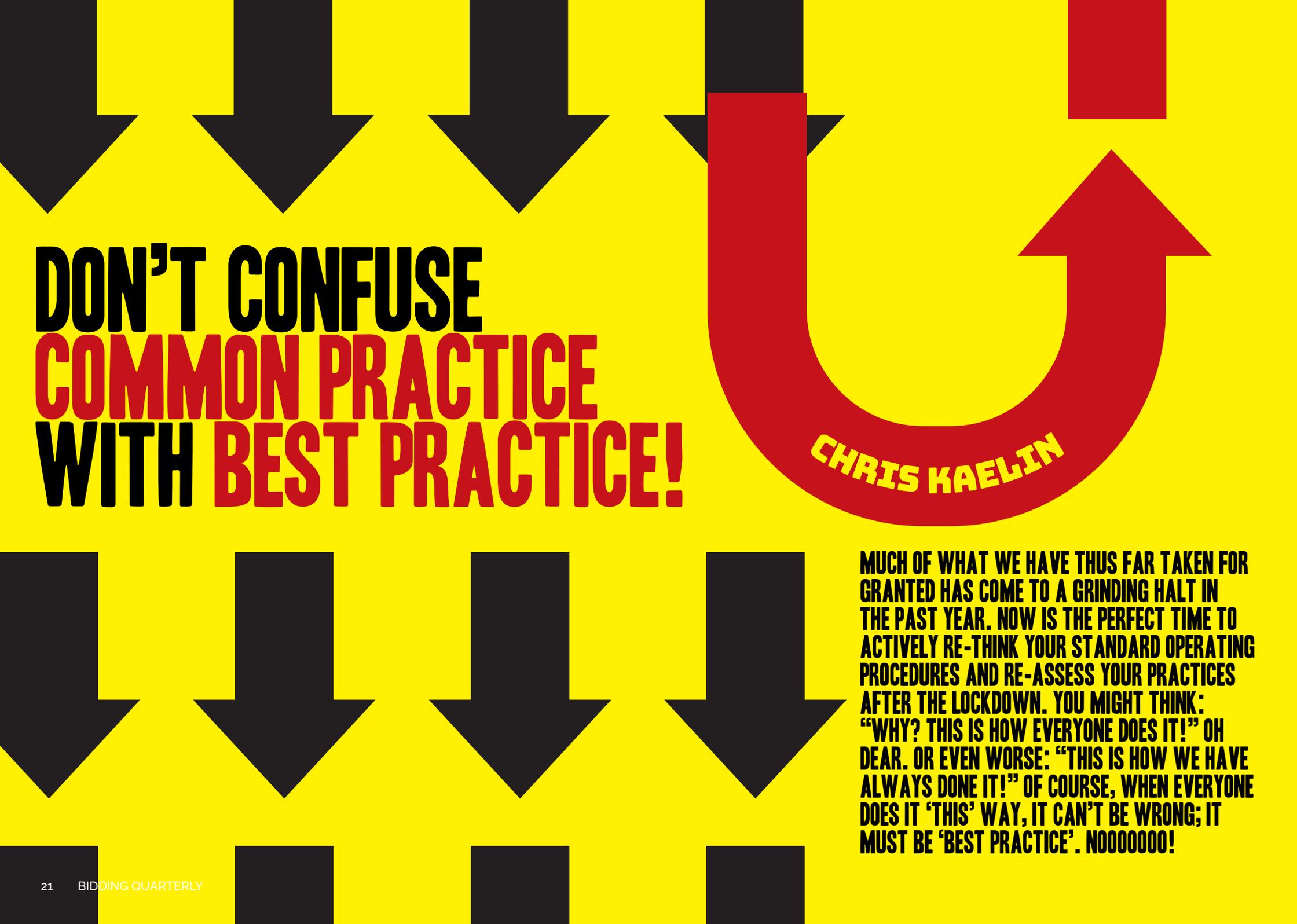
We still think structured learning is an important starting point. But we see social learning as an opportunity to build on that initial engagement – to drive adoption for the long term, encouraging learners to pull knowledge as required from experts within (and beyond) their organisations, instead of just having knowledge pushed on them once.

We believe you can position capture and bid functions at the heart of leveraging social learning in winning work across organisations. Approaches can include creating communication channels for experts to help others, communicating about great contributions, encouraging an environment that rewards performance, and creating a place where staff can ask questions and get answers to promote a social culture of collaborative learning. You could consider reverse-mentoring – engaging senior stakeholders (through live bids and outside the war room) to coach them on what is required in terms of skills and inputs from a bid perspective but also behaviours from the business, engendering buy in.

You could also spend time with the grads and apprentices in your business, getting them aligned with bidding best practice early – so when they rise through the business, they already understand good work winning practices.

We can tell you it really works. We're building on our work with our client Quod, the pre-eminent planning consultancy. We landed a 55-25-20 development programme for them in 2019, resulting in a 20% improvement in win rate, 7% reduction in cost of sale and a dramatic step change in the experience and satisfaction in bidding for their people.

We're now implementing social learning techniques at the heart of our work-winning transformation programmes and seeing our clients reaping the rewards. And to aid the development of our discipline, we're also sharing these techniques through our participation in The Red Review Patreon community – including interviews with work-winning leaders, running micro-learning sessions and drop-in surgeries, and holding breakfast webinars and online conferences with topical panel debates and guest speakers.



# **DON'T CONFUSE COMMON PRACTICE WITH BEST PRACTICE!**

**CHRIS KAELIN**

**MUCH OF WHAT WE HAVE THUS FAR TAKEN FOR GRANTED HAS COME TO A GRINDING HALT IN THE PAST YEAR. NOW IS THE PERFECT TIME TO ACTIVELY RE-THINK YOUR STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES AND RE-ASSESS YOUR PRACTICES AFTER THE LOCKDOWN. YOU MIGHT THINK: "WHY? THIS IS HOW EVERYONE DOES IT!" OH DEAR. OR EVEN WORSE: "THIS IS HOW WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE IT!" OF COURSE, WHEN EVERYONE DOES IT 'THIS' WAY, IT CAN'T BE WRONG; IT MUST BE 'BEST PRACTICE'. NOOOOOO!**

In principle, best practice is always the 'best' approach according to today's standards. However, clearly identifying which approach is 'best' sometimes comes down to a matter of opinion.

Many people get 'best practice' mixed up with 'common practice'. For example, if practically all companies were using Microsoft PowerPoint®, with lots of bullet points for their proposal presentations, it would be classed as common practice. Everyone does the same thing because it's within their comfort zones. But the fact that everyone does it this way does not mean that it's the best practice. There are better alternatives to a marathon of dull slides. This is NOT best practice!

In general, best practice is often a matter of healthy common sense rather than a complicated science. This is also the case in bid and proposal management. There are plenty of things we know but still don't put into practice; we don't think to do so or just don't have the time or inclination. In this case, it makes sense to stop, think about it and plan a new strategy. Specifically, we want our proposal document to stand out because the 'average' common practice proposal only has random chances of winning the deal. The issue is we usually don't like leaving our comfort zone. And oh boy, are there many comfort zones in bid and proposal management! But so often, once we have chosen to enter new territories, we realise how easy it was and how much we have achieved with a tiny little effort!

## SO, GET OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE! SIX SIMPLE EXAMPLES:

**“ THE ISSUE IS WE USUALLY DON'T LIKE LEAVING OUR COMFORT ZONE. AND OH BOY, ARE THERE MANY COMFORT ZONES IN BID AND PROPOSAL MANAGEMENT! BUT SO OFTEN, ONCE WE HAVE CHOSEN TO ENTER NEW TERRITORIES, WE REALISE HOW EASY IT WAS AND HOW MUCH WE HAVE ACHIEVED WITH A TINY LITTLE EFFORT! ”**

### 1) 'Proposal'

It starts with the title. How many submissions have the meaningless and dull title 'Proposal' instead of 'Increasing ABC's productivity with [bidder's] state-of-the-art collaboration tools'?

### 2) "Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to make a proposal."

Not really the most exciting option for starting an executive summary, right? Yawn. Dull. Just drop this.

### 3) "You are important to us."

Sure, customers are important as they mean business for you. But your customer doesn't care about this. Drop it. Horrible marketing twaddle.

### 4) 'Fig. 3.2: Solution Architecture'

Solution Architecture! How exciting. Instead write something that is beneficial to your client, such as 'Fig. 3.2: The solution is fully redundant, leading to an availability of 99.98%, ensuring ABC will deliver their services without interruption'.

### 5) 'You' instead of 'Us': Customer orientation on its simplest level

Say "You will receive..." instead of "We will provide...".

Say "You will benefit from our solution by..." instead of "Our solution can...".

Say "Your organisation will be able to..." instead of "Our company is...".

### 6) "If you like our proposal, we are looking forward to hearing from you."

Sure. This would be nice. However, if we were really interested in this customer, it would be our job to follow-up with them, not vice versa. This is called 'selling'. Those times where we can simply wait for orders are definitely over.

Yes, you can do it!

You have certainly recognised that getting out of the comfort zone can be quite simple and also very effective. In these crazy times where people no longer conform to the 9-5 (particularly after last year, which felt like a time warp in so many ways), this might be the perfect occasion to also re-think your 'standard operating procedures' (common practices).

