



Run Your One-Person Proposal Team Like a Gourmet Sandwich Shop

You're hired to work as the sole proposal professional for an organization that recently created the position. You walk in ... to chaos. They've never had a dedicated proposal professional before, and they aren't quite sure of what your responsibilities should be or to whom you should report. If you've ever worked for a small- to mid-size organization, you may have found yourself in a similar situation. If not, buckle up and get ready, because it will be an interesting ride. Okay—that may be a little dramatic, but you get the point.



What Do Sandwiches Have To Do with Proposals?

If you've worked for a large organization with a multi-disciplined proposal team (i.e., a proposal strategist, proposal manager, content developer, desktop publisher, production manager), this may come as a bit of a shock. In smaller organizations, the proposal team often consists of one person responsible for the entire proposal-development process. I've heard an analogy comparing this to a gourmet restaurant vs. a sandwich shop. The assumption: A gourmet restaurant is the better scenario because it has specialized roles, such as a chef, host, server, and busser. However, in a sandwich shop, you may have one person who takes the order, makes the sandwich, and cleans the tables.

While gourmet restaurants are great, in reality, every company can't afford to operate that way. And, likewise,

everyone can't afford to dine at a five-star establishment. The sandwich-shop structure is the backbone of small- to mid-size organizations. I believe that the sandwich shop can be gourmet by offering services just as good as the high-end restaurant. Here are five tips for running your one-person proposal team like a gourmet sandwich shop:

GET STRATEGIC. Your organization may be wasting a significant amount of time and money on pursuits they don't really stand a chance of winning. Work with management to get an in-depth understanding of strategic goals. Once target industries and key clients are identified, develop a plan to position your organization as their preferred service provider. Additionally, create a solid bid/no-bid process to ensure every RFP is properly evaluated and qualified before pursuing. As your organization becomes more strategic, less money is wasted and more time is available to invest in profitable proposal efforts.

GET FOCUSED. In small- to mid-size organizations, lines can easily become blurred between your responsibilities and management's expectations. Where your role falls on the organization chart, whom you report to, and your level of authority/autonomy are all major factors in establishing expectations, both from you and from colleagues. Consider defining the following:

- Is your role considered management or administrative?
- Are you an extension of business development, sales, marketing, or operations?
- Do you only work on proposal development tasks, or will you write or design marketing collateral and participate in tradeshows?

Get crystal clear on management's expectations and laser-focused on the goals and objectives for your position. Communicate this information to colleagues in order to foster and grow positive work relationships, which will, in turn, help you complete your tasks more effectively.

GET ORGANIZED. Take a hard look at your current processes, from the time you become aware of a potential RFP through post-submittal activities. Some questions to consider:

- How are opportunities qualified for bid/no-bid decisions?
- Is your organization conducting pre-proposal planning efforts?
- What steps take place once a proposal has been released until award notification is received?
- Is the proposal being finalized in a timely manner, leaving plenty of time for review and production?
- Is your organization obtaining internal and external post-proposal debriefs?

How you respond to these questions will help identify gaps and areas for improvement. *Traction* by Gino Wickman is a great book that details how to document your core processes.

GET CONNECTED. It's important to stay abreast of industry trends and best practices. Get involved in industry-specific and professional associations that provide educational resources, opportunities for face time with potential clients, and networking opportunities with other proposal professionals. Build your personal and professional brand by getting involved at the committee and/or board level. Porter Gale, a marketing expert, uses the tagline, "Your Network Is Your Net Worth," so get out there and get connected.

GET HELP. Having served for many years as a one-person proposal team, current consultant, and recovering perfectionist, I know it can be tough to identify professionals you trust to get things done right, on time and within budget. But there are plenty of people to turn to for help, especially once you start getting connected. And once we know you are strategic, focused, and organized, you can identify tasks that will be more cost effective and/or efficient to outsource.

And this, my friends, is how to run your one-person proposal team like a gourmet sandwich shop! ■