

The Eight Key Personnel You Want Guiding Your Sleigh

1. **Dasher** – Meets the education and experience levels in the RFP – the difference between a grounded sleigh and presents under the tree
2. **Dancer** – Incumbent knowledge and available to hit the ground running on day one; if participation is uncertain, it jeopardizes the bid
3. **Prancer** – Can navigate between disparate agency cultures and operating rhythms
4. **Vixen** – Résumé is metrics driven – the customer will be as convinced as you are
5. **Comet** – A rising star in the company and industry; motivated and sparkling with certifications that complement their capabilities
6. **Cupid** – Beloved by the customer for a reputation of getting the job done, not for a menagerie of industry affiliations
7. **Donner** – Can represent your company and explain complex solutions during oral presentations
8. **Blitzen** – Takes the proposal tank by storm and can actively contribute to the solution

Key Personnel: Naughty or Nice?

- Key Personnel sections are not a compliance check mark – they should be used as selling points (although compliance is mandatory)
- Do not just bid incumbents; be open to candidates from teammates and always aim to add top talent and remove underperformers
- A shiny résumé is no substitute for measurable results demonstrated by metrics, achievements, and customer attributions
- There is a difference between a good candidate and a good résumé – the best résumés speak to the position and program
- Candidates should provide true customer insights rooted in mission execution, not generalities and platitudes about the space
- Make sure Rudolph (a.k.a. the PM) has the experience and vision to illuminate the way ahead and rise above the competitive pack

Does it Glow?

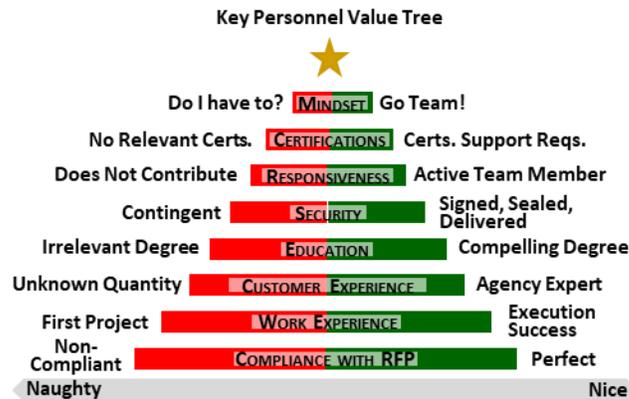
While Key Personnel requirements vary across opportunities, a strong, differentiated team can be the deciding factor between receiving an award and being left out in the cold – after all, who is Santa without his reindeer? When you choose your team, the first step is making sure you have individuals who are qualified to lead the sleigh. Meeting RFP requirements is a necessary (but not winning) condition for Key Personnel – remember, compliance is the first offramp in proposals. RFP language is specific for a reason – often a well-tailored RFP (a Christmas present on its own) will align Key Personnel requirements with specific individuals. A compliant proposal will bid Key Personnel that meet the minimum requirements. A compelling proposal will bid Key Personnel with core competencies and tailored résumés that exemplify the role.

Reindeer Games

The strongest teams that we have supported in proposal tanks are ones that intimately know the customer space – Santa knows each of his elves by name, and so should your customer. On the ground experience is great, and daily or weekly interaction is the best, but socializing and endearing the team early in the capture effort can trigger fond memories during evaluation. An obvious, but often overlooked, step is vetting Key Personnel claims to fame. Just because someone knows or has worked with the customer does NOT mean they are good Key Personnel to bid. In fact, the customer may know the person well enough to know that they would be a terrible PM. Lastly, solicit feedback from additional sources, as PMs are notoriously biased sources of intelligence and can be more motivated by protecting their people and “how it is done” than by what it will take to win the game this time.

Nose So Bright

Proposal teams are often tempted to pick Key Personnel with the most prestigious résumés – previous employers, marquee contracts, industry-leading certifications, and impressive universities. Too often, however, they get burned by candidates that are all flash and no substance. Ensure that candidates have proven experience achieving results and solving tough problems for their customers – as well as the data and attributions to back it up. Like Rudolph’s nose, nothing shines through the snow quite like metrics. If potential Key Personnel cannot quantify their impact through time or dollars saved, level



The farther right on each variable, the stronger the candidate looks to the customer. The length of each axis corresponds to dominance of the variable.
Source: Wolf Den Associates, LLC

of effort reduced, or budget and span of control managed, then it is time to reexamine the value that candidate can bring to the table. All things in moderation but, on balance, tangible experience far outweighs most shiny pedigrees.

Guide My Sleigh

The proposal tank is a unique proving ground for Key Personnel. Those that contribute lackluster

content and insights are unlikely to miraculously transform into team players during execution. Conversely, Key Personnel that demonstrate a willingness to support the proposal effort with quality information and a positive attitude can generally be expected to be strong performers in execution. Do not ignore the signals that Key Personnel send during the proposal development process. If an individual works on customer site or far from headquarters, take advantage of this window into their professional personality. This is not to say that all good Key Personnel perform well in the proposal tank, but you can learn a lot from their attitudes. Similarly, not all strong proposal contributors can be effective Key Personnel, but occasionally you will be surprised where you can find the right reindeer to guide your sleigh.