**Don't confuse common practice with best practice!**

### 1. GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT PERSONALLY?

Maintaining my drive for change through the ups and downs of life.

### 2. BEST ADVICE YOU'VE BEEN GIVEN THAT'S HELPED YOU IN YOUR WORK?

I discovered this tacked to a wall on a colleague's desk 20 years ago and it stopped me in my tracks. For many years I wrongly attributed it to Nelson Mandela, but it's actually by a female author, Marianne Williamson. It's driven everything that I believe.

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.*

*We are all meant to shine, as children do. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.*

*As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."*

### 3. BIGGEST PET HATE?

Laziness. The unquestioning acceptance of the status quo. Sexism. Racism. Adopted prejudices.

### 4. GUILTY PLEASURE?

Podcasts of "This American Life" They have been doing it weekly for 25 years and I've heard nearly all of them during lockdown.

### 5. DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN THREE WORDS.

Driven, openminded, independent.

### 6. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR 18-YEAR-OLD SELF?

Do it. Enjoy it. Be fearless and free.

### 7. WHAT WAS YOUR DREAM JOB GROWING UP?

Anything that involved being paid to ride horses across large continents without any of the annoying details like looking after them or putting a tent up every night.

## ANNE MCNAMARA

Anne is CEO of ShineX and is one of the co-founders of the ReBuild Project, an initiative that is calling on the construction industry to address gender inequality in:

Remuneration • Representation • Recognition

[WWW.THEREBUILDPROJECT.CO.UK](http://WWW.THEREBUILDPROJECT.CO.UK)

# IN THE SPOTLIGHT

## 8. WHAT QUESTIONS ARE YOU ASKING YOURSELF?

When will we see the tipping point where industry shifts away from gender pay gaps and lack of representation of women on boards?

Why do women put up with so much shit?

How come some businesses get it so right while others still cling on to the status quo?

Was Trump an outlier or a portent of things to come?

## 9. ONE THING YOU'D LIKE TO DO BETTER?

Have more patience. I'm working on it...

## 10. IF YOU WON THE LOTTERY, WHAT WOULD BE YOUR FIRST INDULGENCE?

A Tesla. The Model S with the huge waiting list. Ridiculous really...but you did say 'indulgence' and the other option would be too calorific.



50%  
WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE POSITIONS BY 2030



## 11. FAVOURITE PASTIMES?

Anything to do with the water, river canoeing, sea swimming, generally messing around in it, and I still can't resist a good gallop on a horse as long as I can hand it back to someone else to do all of the management.

## 12. MOST IMPORTANT LESSON FOR LIFE IN GENERAL?

Love.

It's what it's all about. It's never wasted. It's often the only thing that can shift perceptions and bring the change that's needed.

## 13. WHAT'S PRECIOUS TO YOU?

My three kids, my husband, my huge extended family. Freedom of speech, freedom of opportunity, equality and justice.

Seeing good people, especially women, growing and thriving in work, career and life.



20%  
GENDER PAY GAP IN CONSTRUCTION



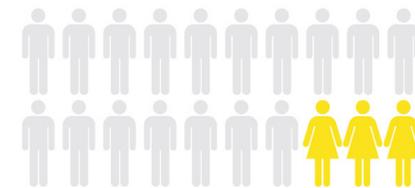
## 14. WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THOSE NEW INTO THE BID PROFESSION?

If you're a woman in bidding in a mid-sized or large company I would advise that you find out what your male colleagues are earning and check that you are not being paid less. On the empirical evidence, you probably are.

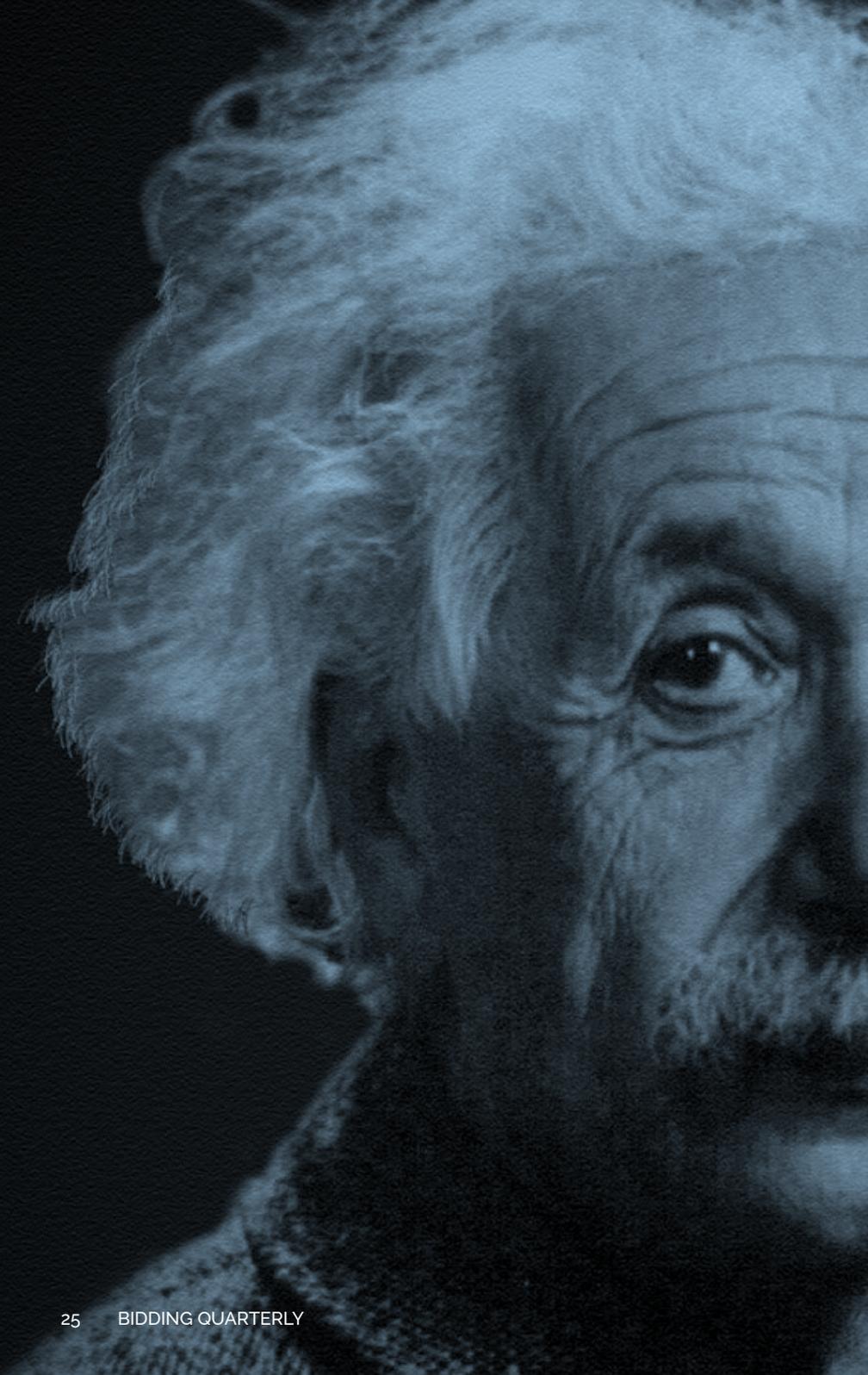
If you are a man, be a good ally. If you're asked the salary question by a female colleague, tell her. More for her does not mean less for you. It means that the profession is being taken more seriously for you both.

In the past two months I have spoken to 20+ women (in construction) on this issue and so far, 80% of these women have uncovered that they have been paid less in the past or now than their male counterparts.

Bidding creates value. A lot of value. It's a demanding, stressful job that requires a lot of skill and a strong dollop of inspiration. It's a great career and deserves good people. Those good people deserve equal pay.



THE INDUSTRY EMPLOYS OVER 2 MILLION PEOPLE, ONLY 15% ARE WOMEN



**TIME IS A  
CONSTANT,  
EXCEPT WHEN  
IT IS AN  
ILLUSION**

**ALBERT EINSTEIN**

**IN HIS SPECIAL THEORY OF RELATIVITY, EINSTEIN DETERMINED THAT TIME IS RELATIVE - IN OTHER WORDS, THE RATE AT WHICH TIME PASSES DEPENDS ON YOUR FRAME OF REFERENCE. HE ALSO SAID TIME IS AN ILLUSION.**

## TONY BIRCH

“**IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES I FIND IT IS DIFFICULT TO FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE. I HAVE TO KEEP REMINDING MYSELF THAT THE FUSION OF WORK AND PRIVATE LIVES CAN BE CHALLENGING FOR EMPLOYEES AS WELL AS LEADERS. FAST DECISION MAKING AND REAL-TIME INFORMATION SHARING CAN BE DIFFICULT WHEN WORKING REMOTELY, BUT IT IS STILL IMPORTANT.**”

I have a lot of experience with working remotely and at home. I have worked at home and in hotel rooms for many years. I would like to share my thoughts with you in case they can help you to work in the current normal. The global pandemic has certainly changed my frame of reference. Hence, my perception of time and the technology that I use to make my working time productive every day.

