

Tenders without tears – part 2



Having finalised the tender, how do you make it through the next step – the interview process?

Linda Julian provides tips on not only surviving the beauty parade, but 'winning' more work as a result

Once you've written a great tender or proposal, and delivered it on time, the competition may yet be decided by interviews. And, the real 'win' is getting your fair share of work and more!

Proposal interviews

Known as 'beauty parades' by insiders, interviews following proposals, tenders, and capabilities submissions are de rigueur in many decision processes – competitive or otherwise. Areas of probable interest to interviewers fall into several categories:

- **Confirmation that what they have read is what they'll get** – evaluators want to be certain you and your team are as presented in your proposal – that you are 'the goods' and not just great on paper!
- **Clarifications of your tender or proposal responses** – areas requiring more detail, amplification, illustration.
- **Extensions and additions to the tender request** – things the client has since wished it had asked, including issues arising during the evaluation process.
- **Concerns and negotiation items** – obstacles to being happy to go ahead, plus areas where they may wish to drive for more.
- **Implementation considerations** – evaluators will want to understand whether you and your team have the capacity to absorb additional work volume, or to transition to their work. In areas you have previously not served them, they want to check whether you've figured out how you'll manage, and how you'll forge relationships with their business units and other stakeholders.
- **Cultural fit** – that you feel right and will be internally saleable to their personnel.
- **Questions which you may have for them.**

To prepare adequately requires that you be



prepared for everything even remotely likely to arise in such a session. Benefits of this thorough – as opposed to minimalist – approach to preparation are obvious. A less obvious benefit is that you will embark on the session with calm confidence, knowing you're going to put in a great performance, and relax into expressing your personality and engaging interviewers.

Your aim should not be passive acceptance of an 'interview'. Rather, approach the session ready to engage in a conversation and meaningful dialogue to confirm, clarify, extend or add, deal with concerns, negotiate, show you can implement, demonstrate strong cultural fit, and get into a true professional adviser and service dynamic – a foretaste of your operating style.

Convincing interview performances

Putting in a convincing performance at a panel interview or other competitive selection forum is largely about preparation. Here's a small selection of questions to help you role-play and prepare for your next interview. (These particular questions relate to public sector legal provider selection –

you'll find lots more useful tools on our website, including those relating to other industries.)

- What do you see as the client's biggest challenges and how will you address them?
- What strategies do you recommend to minimise risk exposures?
- What strategies do you suggest to reduce legal costs?
- What succession planning have you done in relation to your relationship with the client?
- How will you ensure fees don't 'run away' on some matters?
- What distinguishes your approach from other firms?
- What differentiates the approach you take to a 'strategically important' matter, as opposed to a 'business as usual' matter?
- How much of the work will actually be handled by partners?
- How will you allocate our files in your firm?
- What seminars and continuing education will you provide? What topics do you suggest?
- How can your help improve management of external legal services providers?

- If you ever became aware of an executive in the client organisation behaving improperly, what would you do?
- How will you work with other legal panel members?
- How would you suggest that the client allocate work between law firms?
- Do you have an equal opportunity policy in operation in your firm? How is it manifested?
- Why would you be a good choice for us?
- Why do you want our work?
- What questions have you for us?

An hour – better, two – spent preparing often makes all the difference to getting across the line as the legal services provider of first choice.

Tender debriefing

If you've gone to the effort and expense of tendering, be sure to debrief – win or lose – on the outcome. If there is an opportunity for face-to-face debriefing, take it. (It's only fair that large legal consumers who invite tenders offer debriefing and feedback to tenderers, whatever the result.) Use these questions to shed light on why you won – or didn't – and what to keep in mind for next time.

- Why did your organisation go to tender?
- How do you identify which firms to invite?

- What were your selection criteria and how were they weighted?
- Did your views change during the tender process?
- What value adds were you offered? What impressed you?
- How did the various firms compare?
- How important was price?
- What was the relative price position of the successful tenderers in the final outcome?
- What made the winners stand out?
- In what area/s did we do especially well?
- In what areas did our tender fall short?
- Were there any surprises?
- What would you do differently next time?
- How will you know if you made the right decision?
- How will you monitor performance of the winner/s?
- What advice have you to help us do better?
- What would we need to do to be certain to win your business next time?

Getting more than your 'fair share' of the work

Because so many corporate and government clients appoint multiple firms to provide their professional services, winning a place on the 'panel' is only a preliminary to getting the work you really want. These techniques will help you win your 'fair share' of the work – and more!

- Make certain your client knows you truly value their work.
- Constantly seek client feedback on your performance – both what you do especially well, and any areas where you and your firm fall short.
- Take meaningful action on deficiencies in your service – and tell your client what you're doing to address any shortcomings you've identified.
- Stay in touch and 'in mind' – go the extra mile to show interest in your client and their plans.
- Learn more about your client.
- Constantly find ways to 'add value'.
- Help your client to make better use of your services, get even better results, save money, and reduce risk.
- Do a great job, consistently.
- Work out new and better ways of really helping them.
- Make your client look good – internally to their shareholders/stakeholders, and externally to their market/industry/community.

Once you're appointed by a client, the real competition begins: these approaches will win your fair share, and more, of their work.

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