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During my corporate career I have had the relatively unique experience of operating as a Buyer, User, Approver and Supplier of consultancy services – so I have acquired quite a good insight into the buying decision process. Over the years I have seen many different scenarios play out and there are a number of factors which impact the decision to award or not award business to a particular firm. Here are 10 of the more common ways a consultancy firm can come unstuck when bidding into a large organisation;

1. **The person who claims to have the budget and authority to engage you actually doesn't.** This is very common - many people in a large organisation, especially people who may have been newly recruited into the company to solve a specific problem, like to think they have a totally free hand to award business externally but few actually do in practice.
2. **There is internal expertise available to do the work but the person who has asked you to bid has not attempted to ask them first.** These situations always make for a lively train crash.
3. **Many projects have more interdependencies than are realised at the outset – and the person who has asked you to bid may 'not know what they don't know'.** Often this comes to light at the purchase order approval stage, because somebody in the approval chain will ask the right questions and throw the proposed scope up in the air. An associated occurrence is that similar sounding projects can suddenly come to light and you are then perceived to be replicating something which has already gone before. Not a good place to be – especially if you are charging more.
4. **The procurement department are kept at arms length until the last minute.** This is not a recipe for a smooth and successful bid – particularly if the organisation operates a full or partial preferred supplier list and you are not on it.
5. **Your proposed fee cannot be easily linked to specific outcomes.** Remember that the person who has asked you to bid needs to be able to sell your proposal to their approval chain. They can sometimes be blinded by the urgency or complexity of their need and 'want you to get started straightaway' - the less tangible the project outcomes are the harder it will be to sell your solution for approval. In your understandable desire to support your customer you may also take a risk and begin working on the project before receiving an approved purchase order.....
6. **You assume that your 'lead contact' for the project will be working on your behalf inside the organisation to 'smooth the way'.** Sorry to disappoint but vary rarely have I seen a project owner step outside their bunker and do this properly. Too often they perceive that presenting a fait accompli will be more likely to result in approval.

7. **Your pitch is a mixture of 'resource' as well as 'consultancy'.** Look you wouldn't pay consultancy rates for a jobbing project manager either would you.
8. **You believe people when they ask you to work free as a lead in to a definite engagement.** Even if you do a 'fact finding' piece of work for nothing you still have to convince the approval chain that you are the most credible and capable firm for any subsequent piece of work.
9. **You overestimate the value of your 'executive relationships'.** I am not saying these are unimportant, they can be very useful indeed, but wouldn't you rather be chosen because you are regarded as the most capable and credible firm to do the work, rather than being appointed because 'so and so' said to give you the contract. You need people to recommend your firm to others based on what you can do, not who you know.
10. **The last piece of advice is that all the previous 9 are manageable.** You just need to know what questions to ask, who to ask and when to ask them. Then read between the lines of the answers received and create a bid strategy that stands the maximum chance of success.

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