Constantly working at home has meant adapting to a new environment and facing a new set of distractions, as well as experiencing an unprecedented fusion of work and personal life. In order to continue working efficiently and creating value under these new circumstances, we all should do our best to understand and accept our own specific situations and needs.

In the early stages of the pandemic, I picked up this adage from somewhere and it has stuck with me:

**“Remember, you are at home trying to work, not working from home.” (Source unknown)**

To me, this means that I will not achieve all that I want, or expect, to do in a day because of the situation. The fusion of work and personal life changes my perception of time. Some days seem to be very long and some seem to disappear without any sense of achievement.

At times, technical issues prevent me from getting my work done, or logging in to a specific tool, or using all the features of virtual meetings. Screen fatigue causes my attention span to reduce. For me at least, staring at a screen is more tiring than face-to-face interaction. I find that I cannot engage directly as easily with my colleagues and clients. As for work/life balance, sometimes I find it difficult to finish my working day.

How have I addressed this? Firstly, I set up an organised and quiet working space (I have the luxury of enough space at home) and have learnt to accept the “distractions” that cannot be avoided, such as the dog barking or the doorbell ringing.

Secondly, I have begun to understand the benefits of virtual meetings. They can be made to last only as long as necessary to achieve their purpose and there is no travel time. I have taken some time to become familiar with the different technologies

and tools that I must use, ensuring that I communicate ground rules for each virtual event and plan in time for ‘tech-checks’.

Thirdly, I have opened my mind to not being afraid to try something new. Not only am I using technology and tools that I would never have thought I would, I have also actively researched to find alternatives to those technologies in case there are even better ones out there.

What am I still not good at? I do not check-in with friends, family and colleagues frequently enough, just to socialise and to avoid a social disconnect. I am not good at deciding when I am working and when I am not. Often this means that I can get to the end of the day without taking a break.

My final thoughts are for those of you in a leadership role. In these difficult times, I find it is difficult to focus on the positive. I have to keep reminding myself that the fusion of work and private lives can be challenging for employees as well as leaders. Fast decision making and real-time information sharing can be difficult when working remotely but it is still important.

In both your work and personal lives, quick and appropriate reactions are essential “in case of emergency”. Plan ahead. Define and communicate approval procedures for how to escalate matters before a situation arises. One inevitably will.

As leaders, we should practice and encourage authenticity and empathy, as well as maintain an appropriate work/life balance for everybody.

We are all learning to work in a different way. As with all bidding, there is never enough time. We must change our frame of reference and make time pass at the speed we would like it to, even if it is only an illusion.



LISA READMAN

# TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

# “TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE” - A WELL-KNOWN PHRASE WHICH GENERALLY IMPLORES US TO HURRY UP AND DO... SOMETHING.

It is also a phrase regularly used in contract law, where the contract requirement (or an element of it) must be completed by a stipulated time or date. (Sounds familiar, doesn't it?)

Anecdotally, the first use of the phrase in a contract was in the United States in the 1860s. President Abraham Lincoln signed The Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, providing the foundation for building the transcontinental railway. The railroad builders – the Union Pacific Railroad and the Central Pacific Railroad – would be given 6,400 acres of land and \$48,000 in government bonds for every mile of track completed. However, the contract stipulated that all assets (land and bonds) would be forfeited if the project wasn't completed within 12 years (it was, three years early).

Essentially, the contract became a race. The company that worked faster and laid more miles of track received more grants and bonds. Time truly was of the essence for each company's success.

Time is also of the essence in our profession. Every submission document includes a reminder that bids received after the stated return date and time will not be considered. Even in the world's 'new normal', we remain bound to the abstract concept of time to earn our living. Calendars and clocks still dictate our days. Deadlines are still set and met. Meetings are still arranged and attended. The time 'flux' over the past year hasn't changed anything about the bidding process. The requirement (read 'stress') of delivering a job on time, winning work and moving on to the next has remained. It's 'business as usual'.

Only it's not.

A case in point: One of my clients works on a national framework for a blue-chip company, with new work packages issued annually. Pre-Covid, the business

development, operations and bid teams gathered together regularly, from kick-off through to submission, distributing work and reviewing information live and in person. Efficiently, productively, collaboratively.

This year, the process was carried out via telephone and Teams. Yes, we saved time by not commuting from all parts of the country to a central location. We saved money working from home rather than staying in hotels overnight during the tender period. But what did we lose?

Quick resolutions to questions (and disagreements). Communal tea breaks (where someone else makes the tea!). Camaraderie in the bidding trenches. We were still efficient, productive and collaborative but...it just took so much more time.

In our profession, we tend to measure time in phases (capture, bid and pursuit, proposal) or tasks (PQQs, tenders, presentations). Milestones planned. Targets met. In the past year, however, we've been forced to consider time differently and see it for what it is – the most important resource in any kind of operation. It is the only thing that you can't create more of or replace with something else.

"Time at large" is the lesser known, opposite contract clause to "time is of the essence". It usually means only that works must be completed within a 'reasonable' time. Our current, non-traditional, flexible working methods have provided opportunities to find a balance between the two. Is there a deadline? Yes. Do you have to meet the deadline working 9 to 5? No.

In late February, the Prime Minister told a rail industry conference he was confident workers would return to traditional work patterns "in a few short months" when lockdown restrictions were eased. Will we ever return to the way we used to work? Do we want to? Should we?

According to Stephen Covey (author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*), "The essence of time management is to set priorities and then to organise and execute around them. Setting priorities requires us to think carefully and clearly about values, about ultimate concerns. These then have to be translated into long- and short- term goals and plans, [and] translated once more into schedules or time slots. Then, unless something **more important** — not something more urgent — comes along, we must discipline ourselves to do as we planned."

We have had to learn new ways to work together – and apart – while still being productive and efficient. As we move forward into a post-lockdown world, we will frame the events of the last 15 months through our own lenses. What will we see?

Perhaps in our ongoing perception of time and its use, it will be enough if we have learned there is a difference between what is urgent and what is important.

“ THE REQUIREMENT (READ ‘STRESS’) OF DELIVERING A JOB ON TIME, WINNING WORK AND MOVING ON TO THE NEXT HAS REMAINED. IT’S ‘BUSINESS AS USUAL’.

ONLY IT’S NOT. ”

# ACCELERATED CHANGE IN THE WORLD OF WINNING

WE WERE ALREADY SEEING SOME CHANGES IN BUYING AND SELLING BEFORE THE PANDEMIC HIT: MORE DECISION MAKERS, LATER MARKET ENGAGEMENT, LESS TIME TO RESPOND AND SO ON. NOTHING NEW THERE. BUT THINGS HAVE CHANGED OVER THE PANDEMIC. THESE CHANGES ARE NICELY SUMMARISED BY DATA SHOWN IN A RECENT MCKINSEY SURVEY:

**70%-80%**

of B2B (business to business) decision makers prefer remote human interactions

Digital selling is as, or more, effective in terms of reaching and servicing customers (UK same, US/Brazil + 20%, India +38%)

**20%**

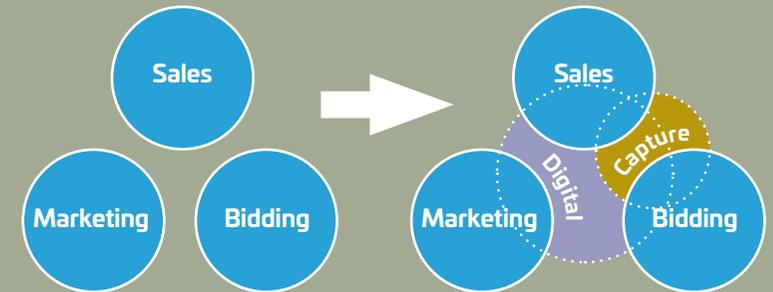
Only 20% of buyers hope to return to in-person sales meetings post-pandemic

Consumers' loyalty is diminishing; they are changing supplier more often. There's a risk that this trend moves into B2B and B2G (business to government) environments.

**15%**

of buyers are spending over \$1m digitally today – i.e. without any F2F (face to face) interaction

