OST GLOBAL SOLUTIONS

EIGHTY PROPOSAL POWER VERBS – HANDOUT

The usual proposal language, called "proposalese," is weak and boring. See for yourself:

"Our outstanding team of engineers with reputation for world-class service can provide innovative and flexible solutions to ensure that the government receives unparalleled comprehensive maintenance support at all times and can utilize the facility on a 24x7 basis."

We can point out multiple problems with this sentence, but we will pick the biggest offender of all—the excessive use of adjectives. For those of you who don't remember grammar well, adjectives are words that answer such questions as ***What kind? How much? How many? Which one?*** and ***Whose?***

Adjective-holics believe that real writers have a special talent to draw on their rich vocabularies to pick the perfect words to describe something well. They tend to say, "I can't understand it, but it sounds so good!" So, they pack those adjectives into a proposal like sardines. In the sentence above, the writer managed to stuff more than a half-dozen adjectives! We are sure he or she believed it sounded good...

The truth is, certain superlatives that appear in many proposals and marketing materials, such as "world-class" or "outstanding", instantly send a negative message to the evaluator. So do multiple adjectives in the same sentence or paragraph. The unintended message is something like "I revel in unsubstantiated puffery to impress you—I am full of hot air."

Adjectives are useful only when the noun or verb alone cannot convey the specific meaning that the adjective adds. When you describe an "uninterrupted flow," for example, the world "flow" alone is not enough to convey the meaning. Better yet, whenever you can, quantify your nouns rather than qualifying them—instead of describing ***What kind?*** and ***Which?***, state ***How much?*** and ***How many?*** Otherwise, ruthlessly cut the adjectives and your proposals are sure to benefit.

The most powerful proposal text comes from sticking to nouns and verbs. Finding good nouns may be easier—you usually know what you deliver. It is the verbs where everyone struggles. We have seen proposals with only four verbs other than the various forms of the verb "to be": **provide**, **ensure**, **utilize** (the word we despise), and **bring**.

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Here is a list of **80 power verbs** that you can use in the proposal to get your writing to pack more punch:

accelerate	establish evaluate	overcome
achieve	explore	penetrate
act	filter	plan
adopt	finalize	position
align	find	prepare
anticipate	focus	prevent
apply	foresee	raise
assess	gain	reach
avoid	gather	reduce
benefit	generate	refresh
boost	grasp	replace
bridge	identify	respond
build	implement	retain
capture	improve	save
change	increase	select
choose	innovate	simplify
connect	intensify	solve
create	lead	stimulate
define	learn	stop
deliver	leverage	stretch
deploy	manage	succeed
design	master	supplement
develop	maximize	take
diagnose	measure	transfer
discover	mobilize	transform
drive	motivate	use
eliminate		

Remember, flowery proposal language usually tries to cover up for lack of substance. It is hard to read, and it tends to mask the real gems of your approach and solution if they are there. Sharpen your pencils and get rid of all the fluff to make your section shine.