Red Teams seem to be a constant in the proposal process - unavoidable, miserable, unproductive.

Can't we do something about it?

Red Teams: We've all been there.

The proposal schedule is tight, the subject matter experts are hard to reach, the proposal manager (that would be you) is pulling out her hair. All the writers are late. It's time for the Red Team.

So you retrieve your proposal review forms and directions. You extract the RFP text and match the proposal sections to the individuals assigned to the Red Team. You conduct the call, review the process, ask for questions. There is none. It *seems* to be an OK conference call.

Finally, it takes a couple of rounds to get almost everything back and the debriefing conference call is happening now. We could play Red Team bingo on this one:

- There wasn't enough time to read the RFP, but I have some concerns with the proposal.
- I didn't read my section - I'll just listen in on the discussion.
- Is there going to be a gold team review?
- I told my boss I can't be on the Red Team, didn't she tell you?
- Can we rework our staffing solution? The Account Manager says we can't use his resume.
- I have to jump on another call, I'll get my comments back to you ASAP.
- When is it due?

The Red Team Blues

Here's the deal. This function is part of a series of formal reviews of opportunities. The purpose of each is twofold and the same:

1. Validate the "Go" decision.
2. Assure the solution is valid and translates to the proposal, both technical and cost.

As the organization goes through the development process, the detail level increases. First, you refine the competitive strategy. Then you score the writing for presenting the solution. At each checkpoint, with greater information and specificity, the company can evaluate its "go" decision and ability to win the business.

What Red Teams Do

Red Teams occur when the first draft of the written proposal is complete. Solution theme statements, compelling content, tables, visuals - all nearly final and all in the proposal. At this point, the review should be able to validate the solution strategy, assess how well the proposal presents it, and determine compliance with requirements. Red Team participants should be independent. In addition, they should prepare by reading the RFP and all amendments and documents, for a thorough grasp of the opportunity. Afterwards, Red Team recovery, or post-review editing, covers comments and questions and moves the document to the final version.

Instead, Red Teams become haphazard gating exercises. Attendees do not have a detailed understanding of the opportunity. They did not participate directly in the proposal development and are unaware of the strategy. Rather than being independent, they are disconnected. It is frustrating, time-consuming, and unproductive for everyone. Invariably, the proposal suffers and the proposal team spends hours on rework of content and visuals.

Taking the Team out of Red Team

I've tried a dozen or more different strategies to repair Red Teams. Different forms. More meetings. Fewer meetings. Orientation meetings early in the process, meeting with senior staff to get buy-in. Yet nothing really worked very well. People showed up unprepared or didn't show up at all. Comments and suggestions were stylistic word-smithing at best.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Then I invited the CEO to chair the Red Team.

It was a small company, so it made sense for him to join in at that level. And, with growth the number one priority, we had to take each opportunity seriously. He issued the invitation himself, which stipulated no late arrivals and no substitutes. Members submitted their reviews in advance, and a copy was ready for everyone to read. There was 100% participation.

So, was it a perfect Red Team? No, but it was significantly improved. We received better feedback. Reviews were timely. We came to consensus on the solution. Finalizing the proposal was easier and faster. Going forward, the CEO participated only in major opportunities, but the model was set from the first meeting. Red Teams are important and the invitation to participate is also important. Show up prepared and participate actively.

As a result: our takeaway.

STRATEGY HORIZON

THE FUTURE IS IN SIGHT

Elevate the Red Team

Rather than one in a variable series of color reviews and revisions, make the Red Team, well, **RED**. Make it important. Make it prestigious to participate. And, recruit a senior manager, if you can, to lead it. Most of all, raise the visibility of the event within the organization and make it *hard* to get on the list.

For example, one company counted business development participation as billable hours. The Proposal Lead could choose the team and if you failed to contribute meaningfully, you were off the list. Furthermore, that was a problem for *your* annual review and bonus. Consequently, everyone on the team showed up for everything - including the Red Team.

Can everyone get the CEO to lead a red team? Or bill hours for development support? Of course not. However, your organization could assign a senior manager to lead the effort or consider business development participation in evaluations and promotions. Keep track of Red Team members and publicize their contributions on the company intranet, or even just on your office door, when you win.

Most of all – look for ways to make it a privilege rather than a chore. Limit participation, publicize the review, and arrange for rewards. Make the Red Team count - and stop seeing red!

Need a fresh point of view on your review process? We can help. See our approach here: [Strategy Horizon: Quality Review](#)