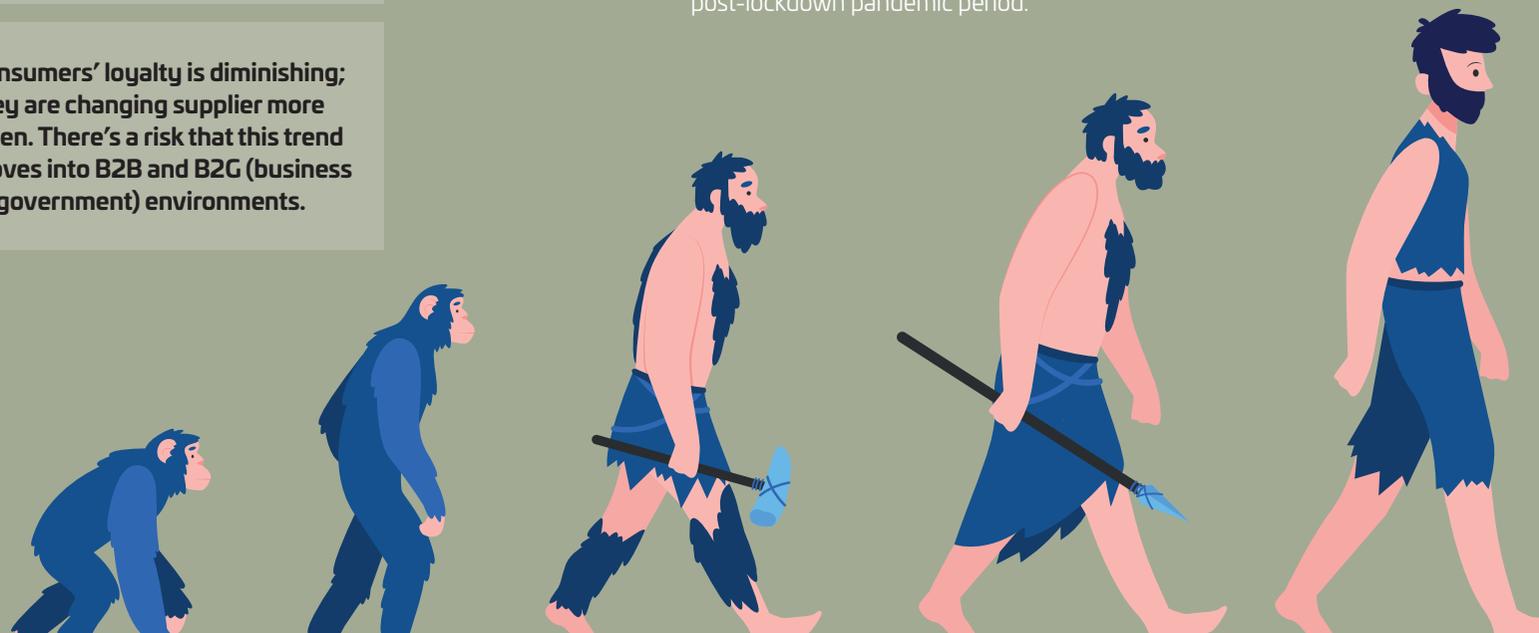
Moving forward, the most effective organisations will be the ones who are able to bridge the silos between their own sales, marketing and bidding teams - where Bidding = Capture + Proposals + Pitching. The APMP's focus on capture and its move into digital marketing (as evidenced in recent conferences) demonstrates how some of the gaps can be bridged with new approaches and practices, as shown below:



Siloed teams, minimal skills and knowledge share

Separate teams but some shared winning responsibilities

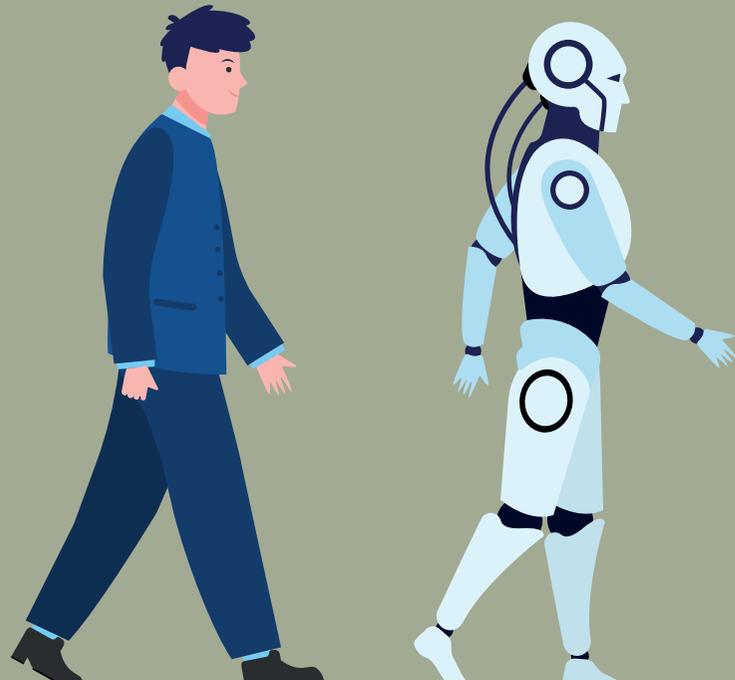
New virtual and digitally-enabled capability and associated approaches will drive the capture process and invigorate traditional proposal and pitch capabilities. Here are three key things that organisations should be working on to be successful as we enter the post-lockdown pandemic period.



## 1. ARE YOUR RETENTION PROCESSES GOOD ENOUGH?

Assume your competitors will be smarter with their approaches and are getting their message to your existing customer in new and innovative digital ways. Test your current approach to retention. Ask yourselves:

- **Is your organisation as sticky as possible with your customer?**
- **Are your account management processes geared up for proactively retaining customers?**
- **Are you going beyond the SLA reporting, calculating and sharing the real value you are delivering?**
- **Are you building and maintaining relationships with all of the people who make buying decisions? This is often not exploited in all industries, especially where the deals are typically project-based.**
- **Do you have a structured process for renewing? Remember over 75% of buyers would seriously consider retaining an incumbent if they received a compelling offer.**
- **Could you protect 75% of your existing B2B customers without them going to market?**



## 2. WHAT'S YOUR ORGANISATION'S PERCEPTION IN YOUR MARKETPLACE?

Organisations have been countering the lowering levels of customer loyalty by promoting the good things they are doing and showing leadership during the challenging times. For example, Bank of America promised not to make job cuts during the pandemic and Starbucks committed to give free coffee to frontline health workers. So, think...

- **Is your company talking about what you are doing or did during the pandemic?**
- **Is this a strength or a weakness versus your competitors?**
- **What do your customers now see when they look at your organisation? This may change how you approach bidding for work as previous assumptions on customer perception may have changed.**

Three other predictions:

- **Organisations will need to be more agile moving forward, as changes to customer and market demands will happen quicker**
- **All organisations will be looking for help being more digital and data savvy**
- **Cutting costs will remain critical for organisations – but it's critical they don't cut things that will devalue their brand**

For bidders this means you need to find ways to help your customers and prospects achieve savings whilst protecting and enhancing their most valuable attributes. If you can help them be more flexible, provide digital assets and analytical tools and skills, then you'll also be hitting an important hot button.

## 3. ARE YOUR BIDDING CAPABILITIES ADAPTING FAST ENOUGH?

The more successful bidding organisations are likely to focus on chasing fewer opportunities, going at each qualified opportunity earlier and executing them better and smarter. They'll target winning by creating customer demand and have strategies that start with a goal of winning proactively (i.e. avoiding procurement and competition). How does this compare to your current approach?

Ask yourselves these five things:

1. **Can you call upon resources and expertise to create targeted digital campaigns that engage the people you want to connect to?**
2. **Are you effective at identifying and working with coaches within the organisations that you want to win work with?**
3. **Do you have the expertise to create the need for your customer to change, using storytelling techniques and consulting strategies to influence and persuade them?**
4. **Are you maximising the impact of every customer interaction by using the latest communication and virtual pitching techniques?**
5. **Do your capture plans include planning to get your customer's procurement teams on side at the right time?**

Many of you will recognise the trends and challenges that I've mentioned. Over 80% of the participants in the McKinsey report I referenced earlier believe that the changes will endure, so it's up to you to determine whether you are geared up to handle them. Only by challenging your organisation's current approach now, can you be sure that you can maximise the opportunity to win as we move forward in the new post-pandemic world.

A meerkat is shown in profile, standing on its hind legs and looking upwards. The background is a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The meerkat's fur is light brown and grey.

PETER MCPARTLAND

# KEEPING MY ATTENTION

**A YEAR OF HOME WORKING - FOR MANY, NOT JUST THE FEW - HAS EMPHASISED A TREND THAT I'VE BEEN MINDFUL OF FOR MANY YEARS. LONG GONE ARE THE DAYS THAT OUR BID RESPONSES ARE SCRUTINISED IN DETAIL BY TEAMS OF EVALUATORS CONCENTRATING ON PRINT OUTS OF OUR IN-DEPTH ANSWERS, PAGE BY PAGE.**

**WHAT THIS MEANS IS THAT MORE THAN EVER BEFORE WE NEED TO FIND WAYS TO BRING OUR BIDS TO LIFE FOR THE READER IF THEY ARE TO MAINTAIN CONCENTRATION WHEN REVIEWING OUR BIDS.**

## GLUED TO OUR SCREENS

A surge in screen time during lockdown saw adults in the UK glued to their devices for more than 40% of the waking day, according to 2020 research by industry watchdog Ofcom. In its annual study of the nation's media habits, Ofcom found adults in the UK spent an average of 45 hours in front of screens time each week - computers, mobiles and TV. That figure is often reaching 70 hours for desk-based workers who are no longer commuting to an office.

Alarming, our screen time rose by almost 33% compared to the 2019 figure, as lockdown forced people to stay indoors for months on end. As lockdowns continue, it is expected to rise even further.

Our increased screen time reinforces the reality that today, there are very few of us not programmed to expect instantaneous access to information, goods, services and people. It doesn't matter what generation we would traditionally pigeon-hole audiences into based on their age. We constantly flit between applications and devices. Online meetings have even given rise to attendees engaging in meetings whilst tapping away on their keyboard and checking their mobiles. Incredible advances in mobile connectivity continue to drive our expectations of immediacy and variety even further.

The fact is that our core DNA has been reprogrammed to reduce our motivation to spend time performing research or analysing information.

