

Proposal managers - new profession

What is reportedly the first proposal manager salary survey in South Africa, conducted by proposal consultancy nFold on behalf of the APMP (Association of Proposal Management Professionals), has indicated that more than 35% of proposal managers in South Africa feel their company understands the value they contribute compared to 26% of proposal managers in the UK. Bid Solutions did a similar survey in the UK in 2008.

Despite this acknowledgement by their companies, Sandy Pullinger, MD of nFold and first chairperson of APMP South Africa, believes that proposal managers still lack the financial rewards they deserve. They also suffer from a shortage of skills. Therefore, there is a danger of burnout from working late hours to meet proposal deadlines. Only 8% benefit from flexible hours and only 16% get a bonus.

"The majority of proposal managers are in it for the long run, with only 5% seeing this as a short-term career. However, management attitude needs to improve because almost a third of respondents are undecided whether to continue in proposal management," says Pullinger.

Proposal management - new career

"Sales and new business development teams in South Africa can no longer afford to scramble at the last minute to complete a proposal or submit a tender, as they may fail to compete and thus lose deals. Procurement has become increasingly complex as competition has become more global and large teams of people make decisions about intricate products and services from several potential suppliers over several weeks. Corporate governance has also forced procurement teams to observe strict processes when choosing suppliers.

"This has pushed proposal teams to become more formalised and proposal and bid management have emerged as brand new job descriptions."

The fledgling profession in South Africa now has a local association, the Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP), to promote it. This association has run for 21 years in mature markets but the local chapter was only recognised in November 2009.

Challenging players

Pullinger's challenge to proposal managers based on the survey results is:

- Get a voice - By joining APMP, proposal managers can promote the profession, network with peers and share knowledge
- Spread the word - More than 60% of SA proposal managers are not aware that the APMP offers internationally recognised accreditation, compared to only 24% in the UK. This points to a lack of awareness about the profession in general. Proposal managers need to educate managers on what their profession entails.
- Get wise - There is a short window of opportunity for well-informed proposal managers to shine. Only 3% of proposal managers in SA have accreditation, compared to 22% in the UK, where this qualification is becoming a minimum entry requirement to get a job in proposals

- Climb the ladder - The average proposal manager in the UK earns between R452 482 and R891 268 depending on age and experience
- Set the trend - The proposal profession in South Africa is still young. Therefore, there is an opportunity for to set the example and improve the processes and raise the proposal standards in organisations.

Next APMP meeting

The next local meeting of APMP takes place in August 2010 and will focus on how to win corporate business. A procurement specialist will explain how proposal managers can improve their bids. In October the APMP welcomes two international speakers to the first local conference. Anyone interested in attending these events should email events@apmp.org.za.

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