

CHAPTER ONE

THE ONE MOST
IMPORTANT THING

THE CLEAR WIN

If I was asked to deliver a lecture on New Business Pitching Strategy, and was restricted to the use of one word – and one word only – I would be happy to oblige. Then, should you read only this section, I would like to reveal that one word to you upfront without further ado: that word is ‘**clarity**’.

The greatest influence you can exert, when pitching to be chosen, is to be clear. We see this manifested at the start of the most important relationship we will form in our lives with a simple question: Will you marry me? And if that’s not clear enough, we drop to one knee and hold up a ring containing all the sparkle our salary could muster. There is no mistaking the request. This pitch is important to us, so we make sure we do what worked for our parents and their parents before them. We seldom deviate – even if the pitch is an elaborate one with airplanes dragging banners in the sky – we stick to the formula that we know works.

Yet, when we form relationships in business, everything becomes muddy. We introduce practices that work against us, yet we tenaciously cling to them – as if this is good business practice. We focus on our ability to deliver the objective – the fact that our work is good. However, people do not want to form relationships with people who do good work – they want to form relationships with good people.

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This book is about clearly delivering the message that, should you be chosen, you would be good people to work with.

Many pitches are lost by agencies complicating their presentation to ensure that they get it absolutely 'right', at the expense of being absolutely clear and simple. There is this desire to be seen as exceptional – matchless beyond compare – so the stage is set to pitch for the new business with a 'unique' approach that will wow the client with a rare and extraordinary performance. But you're not there to sell your presentation – your presentation is there to sell you.

In a study of 304 companies conducted by the Centre for Competitiveness at the University of Luton, the winners show a very separate profile to the losers. On the following page is an adaptation of the statements made by each group. Although these would vary in importance, the last statement – in my opinion – predicts success best.

THE CLEAR WIN

| Companies that win 75% and more | Companies that win 25% or less |
|---|---|
| "I need to understand the VALUE that the client expects, and I need to reset those expectations if necessary." | "Everyone knows what is expected of a good agency." |
| "I need to understand the 'cost of ownership' issues – who's <i>derriere</i> is on the line." | "Surely that's none of our business." |
| "Establish the superiority of what we offer – we need to really differentiate ourselves." | "They can see how good we are from our work." |
| "I need to find out why customers give this client money – what is actually being sold – what is the business 'all about'?" | "Our job is to understand what we do." |
| "They must buy into us as people." | "They must buy into us as a leading-edge agency." |

Adapted from: New research shows why "Superbidders" win more business, Centre of Competitiveness, University of Luton, 2003.

I am often told that people like us for how we make them feel. If that truly is the case, then the poem opposite adds rhyme to the reason.

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Ode to a new client

*I want to win your heart
So I'll show you that I'm smart
And wise
And special*

*Yet all I need to do
Is mirror you for you*

That's what wins the pitch

You do.