## WHY LOCKDOWN LIFE HAS KILLED OUR ATTENTION SPAN

Added to the above is a realisation that lockdown life has meant people's ability to concentrate for long periods of time has been challenged like never before. Covid-19 has forced us to replace face-to-face engagement with online experiences. We jump from one virtual meeting to another. We are suffering visual fatigue from prolonged exposure to a screen. Opportunities for scheduled 'switch-off' time in our commutes and social catch-ups have gone. Our mental-wellbeing has also been affected as anxieties about how we will personally exist in a post-lockdown world are pricked by the media.

## OUR AUDIENCES ARE BOMBARDED BY DISTRACTIONS EVERY DAY

Lifestyles that demand quick satisfaction and constant connectivity make it increasingly difficult to hold readers' attention as they perform more reactive and simultaneous behaviours than ever before. In a well-publicised study by Microsoft, performed in the middle of the last decade, they concluded that the human attention span had dropped to eight seconds, shrinking nearly 25% since the start of the century. This figure is only going one way and the gap between ourselves and the humble goldfish, linked with a figure of nine seconds, will certainly grow.

# BRINGING OUR BIDS TO LIFE

It's critical that our bid response and content is engaging, authoritative and thought-provoking. It needs to constantly stimulate through creativity, variety and focus. Here are some reminders:

**VERY FEW BIDS WILL EVER BE PRINTED AND SO SHOULD BE LANDSCAPE (NOT PORTRAIT) TO FIT TO THE SCREEN.**

**HIGHLIGHT METRICS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO THE CLIENT, CLEARLY DEMONSTRATING WHAT THE MEASURABLE IMPACT OF WORKING WITH YOU WILL BE.**

**AVOID APPLYING RIGID LAYOUT STYLES ACROSS EVERY PAGE AS THEY FOSTER MONOTONY.**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER BEFORE. THEY SHOULD BE ALIGNED TO A BEST PRACTICE FORMAT TO ENSURE THEY ARE FOCUSED, LOGICAL AND HAVE IMPACT.**

**USE VIDEOS TO DRIVE ENGAGEMENT AND CREATE A MORE MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE. RESEARCH SHOWS THAT VIEWERS RETAIN 95% OF A MESSAGE WHEN THEY WATCH IT IN A VIDEO, COMPARED TO 10% WHEN READING IT IN TEXT.**

**LESS WRITTEN CONTENT, STRONG VISUALS, FACTS AND FIGURES ALL ENABLE THE REVIEWER TO MOVE THROUGH THE DOCUMENT AT A QUICKER PACE. REVIEW AND REPLACE TRADITIONAL PARAGRAPHS WITH DIAGRAMS. HIGHLIGHT EVIDENCE THROUGH INFOGRAPHICS AND CLIENT QUOTES. SEE WHITE SPACE AS AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR LAYOUT.**

**A CLEAR AND SIMPLIFIED DOCUMENT STRUCTURE WILL ENABLE THE READER TO PROGRESS CONFIDENTLY. YOU SHOULD BUILD INTERACTIVITY THROUGHOUT THE DOCUMENT TO STREAMLINE NAVIGATION AND INTRODUCE DIFFERENT MEDIA. WEBSITE DESIGNERS USE A 'THREE-CLICKS TO ANYWHERE/FROM ANYWHERE' PRINCIPLE.**

**EMPHASISE THE CLIENT THROUGHOUT THE RESPONSE USING IMAGES THEY CAN RELATE TO. ACCENTUATE DETAILS YOU KNOW ABOUT THEM BEYOND SIMPLY THEIR COMPANY NAME.**

**PARAGRAPHS OF TEXT WILL ALWAYS FORM PARTS OF YOUR BID. ENSURE YOU COMMIT ENOUGH TIME TO CARRY OUT COPY-SMOOTHING TO REMOVE AMBIGUITY, REPETITION AND DUPLICATION IN YOUR COPY.**

**BREAK PAGES UP WITH HEADLINES. ASK YOURSELVES, "IF THESE HEADLINES WERE ONLINE, WOULD THEY BE COMPELLING ENOUGH TO BE CLICKED ON?"**

**Lockdowns, and the effects of an increasingly digitalised lifestyle on the brain, mean we must work harder than ever before to help bid reviewers maintain concentration when reviewing our bids.**

# NETWORKING IN A POST-COVID WORLD



THE THEME “OLD FATHER TIME” REMINDED ME OF THE FAMILIAR WEATHERVANE, WHERE FATHER TIME IS BLOWN WEST OR EAST AND TURNS BACK WHEN THE WIND CHANGES. THERE IS A LOVELY SAMENESS AND PREDICTABILITY ABOUT IT. THAT HAS ALL FLIPPED AROUND A BIT IN A POST-COVID WORLD.



“

ULTIMATELY, WE ALL MUST REASSESS HOW WE CONNECT AND ADAPT IN THIS NEW WORLD. HOPEFULLY, IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE IT ONCE AGAIN BECOMES AS FAMILIAR AND PREDICTABLE AS THE WEATHERVANE.

”

We have a need for familiarity to bring comfort and yet, unlike the weathervane, our reality in this new world is not as predictable as we all crave.

I run my own business. Unlike many of my fellow Experts, I have a procurement background and provide consultancy for businesses pitching in a formal procurement process (a slight “gamekeeper turned poacher” activity, I confess). That said, networking for work opportunities or otherwise is the same whether you are providing bid support, creative writing, or in my case, commercial advice. Certainly, BC (“Before Covid”) it was, like Father Time, a little formulaic as to how one went about it. These new communication opportunities may be familiar to you but for me, I met people at conferences or seminars – either attending or presenting – and I always planned to meet a minimum of two new people at each event. Having a coffee with someone before or after a day’s work near their offices or the station was a particular favourite as it was a great way to start or end a working day as well as beating the commuting crowds. I also used LinkedIn to comment on others’ posts or specifically write my own posts knowing that most people might read them on a train journey home. Thursdays were known as being the best day of the week for that.

Now that we are starting to get out the other side of lockdown 3.0, I have been reflecting on how conscious and unconscious signals have changed in business over the last year and how they have helped – or hindered - networking.

First impressions are delivered through a screen, as is building up knowledge of the client. I can tell you about an individual’s décor and taste in their kitchen/front room/bedroom (delete as appropriate) but how does that help me understand the culture of the company? This was normally easy to guess when being in their reception area or in a meeting room in their offices. There is now no water cooler moment when that extra nugget of information is often imparted casually. And how can you pick out a potential key contact or two amongst a sea of virtual faces at an online seminar?

I have also noticed that LinkedIn is becoming a little like Facebook with the more relaxed forms of posts: lots around home office set ups and home-schooling anxieties. People are, in general, a little more time poor. (This has been backed up by studies

starting to show that working hours in the UK are creeping up for a number of us. Makes you wonder where we would put that commute in the working day now.) ‘Office’ attire is more relaxed with ‘Dress for Your Day’ (in this case sitting at home) being taken to its max and becoming much more common. All channels of communication are becoming more instantaneous and managing the bombardment of instant messaging, video calls and WhatsApp – all now used as standard for business - is a skill.

So, what have I learned that I can share here?

- **Firstly, accept that children, animals, and other family members may feature unexpectedly in calls. It shows a different side to us all and can create conversation in itself: Thelma the cat has become quite renowned for attending my meetings.**
- **Do not expect to top and tail someone’s working day with a catch up. Assume working patterns won’t get back to pre-BC times even with loosening of the lockdown regulations. Flexibility is important but so is an understanding of differing types of circumstances.**
- **Be always “camera ready” both for you and for your surroundings. First impressions still count even when at home.**
- **Be more visible across all channels, be more organised about networking and expect it to take a little longer to develop.**
- **Think less about presentations, i.e. have a great story to tell, but tell it verbally. Screens are small enough without having to follow micro-scale documents.**
- **Expect to be more direct with your questions to gather information, especially about culture, working styles and interpersonal dynamics.**
- **The most important for me is if you know them at all, ask how they are faring. Everyone is dealing with this differently so spending even a few minutes just to let them download will make a huge difference.**

Ultimately, we all must reassess how we connect and adapt in this new world. Hopefully, it won’t be long before it once again becomes as familiar and predictable as the weathervane.



# WE SPENT SOME TIME REFLECTING ON WHAT WE HAD LEARNED OVER THE YEARS. WE PUT THE BITS TOGETHER AND CAME UP WITH A TEMPLATE FOR DOING IT.

## STEP 1

State you can do it all, blatantly and succinctly. Do this right up front.

## STEP 2

Open the next sentences or paragraphs with run in headings (headings which are part of the text of the paragraph). Use the client's requirement text (actual words) in these headings, e.g. "We will meet each milestone on time by creating a project office ...". Note: bolding their words will help the evaluators find their scoring points.

## STEP 3

Describe each consecutive step in the process in the style, "The Project Director will create a plan to ...". "She will check for ...". "If she uncovers a problem, she will ..." etc.

## STEP 4

Show absolute ownership of the process steps. Check every time 'passive voice' is used and turn the sentence around to see if you can make it active. It is no good saying "The plan will be created ...". It is important that the client sees that the right person will be doing the work, e.g. "The Project Director will create a plan to ...". This can also save words and characters.

## STEP 5

Examine every instance of "and" in your text. See if you can replace it with a full stop. (Did you see the "and" had gone from these two sentences?). This saves more words and characters.

