TO ASK OR NOT TO ASK: THAT IS THE QUESTION

The RFP dropped and it's on your desktop. Questions are due in five days. You and your team diligently review it. You make notes about questions, including the section and page number so you can point the issuing agency to the area of your concern.

HERE'S A QUESTION FOR YOU

Do you submit all your questions?

Are there questions you shouldn't ask? How do you tell the difference between those questions you should submit and those you should keep to yourself – or hope someone else asks? Here are 3 important questions to ask yourself before you ask the customer.

1. **Can you develop a compelling solution and price your proposal without the answer?**

If the answer is yes, maybe you don't need to ask the question because you don't need to know the answer. Consider the question in the light of "nice to know" or "need to know". If the answer will help you frame a solution that gets beneath the surface of the requirements and respond to the customer's pain points and objectives – it's worth knowing.

2. **Are you the incumbent?**

If the answer is yes, remember caution is the elder child of wisdom (according to Victor Hugo). The answer to the question may also tell your competitors something *they* need to know, so think twice before asking. Pose your question to give as little away as possible that relates to your incumbent advantage. If the answer is no, think of questions that, if you WERE the incumbent, you wouldn't want someone else asking. And then ask those questions.

3. **Does the RFP contain mistakes or is it misleading?**

If your solution and pricing depend on volume estimates in the RFP, and you have reason to believe they are inaccurate, ask the question. If the formatting and response directions are unclear, ask the question. If you find a mistake in the requirements, ASK THE QUESTION!

THE ART OF QUESTIONING

In a competitive situation, knowledge is an advantage and asking questions is a strategy. Evaluate your need to know and ask questions that help you develop a compelling solution and price to win. Bottom line: if the answer is not essential, don't ask the question.