

Must Wins – How To

Most "Must Wins" are lost by the time the RFP comes out. Most lose because you didn't collect the right information and establish the right customer relationship. You cannot impress the client and offer them what they truly want, unless you truly understand them. In addition to collecting information, developing the best solution to the customer's needs, and having the right customer relationship, you must also prepare the right proposal. This article is not about what information to collect, or how to build your customer relationship. It is about execution. It is about how to get your team to prepare the winning response, once you've done your customer relationship homework.

When a "Must Win" opportunity arrives, companies tend to suddenly get heroic and want to do things the right way. They do things differently because they must do things better. They get heroic because they are already too late.

What they try hard to ignore is that you can't pursue a must win by inventing your process as you go along. And when you suddenly decide that what you have been doing is not sufficient and that now you must use "best practices," what you are really doing is improvising. Even if you are absolutely sure that what you are about to do is a better approach, at best what you are doing is beta testing a new process. If you must win an opportunity, you need to know ahead of time:

- What the proposal team will do
- How the proposal team will do it
- How you will validate the quality of what the proposal team does
- Who is going to write the response
- What information the proposal team will require

If you try to decide these things when the RFP hits your desk it will be too late. You will be inventing instead of executing. Even though Thomas Edison knew how to make a light bulb, he had to try over 3,000 filaments before he could make one work. Your process needs to be in place and proven before you start a must win.

Your process should have written standards and processes to expedite the process and prevent people from making it up as they go along. It should also have clearly defined roles and responsibilities so everyone knows how to work together. Finally, you must make sure that everyone understands what is expected of them during the process and is capable of fulfilling their role. These activities take time and must be embedded into your environment and corporate culture before the "Must Win" opportunity arrives.

When the "Must Win" opportunity does arrive, instead of changing your process, you should put the focus on execution. In particular, you want to make sure that you execute by:

- Fully tracking action items so everyone knows what is expected of them
- Measuring progress and providing constant feedback so that everyone knows where they stand
- Validating every element of your proposal to make sure it is right

It's easy to get confused about the difference between process and execution. They go hand-in-hand. A good process supports and facilitates all aspects of execution. And when you focus on execution, you start to see the problems that exist in your process. However, when the "Must Win" opportunity arrives, it's time to focus on doing things the way you know how, only doing them correctly. Most companies will be better served by actually following the process that they have, then they would be by inventing another process. Execution is about follow-through. When the "Must-Win" opportunity arrives, you must execute, or no amount of process can save you.