## STEP 6

If you have any words or characters left, select all you can from:

- **A benefit the client will get**
- **A benefit the client's client will get**
- **Where you have done it successfully before**
- **Where you have won an award for it**
- **Where your solution has worked really well elsewhere (even if it was not you doing it). You must describe why you believe this is the best solution for this client.**
- **The choices you had for doing it and the reasons you chose this way for this client**
- **A testimonial from a very happy and similar client**
- **Added social value**

## STEP 7

Submit the entire text to a readability checker. Rework it until you get to the point that the "Flesch Reading Ease" score is better than 50. This can be tough if you are writing about a topic which has unavoidable complex terminology. (On its own, that sentence scores 42.5, so you can see the problem.) In such responses, we would accept an overall response score of 45 but never, ever, below 40.

This is still like trying to eat your alarm clock; it is very time consuming! So, the trick is to do it lots of times. Then you will begin to write in this format and style automatically. This is what leads to you creating very short and concise text in a very short time.

In its allegorical form, Old Father Time with his beard and sickle reveals truth. It seems to me that you can learn something and even tell others how to do it. However, it can take time for you to appreciate and actually use that truth.

Of course, I knew all these steps. I have been critically reviewing bids for years. Each point in the template was what I had always tried to do. It was only when faced with the challenge to create an example that I put what I knew into one succinct package. Now I know what I knew. Even better, I learnt from it, used it and I can use it again!

Does our approach work? Our client got an example to use as a template. It covered all the points and met the character count limit. The bid went in on time. The bid manager was happy and we await the outcome.

I hope you found this article easy to read and understand. If you did, this was because I wrote it to achieve this. The statistics are:

- **Long sentences – 1.06% caused by putting an explanation in brackets and lists of items in a sentence. I can live with this.**
- **Passive voice – 2.13%, mainly from the example of passive voice. However, a small amount of passive voice can make the document easier to read. This level seems about right to me.**
- **Readability (Flesch score) – 77 which means that even the MD will understand it!**

### Acknowledgement:

I use a tool called VT Writer from Visible Thread to analyse all my text. It provides the readability results and suggestions for improvement. Now you know all my secrets.

**PIPPA BIRCH**

# A HEADLESS CHICKEN

# AND TINY PURPLE ELEPHANTS



**DURING MY RESEARCH INTO 'OLD FATHER TIME', I DISCOVERED THAT NOT ONLY IS HE PERSONIFIED AS TIME ITSELF, BUT ALSO DEPICTED AS AN OLD, BEARDED MAN WHO HANDS OVER TIME TO THE NEW YEAR ON NEW YEAR'S EVE.**

It got me thinking about how time management and time boundaries have changed over the last year, as well as how I am now handing over many time-consuming activities to staff - the 'New Year' as it were. So much change in the last year has literally had me on the edge of my seat, gasping for breath. Let us go back...

### **PEOPLE INVASION:**

In March 2020, Lockdown 1.0 started, forcing people back into their homes to work, or into furlough, as happened to many in the bidding community. Having worked from home myself for many years, I understood the issues people were facing in terms of time management - the lines between work and home time became blurred. It was different for me. I actually felt invaded. Where I used to have the odd conference call and was pretty much left alone to get on with my work, all of a sudden I was in back-to-back Teams/Zoom calls all day. This left me little time to concentrate and get the writing done, forcing me to work out of hours when things were quiet.

### **HEADLESS CHICKEN:**

Things continued to go bananas over the following months - many of my clients were forced to stay at home and contemplate the future of their businesses. This prompted a flurry of phone calls, and as highways procurement kept momentum (although some dates were delayed), it meant I was kept extremely busy. I was so hectic in fact that by the end of the summer I seemed to be working seven-day weeks without a break. After all, there was nothing much else to do so I just carried on. This soon took its toll, as I am sure you can imagine, although I was of course extremely grateful for the money coming in to pay the bills.

### **“ALL BY MYSEEEELF, DON'T WANNA BE...”:**

Towards the end of the summer, I started to have some very serious thoughts about taking on another Bid Writer. I had a minor panic - I knew several large framework bids were due in the autumn which I would not be able

to manage on my own, even working seven days a week. Much counsel was sought from friends, family and colleagues, including BO's very own Martin Smith, and I finally made the momentous decision to recruit someone into the Pipster fold.

### **FINDING 'THE ONE':**

The first thing I learnt is that recruitment is another time-consuming process! Working out terms, writing the advert, handling the enquiries, a second stage writing task to devise and review and finally, conducting interviews and a final decision. This is where I came off the rails a little as I found my Bid Writer in Hannah, but also decided I could not let Katie escape when she was so intent on a bidding career path. I also had an old colleague, Jo, who asked to be considered! And so it happened rather quickly. Hannah and Katie came on board in November 2020 and Jo had to wait in the wings until this spring 2021.

### **A DIFFERENT KIND OF FRAZZLED:**

Of course, having staff does not solve time issues; in fact, it adds complications. Suddenly my time was not my own - there are actual people to manage too! Throw into the mix some bad decisions regarding additional freelancing help, schools being shut and a client hopping on eight days before a massive framework bid is due, throwing massive documents at me saying, "Read this - we need to get some of this stuff in", and I became a gibbering wreck! Thankfully, that bid was completed and submitted on time. Jo is finally on board and taking much of the time-

consuming administration and coordination off my hands, and Hannah and Katie are embedded and delivering superb submissions for Pipster clients.

### **TINY PURPLE ELEPHANTS:**

This run of madness demonstrated I need to change in this new era, learn how to actually run a business and handle my time differently. I have invested in personal sessions with mentor and coach, Jackie Jenks. As a mentor myself and lead of APMP UK's Rapport Mentoring programme, I know the benefits of having that outside influence to enable personal growth. Jackie is making a huge difference to how I look at management of my time; now work life is very, very different. This learning process involves tiny purple elephants - who knew?

### **#TEAMPIPSTER RAH RAH RAH:**

Those who know me may recall I always swore I would never take on staff, but here we are, 12 months on and I have three. I have been forced to rethink time management and learn to delegate time-consuming tasks, considering individual, team and business, as well as clients. Time is most definitely not my own anymore and I have had to shift and readjust to make it work for everyone. A different mindset and a range of new processes are proving to be essential, and it is already paying off. #TeamPipster is flying, and the future is looking extremely inviting. For now, in the interests of self-care and time to breathe, I am off to book a spa day before the next challenge.... Bliss...





# RIDING THE RECRUITMENT ROLLERCOASTER

THE RECRUITMENT MARKET HAS CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS. AS THE WORLD NAVIGATED ITS WAY THROUGH PANIC, LOCKDOWN, TRAGEDY AND MORE LOCKDOWN, IT HAS BEEN ONE HELL OF A RIDE.

**BEN HANNON**

I've witnessed an unprecedented number of redundancies over the last 12 months. I've seen job offers withdrawn just days before candidates were due to start, and the dire financial issues that brings. I've seen recruitment freezes, thaws, and more freezes. I've seen super-ambitious candidates hunkering down and waiting for everything to blow over, putting their next 'big move' on hold. I've seen salaries stagnate and contract day rates decrease, in no small part because of the increase in 'immediately available' candidates eager to secure work.

We are reminded daily by the 'powers that be' that these are just temporary changes and things will soon be back to 'normal'. So, what are the lasting changes; what's the evolution?

Firstly, there's the obvious, big change: working from home. For as long as I have been recruiting, working from home has been sold as a job benefit, and always brought a significant uplift in candidate attraction. Now, it feels odd if a role is fully office-based. Bar one or two outliers, organisations have adapted to a remote working model that will continue (even partially) in the post-pandemic world.

What this means is that companies can now recruit based on talent alone, rather than having to trade this with proximity to a specific location. On the one hand, this has increased job prospects for candidates across the UK and has uncovered opportunities that were otherwise unavailable. I've seen companies that had previously struggled with recruitment now flourishing with great talent due to this change in mindset. On the other hand, I've also seen job descriptions and briefs filled with more 'must haves' than ever – because if they're not limited by location, surely the unicorn candidate will come out of hiding, right?

Interviewing has changed, too. With the likes of Zoom and Teams becoming the de facto method of interacting with colleagues, friends and family, it was only natural that they became an integral part of the interview process.

It's become quicker and easier to arrange and conduct interviews and I believe this format will remain, at least for first stage interviews. This will hopefully result in less time wasted for candidates having to travel to interviews and an increased focus when meeting face-to-face.

Given the unrelenting impact of the pandemic, there's global acknowledgement that everyone has their own story to tell about how they've been affected by Covid-19. What this means for the job market is there is a heightened sensitivity and willingness to listen about gaps in employment and redundancies. It feels there is a greater balance between hiring the person and hiring the skills. Everyone seems just that little bit more understanding.

I have also witnessed a noticeable increase in people investing in their own development, rather than waiting for company sponsorship. This has covered both those in employment (who couldn't wait for the corporate training budget to recover) and those without work looking to keep their skills relevant. Without doubt, this will result in the upskilling of the bid and proposal workforce, with so

many investing in their bid writing, bid management and capture capabilities.

