



THOUGHTS OF THE ALCHEMIST

You are NOT a master

I like to think (and my ego is big enough) that I am a successful Bid Manager. To be honest, I like to think I am better than most. I have the win rate to prove it. What I am not is a master of the game of sales or a master Bid Manager.

I have had the pleasure of working with 3 masters of the game of sales in my career and I suspect that I am somewhat blessed to have worked with so many.

We tend to throw the word “master” around too easily. I like to go back to its original definition. So, let me tell you a story.

In the olden days, real olden days before internet and computers, even cars and electricity, unless you were born lucky, you were born poor. For many this was into a household who survived on farming or working for the local big cheese. You knew who the local big cheese was because they had the big house on the hill.

As you grew up, you had a stark choice. Do you continue to live like your parents, effectively taking over the work from them or do you do something different? If you do the same as them, you will get the same as them, so your children will grow up with the same conundrum.

If you wanted to do better, then you needed to decide on what. We had limited choices. You could go and join the army, in which case the chances were you would die in battle or get so injured that you could not work and then could starve. You could become a thief and make your money illegally. Well they would capture you and you would not last long; they would hang you or be put you in prison for life, which would not be that long. The only practical choice was to learn a trade, what we now call a craft.

So, say you went down the craft route, you first had to convince the local Master to take you on. There was a limit on opportunities, but if they did then you became an Apprentice. You got, for example, an apprenticeship with the local Master potter. Your job was to wake up earlier than the Master and get the fires going, prepare the clay and glazes and whatever else the Master told you to do. In return, you could watch and over time, they would teach you in the craft of pottery. After the Master had finished, you needed to clean the pottery and prepare it for the next day.

After a number of years, the master would think they have taught you all they wanted to teach you and they would get rid of you and bring in a new apprentice, at the same starting salary you had years ago.

You would now begin to travel around the local villages, the ones without a Master potter, and ply your trade in the craft. You were no longer an apprentice; you were a journeyman. And you would remain a journeyman for years, until you wanted to settle down and had learnt to consistently perform at excellence. Now you could call yourself a Master and open your own pottery and hire and fire your own apprentices.

So where are you in your journey? Are you an apprentice, a journeyman, or a master? I have been a Bid Manager for 30 years, as I say (continually, remember my ego...) successful. Yet I would not claim I was a master. I do not consistently perform at excellence. Sometimes, I fail, and the competition beat me, or the customer withdraws the opportunity. I am a journeyman.

And I like being a journeyman because that means I am still learning, still improving, still excited about the game of sales. The Masters of the games of sales I have worked with have all been Sales Professionals with 30 plus years of experience. In sales, the best of the best can get to be masters.

In our worlds of Bid and Proposal Management, it is our aim and yet unachievable.