



THE WILKINS GROUP

Tool Kit

Providing Tools for Productive Workplaces

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“Trying too hard can make success elusive. Take the necessary actions, then let go of your expectations.”

Anonymous

Many questions, a search for answers

The second half of 2002 is upon us. Summer is here. School is out.

Vacation and a slower pace beckon us. Life around us still holds a certain degree of uncertainty. Peace in the Middle East is elusive. Corporate improprieties keep unfolding. The stock market fluctuates regularly. The thought of terrorist attacks makes us anxious.

We stop and think about what is really important. What are the right things to focus on? What should we really be doing?

Organizational leaders must answer these questions regularly. Where are we going? What are the right things to focus



on to get us there? What's our plan of action? Is it the right one?

Even when the way is not clear, leaders must define reality and provide a clear sense of direction. Leaders must go first to lead the way and inspire others into action.

This issue offers some tips on how leaders can get into action by articulating goals, objectives, and plans that provide a clear sense of direction

for their organization.

I am pleased to introduce Jeanne Smith, a proposal writer with an exceptional success rate. Jeanne presents some insights on how to write winning proposals.

— Sheila Scanlon Wilkins

How do leaders lead?

Leaders must inspire others into action. Doing so involves addressing three key points.

Before considering these points, let's look at leadership from a functional viewpoint.

Rather than asking what good leaders are like, it's more important to ask what good leaders are expected to accomplish, and how.

This functional approach to leadership is an effective way to harness myriad skills and abilities a leader might demonstrate.

Four basic questions listed below serve as a framework for determining what leadership capabilities are needed.

- ❶ What functions or purposes do we want to accomplish?
- ❷ What behaviors will contribute to our accomplishing those functions?
- ❸ How are we doing now?
- ❹ What can we do to improve?

Leaders perform three necessary functions to inspire others into action:

- ▶ They provide direction.
- ▶ They motivate people.
- ▶ They provide guidance.

By providing direction, leaders focus people's individual activities and behaviors

on common outcomes. By motivating people, leaders help people invest appropriate efforts in working constructively with others to accomplish desired outcomes.

By providing guidance, leaders give people information to act on to enhance their ability to accomplish the desired outcomes.

How do leaders inspire others to action? They provide direction by

- ▶ Keeping people informed of the big picture.

▶ Anticipating what the future might hold and explaining to people how they can seize the opportunity.

▶ Clearly translating the company strategy into projects and/or job assignments.

- ▶ Making sure people know and understand what is expected of them.

They motivate people by

▶ Linking individual behavior and team efforts to the overall success of the organization.

▶ Expecting others to do extremely well.

▶ Letting people know their efforts are important.

▶ Making a point of telling others about the good work their team is doing.

“Leadership is something one provides to a group to meet certain needs.”

Sheila Scanlon Wilkins

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Tips for a successful proposal

By Jeanne M. Smith

Because proposals may be your one and only chance to get your foot in the door, they need to hit the bull's eye. This means you need to understand your customer and their needs, succinctly and logically present your case, and provide a winning offer.

A good proposal captures the reader's attention from the beginning and presents a compelling story that convinces the reader that you offer the best solution, for the best price, in the most manageable and qualified manner, and that you will deliver beyond expectations.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER

The key to a winning proposal is communicating that you understand your customer's business and technical needs and goals. The cardinal rule is "Don't keep telling the reader how great you are, tell them how you will benefit them." You achieve this by threading your accomplishments and qualifications throughout the proposal in response to your understanding of their needs.

FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS

Always submit your proposal in the format or manner your customer requests, no matter how illogical it sounds. Implied in the instructions are two tests (1) whether you can follow instructions and (2) how you will respond to future project requirements. If you present your proposal the way you want to, not the way your customer asked for, you won't get past the first gate.

DON'T SLAM YOUR COMPETITION

There are other ways you can show that your company is superior without disparaging your competition by name. For instance, you can say that "We realize there are other products/services in the marketplace that provide XYZ features, however, our



solution/approach has been proven to be superior in similar projects because it..." then qualify your offering with percentages, numbers, etc.

TAKE THE TIME

Always take the time to make your proposal the best it can be at the time. Run spell checks and have an editor, or someone who didn't write the proposal, review it for proper grammar, sentence construction, consistency, responsiveness, compliancy, and logic. Break up your text with about one-third graphics or formatting (bullets, etc.). If at all possible, let your proposal "rest" by putting it aside for several hours, then go back and look at it fresh — you'll be surprised at what you find if given the time!

DON'T KICK YOURSELF

Remember, though, that a document is never perfect—once you've submitted it, you'll always find something you wished you had changed.

FOLLOW UP

After a reasonable time (about one week), follow-up with your customer even if they initially didn't give you a decision date. This shows you care

and are interested in doing business with them. Ask for a debriefing even if you don't win the contract that shows that you want to improve your process for next time.

For more than 18 years, Jeanne has specialized in helping companies position themselves for federal government and commercial contract awards. Her expertise is in the development and management of successful proposals and the training of proposal teams.

Jeanne's background in project management, software, hardware, professional services, contracts, and quality assurance enables her to effectively work across organizational boundaries. If it's a continuing contract that an incumbent needs to compete on or if it's the first time a firm has ever presented a structured proposal to a government agency or commercial institution, she adeptly helps proposal teams of all sizes create the winning presentation.

Throughout her career, she has maintained an industry-exceptional success rate. She has won more than 87% of the more than 1,500 competitive proposals she has managed, written, and supported. Her methodologies, communication style, training, and skills enable companies from various industries to win the bids they go after.

Jeanne has established and managed corporate proposal centers in Silicon Valley and fulfilled the role of proposal consultant for Fortune 500, 1000, and smaller companies across the U.S.

How do leaders lead?

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They provide guidance by

- ◆ Acting in a way that mirrors the stated values and principles of the organization.
- ◆ Consistently asking 'what can we learn?' when things don't go as expected.
- ◆ Being readily accessible to people seeking guidance.
- ◆ Giving feedback for improvement by focusing more on how to avoid problems in the future than on assigning blame.

What does this type of leadership look like? An effective leader's team would:

- ◆ Know where they're going; that means they can describe their mission and goals and focus the majority

of their time on tasks and behaviors directly related to achieving those goals.

- ◆ Have reasons for working toward the goals; that means, they find the work of the team, as well as its goals and tasks rewarding, and generally they prefer goal-oriented behavior to non-goal oriented behavior.

- ◆ Know how they're doing as a team and what has to change; that means they receive information about their progress and act on that information to improve what they are doing.

Leadership is something one provides to a group to meet certain needs. Leaders must provide their groups with what they need and will use to achieve targeted goals.



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