Recruitment has changed, there's no doubt about it. The last 12 months have gone from despair, to challenging, back to despair, and now \*touch wood\* we're coming out the far side of it stronger than before. I believe that there has been enough of a positive evolution in the way we work that recruiting will be quicker and more intuitive than ever before.

**“ I HAVE ALSO WITNESSED A NOTICEABLE INCREASE IN PEOPLE INVESTING IN THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT, RATHER THAN WAITING FOR COMPANY SPONSORSHIP. ”**

**”**

# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUR TIME GETS TAKEN AWAY?

I'VE CALLED THIS "WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOUR TIME GETS TAKEN AWAY?" BECAUSE WE DON'T THINK OF THIS SCENARIO VERY OFTEN, UNTIL SOMETHING HAPPENS THAT MAKES YOU DEAL WITH IT.

We live sure of the fact that we can just shift something to another minute, hour or day. Often things run late (trains, work), we apologise for taking up additional time and sometimes give up hope of being on time (or early).

How many times in your working life have you had everything on time or ahead of the deadline? It's the same in our personal lives, as we rush from here to there and don't know what to do if we have five minutes extra.

The bid world thrives on deadlines and hopes for extensions to time. We generally don't think about what would happen if we suddenly had the opposite of an extension. This applies to work and, by association, to one's personal life.

In fact, what is the opposite of an extension even called? A reduction? A deduction?

The last year has been a peculiar one. Weeks melding seamlessly into one another. Time merging variously into a single, never-ending day. Many, many unending minutes that have felt like there is all the time in the world. The illusion of extra hours because commutes and travel have vanished entirely or changed significantly.

What happens if it felt like the never-ending day wasn't attached to anything else? It's easy to feel time has stood still and shifting things to the next minute is perfectly logical. There are many, many more minutes. No rush!

**KATHRYN POTTER**

## SO HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH A DEDUCTION, REDUCTION, SHORTENING? IN SHORT - PRIORITISE, BE REALISTIC AND DON'T THINK YOU'RE A SUPER-HUMAN.



Then a reduction notice arrives. The notice that says “Hey, this is your three-month (insert relevant time-frame) warning”. The notice that makes you sit down and take stock, work out your priorities and make sure they’re realistic.

Reduction notices can come in many guises - a few examples are severe ill health or injury, an unexpected change in a relationship, a baby arriving ahead of time, someone close to you (or you) being diagnosed with a terminal illness. They are almost always unexpected and they have to be dealt with logically, not emotionally. This is not to say that emotion isn’t involved, simply that logic should prevail.

So how do you deal with a deduction, reduction, shortening? In short - prioritise, be realistic and don’t think you’re a super-human.

Start with the facts of the situation. Write them down and be realistic about the impact they may have on what you can and cannot achieve. For example:

- **The physical symptoms**
- **The impact these have on what you can and cannot manage - both at work and at home**
- **The impact on family (do you need help with shopping, school run, childcare, self-care?)**
- **The impact on your mental health (you need to make space for emotion but don’t let it rule things)**
- **What you might need to reassess about the way you manage your day (work/life balance)**

Next, make a list of your priorities taking the facts into account. It can be challenging to be honest and realistic about things here, about how much you can fit into the time you have.

It’s important to be clear about what must be done, what would be nice to get done and what is non-negotiable. Understand from the logical perspective that there may be moments when you have to stop because of something you can’t control - e.g., delay at the hospital, fatigue that wasn’t expected, emotional load. Bear this in mind and allow for some ‘dead time’.

Mental health has been a focus this past year and is even more important when something unexpected happens. Talk to people you trust and build a support network so that they can help you. People want to help; you simply have to ask (and then accept the offer of help and explain exactly what you need doing!).

What causes a reduction in time can vary in severity but that doesn’t change how to deal with it. Reductions aren’t the end of the world, even if they can feel that way. Sometimes they’re exactly the opportunity you needed to wake up and smell the coffee and appreciate the sunrise and just being alive.

**BASKAR SUNDARAM**

# THE HUMAN IMPACT OF BEING TIME-POOR

**THE PANDEMIC HAS MANAGED TO COMPLETELY DISRUPT AND OVERTHROW LIFE AS WE KNOW IT. AS THE WORLD WENT UNDER LOCKDOWN, MANY PEOPLE LOST THEIR JOBS WHILE OTHERS WERE FORCED TO WORK FROM HOME.**

Companies were struggling to adapt to this sudden shift while workers were experiencing a clash between two different facets of their lives - the personal and the professional. But we all share one thing in common: every single one of us is trying to cope with different roles and various changes happening around us.

Working from home, which would seem like a peaceful scenario under normal circumstances, has now become stressful. Working parents are overwhelmed by home-schooling children while managing their workload. Many employees are overworked; they are forced to create time schedules and discipline for themselves as there are no fixed 9 to 5 working hours anymore.





Isolation and quarantine have led to more issues. People do not have opportunities to socialise. Suddenly your home becomes your office and you are in your office the whole day - with your family as colleagues!

Organisations are dependent on technology to connect all the employees sitting in different parts of the country. Meetings, discussions, conferences, webinars, etc are all being conducted through various online platforms. Before, these conferences and meetings were opportunities for human interaction, socialising, networking and catching up with people. Now everything has become virtual. The human element of socialising and communicating has been lost between the screens, cameras and the internet.

Before the pandemic, there was a standard for measuring your daily achievement. When we got up, got dressed and went to the office, we felt motivated. We had an idea about a day well spent in the office. But when home became the office, even organisations were confused. Too many meetings were held and too many hours were spent in daily check-ins.

For many there is no longer a difference between weekdays and weekends. The stress caused by the pandemic and overworking has taken a mental toll on lots of people.

**“ MANY EMPLOYEES ARE OVERWORKED; THEY ARE FORCED TO CREATE TIME SCHEDULES AND DISCIPLINE FOR THEMSELVES AS THERE ARE NO FIXED 9 TO 5 WORKING HOURS ANYMORE. ”**

Self-care is an aspect that people compromise on frequently. We move aside personal activities to cram in more work. We think we are being productive but productivity starts with a healthy body and mind. During these unsure times, we need to set aside time and space for work and play. Here are a few of my pointers.

### **SCHEDULE**

Create a schedule where you set aside ‘office time’ for projects and ‘personal time’ for family and friends. Mention three key tasks you want to achieve in a day and prioritise those activities. Manage your calendar effectively. Create a schedule following your office hours. Set an alarm in the evening to remind yourself that ‘office time’ is over.

### **SET BOUNDARIES**

Have separate spaces for work and relaxing. Mixing both these areas will keep your mind alert and working, even when you want to relax. Avoid unnecessary distractions in your workspace.

### **MANAGE ENERGY**

Set your mornings aside for projects and activities that require the most energy and allocate meetings and checking emails to later in the day. Ensure that you get proper hours of sleep and make sure you take breaks in between meetings and work to rejuvenate yourself.

### **COMPASSION**

Human understanding and kindness will always go a long way. If you are an employer, check in on your employees and reduce the number of meetings. Use productivity apps to create schedules and allot tasks. If you are an employee, let your employer know when things are overwhelming and you need help. Check in with your colleagues and help each other.

Time is a valuable resource. Time management is vital - not just for productivity but for mental, emotional and physical well-being.



# MEGA NOOB

**NIGEL HUDSON**



## CLAIMING TO BE AN EXPERT IS RISKY. THE TITLE INVITES CHALLENGE AND CAN PROVE REDUNDANT IN TIMES OF RADICAL CHANGE LIKE WE'VE SEEN THIS YEAR. AS I'M LEARNING THROUGH MY DOCTORAL RESEARCH, 'EXPERT' IS AN EGO-FUELLED CHERRY THAT SITS PERILOUSLY ATOP A THIN AND POINTY CAKE.

Why? Because the process of getting progressively better at what we do leads to greater focus upon an ever-narrowing field of study. Eventually we've polished a pea-sized nugget of unmatched wisdom that shines brightly, albeit for a moment, until someone questions it or builds upon our work. Intellectual property, it seems, is like flotsam in a river flood: hold onto it while you can, while knowing that you really ought to be using it as a rudder to steer you ahead of the flow.

Lifelong learning became intensely apparent to us this year as we adapted to new working practices brought about by the lockdowns. Twelve months ago, I'd never heard of Zoom or Teams. I was happily locked away with 48 fellow 'experts' in a bid bunker in Portsmouth, working through 600 documents that formed the biggest RFI I'd ever seen. The walls of the bid room were covered in notes, its whiteboards were filled with multi-coloured scribbles, and there was the familiar funky aroma from a team that hadn't been home in several days. Was this best practice? For such intense analysis and collective thinking, I'd have said so. But not so today. These days we're working mostly from home, using technology that enables us to collaborate, enjoy more time with our families, and be close to a shower and washing machine. But I do miss close contact with my friends and colleagues.

Talking to Jon Williams the other day, he remarked on how 'the world's gone landscape' as the 16:9 view of our computer screens has replaced the traditional portrait orientation of printed materials. A new window to the world? It's a new perspective, a result of how our bidding landscape has changed because of the pandemic. With it comes new learning.

I'd have been the first person to say that co-location is the best way for teams to gel and workshops to be most creative. But I was the guy driving 900 miles a week from bid bunker to bid bunker, maintaining my presence amongst my teams, coaching them and leading workshops. This hardly seems smart now. Those four hours of dead time behind the wheel each day cannot be seen as best practice. If anything, it was surprisingly dumb behaviour for a so-called expert.

