ABOUT *the* AUTHOR

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HOW TO ENSURE AN 'EXTERNAL FOCUS' AND WHY IT'S A MUST

In my experience, most B2B organisations aren't nearly as externally focused as top management believes.

C-suite executives generally work on the assumption that their various departments and their key people have their fingers on the pulse of their customer bases and the marketplace in general. Frequently, however, true customer and client sentiments go either undetected and/or unaddressed . . . and most often for want of the patience and the correct skill sets to drill these out and communicate them back to the right strategy-and-action points within the company.

Yet this skill is critical from the perspective of client / customer retention . . . most especially if you are at any point to find yourself the incumbent in a tender.

When the focus of the enterprise is genuinely external versus internal, an offer has a far greater chance of hitting the client's hot buttons from the very outset of its formulation (bear in mind, the "hot buttons" you may have hit that won you the business initially, could have changed over the years you've been the incumbent).

Three Steps to Give Yourself Pole Position

So take advantage of your privileged position to formulate your bid strategy. If you do so, you will be basing your resultant documentation upon a genuinely close, "inside" knowledge of the customer's / client's objectives . . . their current thinking, their pre-existing mindset and objections, their relevant experiences, the skill sets they need maximised and the gaps they need compensated for, their perceptions of competitors, and other relevant considerations.

> THUS, ALL ELSE BEING EQUAL (AND ASSUMING NO MAJOR DISSATISFACTION WITH YOUR SERVICE OR PRODUCT), YOU'LL HAVE GIVEN YOURSELF POLE POSITION

Thus, all else being equal (and assuming no major dissatisfaction with your service or product), you'll have given yourself pole position.

Here are three key steps you can take to ensure your organisation is operating with an optimised external focus:

1) Speak with business development operatives regularly, to gauge whether they're operating from supposition or solid research. (I've written voluminously about how assumption and arrogance is all too pervasive in many, if not most, companies - most especially when it comes to client / customer-interfacing. I've also written about the unwitting consequences to the enterprise's big-ticket pursuits.)

2) Determine the quality of the information being obtained during interfacing and via other communications.

3) Identify a broader range of externally-facing personnel from whom insights can be gathered, and with whom the traditional client-facing staff's opinions can be compared / corroborated.

Again, assumptions in this area are dangerous. It may mean questioning your business development operatives and key sales personnel - and now and then, even confronting the latent ego issues that go with such territory. These are discussions that simply must be had, if you're to have your finger on the pulse of your client base and be fully aware of, and in tune with, its thinking. ■