My daughter, who is ten and an all-out Roblox gamer, knows that I'm not smart.

*"Daddy!" she cries, "You're a total Noob!"*

*"A total what?" I reply.*

*"A Noob! A total and utter Noob! All that time AFK!"*

*"Erm, AF-what?"*

*"AFK! Away From Keyboard! It's what we gamers say when we have to dash to the toilet or go for food."*

*"Oh," I reply, "and a Noob is what?"*

*"You don't even know what a Noob is?" she yells, "In that case, you're a MEGA NOOB!"*

It's humbling to be outsmarted by a ten-year-old. She's since taught me that Noob is short for 'Newbie': someone who's new to the game and needs to learn how to play it. How quickly the master can become the apprentice, and vice versa.

I'm especially rubbish at gaming on an iPad. I was taught to type with my fingers and not solely with my thumbs, so I can't keep up with my ten-year-old opponent. But with more than 20 years in bidding? I was hardly new to that familiar game. But that was the problem. It was too familiar. I'd fallen into the trap of 'sleepwalking': working on autopilot and not constantly questioning the efficiency and effectiveness of things that have worked for me in the past. I'd become the bidding equivalent of a one-finger typist.

The philosopher Bertrand Russell said, *"It's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted."* It supports Eckhart Tolle's thoughts about the need to evolve or die: *"If the structures of the human mind remain unchanged," he said, "we will always end up re-creating the same world, the same evils, the same dysfunction."* So, with our new 'landscape perspective', I encourage you to embrace the ways in which the past year have forced us to rethink the norms of our profession and question our sense of expertise within it.

Maybe, as we accept that 'virtual' is the new norm, we should start using 'AFK' instead of 'Out of Office'? (When working from home, we're hardly ever 'out'.) I pray that we don't go back to the office-only ways of working and unnecessary commutes. We have our new normal. But 'normal' doesn't sit well when we're seeking to better ourselves. Our new comfort zone of cosy slippers and informal 'out of camera' attire might lead to complacency if we don't innovate and learn. So, hold up your thumbs and seek out today's unfamiliar.

Embrace the 'new' and the 'scarily different'. Be curious. Adapt. Reinvent yourself and your ways of working. Sure, we might struggle for a while but it's better to be a humble learner than a know-it-all. As with the Roblox game, it's fashionable to be a Noob.

“EMBRACE THE 'NEW' AND THE 'SCARILY DIFFERENT'. BE CURIOUS. ADAPT. REINVENT YOURSELF AND YOUR WAYS OF WORKING.”

# BIDDING QUARTERLY – CONNECTING YOU WITH BEST PRACTICE

With an abundance of knowledge, skill, and experience amongst our Bidding Quarterly community, I am excited to announce three new initiatives that will provide you with the opportunity to connect with the Bidding Quarterly audience.

Our first initiative is **Win in 60 Seconds**. These rapid-fire interviews and videos will feature insider tips, winning strategies, and timely advice from those in the know. We aim to improve your chances of winning in just sixty seconds.

I'm also delighted to announce the launch of **BQ Book Club**. Most people I talk to in our community can count on one hand the bid and proposal books they've recently read. BQ Book Club will provide critical reviews for the full spectrum of books available to our profession.

In keeping with my passion for developing the entire profession, **BQ Bid Vault** will provide free access to a huge range of bid and proposal resources, videos, white papers, tools, and checklists. If you have something to share with the BQ Community you can simply upload it to the Bid Vault and we'll spread the word.

**If you would like to contribute a Win in 60 Seconds video, be part of the book review panel, or have content you would like to share on the Vault, please contact [martin\\_smith@bidsolutions.co.uk](mailto:martin_smith@bidsolutions.co.uk)**

**Free access to a huge range of resources, videos, whitepapers, tools, and checklists. Got something to share with the BQ Community? Upload it to the Vault and we'll spread the word.**



## BQ Vault

Improve your chances of winning in 60 seconds. Insider tips, winning strategies, and timely advice from those in the know.

# WIN IN 60 SECONDS

It's the 'BBC' but not as you know it. The BQ Book Club regularly reviews the latest and greatest literary contributions to the Bid and Proposal Profession.



Book Club

# ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



## Rick Harris

Rick has 32 years of association management experience, with the last ten years spent as the CEO of APMP. He is committed to the bid and proposal industry and has guided the association to 100 percent growth to 10,500+ members over that time. With the help of APMP's Board of Directors, Rick created Bid & Proposal Con Europe™ and Bid & Proposal Con Asia™ to promote professionalism in the bid and proposal industry worldwide. He is APMP Practitioner certified and encourages all bid and proposal professionals to join APMP.



## Charlotte Rees

Charlotte started her bid and proposals career as one of the world's first Bid and Proposals Apprentices back in 2013. She has since gained a wealth of bid management experience leading multi-discipline proposals within the IT Services industry and is now a Bid Manager at Mace. As the founder of Women in Bids and Proposals, she is working tirelessly to drive diversity and remove inequalities from the profession.



## Baskar Sundaram

Baskar Sundaram is Chief Executive of three different fast growing companies - Baachu, BaachuRain.com, BaachuScribble.com and principal in Baachu.co and Baachu Tech. He is a trusted advisor to UK Government Strategic Suppliers. Baskar is Host to Apple Top10% rated Scribble Talk and Baachu Talk Podcasts. He is an APMP 2017 40 under 40 award winner and approved APMP Trainer.



## Kathryn Potter

Kathryn's experience in bid writing covers sectors as varied as IT outsourcing to financial services, security services to reprographics and construction and rail. She sees content as the cornerstone of proposal development and understands that no matter what, it needs to be relevant and up-to-date.



## Chris Kaelin

Chris is a global authority on bid and proposal management. He was co-founder and chairman of the German-speaking APMP chapter and regional director for Europe/Africa. He is APMP-certified at Professional Level (CPP APMP) and is an APMP Approved Trainer. In 2013, he received the prestigious Fellows Award.



## Jon Williams

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.

# ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



## Nigel Dennis

Nigel has been called a proposal pioneer in Australia for his work in shaping the professional bidding landscape in the region. He has three decades of proposal consulting experience and has trained thousands of people. Nigel started the APMP Australia New Zealand Chapter, runs Australia's largest specialist bid consultancy and is a strong advocate for development of the profession.



## Anne McNamara

Anne is co-founder and CEO of ShineX, an organisation that works with Fortune 500s supporting them to maximise their sales potential and win large government contracts. Anne is a business leader and entrepreneur who has forged a successful career in helping organisations define their offer and develop strategies to deliver it. She is focused on partnering with other entrepreneurs and leaders to help them scale their businesses. She is currently leading the ReBuild programme to drive equality through the construction industry.



## Sarah Hinchcliffe

Sarah has over 35 years' selling and bidding experience, which she loves to share through her freelance work, articles and presentations. A constant champion of creative storytelling and professional rigour, she never tires of encouraging sales and bid teams to join up, work as a team and win more business together.



## Lisa Readman

Lisa is an expert Content Evaluator. She is a highly skilled proofreader, copy editor and evaluator of bidding, sales and marketing documents. Lisa established her own business, Readman Writes, in 2018 to combine her unique skillset and passion for words with a sensible, commercial approach to clear and concise written communication. Her services include pre-tender evaluations, document reviews and one-to-one technical writing training.



## Tim Snell

Tim is a freelance Capture Specialist/Trainer, Business Winning Consultant and Executive Coach. He has shaped his career helping companies create successful, high performance bid and proposal teams in the UK, the Middle East and Australia. He volunteers as the Deputy Chief Examiner for APMP, is a professionally trained and certified Coach, and holds APMP Professional Level certification.



## Holger Garden

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.

# ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



## Jeremy Brim

Jeremy works with leadership teams and business owners as a consultant and advisor to plan and deliver sustainable growth through analysis and interventions across the sales cycle. Jeremy has also taken on leadership of the Bid Toolkit, bringing with him a wealth of bidding knowledge and desire to help businesses of all sizes improve their win rates.



## Pippa Birch

Pippa has been a Bid Writer for twenty years, working as an employee for major companies within the Highways and Civil Engineering Sector before going freelance in 2012. Pippa and her team write for companies across a variety of sectors (construction, facilities management, custody and forensics) although core clients are from highways and civil engineering. Pipster Solutions has become a successful, sustainable business with over 40 clients.



## Peter McPartland

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.



## Tony Birch

Tony Birch is the founder and current Chairman of Shipley Limited in the UK. Tony served on the main board of the APMP for four years and was elected a Fellow of the organisation in 2006, for his work in developing and launching the APMP's Certification Programme. Since founding Shipley, Tony has trained thousands of sales and bid professionals around the world.



## Andy Haigh

Andy is an expert in bidding and tendering, specialising in competitive formal bids into EU Public Sector organisations. He 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.



## Ben Hannon

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.

# ABOUT OUR EXPERTS



## Graham Ablett

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.



## Martin Smith

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



## Beth Wallace

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.



## Nigel Hudson

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.



# NEED HELP AND ADVICE?

**ASK ONE OF OUR EXPERTS AT  
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