



THOUGHTS OF THE ALCHEMIST

2 Negatives do NOT make a positive

We were working on the biggest opportunity the company had ever gone for. A must win. We played the game well, very well. So well, that we moved from being the outsider to the one that was teaching the customer.

One competitor played a straight game and came up with tactics and improvements to their offering that stretched our minds and kept us nimble. One started playing the crooked game. They tried to recruit the bid team, offering almost double salaries to join them. I am not dumb, they did not want my brain, just what was in it about this deal. Then strange things started to happen around our office. We increased security. Then strange documents started to appear in front of the customer, allegedly coming from our organisation. They were playing a dirty game. You only need to play a dirty game if your ethics allow it. Ours and mine did and do not.

We took it as an admission of defeat, if they thought they could beat us in a straight game, then they would be playing it.

The customer also trusted us, morals and ethics are invisible yet tangible. They saw what was happening and they knew what the competitor was up to. It is dodgy second-hand car dealership territory. Would you part your money with a business you could not trust?

We sealed their fate; it is just they did not know it. For fun we decided to bloody their nose. We let them believe they were in first place. So much so, that they had the champagne reception (with customer invited) set up for the night after the announcement.

To this day, I do not know what felt better, the win announcement or the thought of them putting the bottles of champagne back on ice in a public shaming. OK the winning felt best, but it was a close race.

This is not a warning about mega deals and not to expect everyone to play with a straight bat. It is not really advice about holding on to your morals and ethics, however tempting it is to stoop to their level.

It is about the power of your morals and ethics. Customers do not buy, people do. People buy from people they trust, and they like. Use this as a strength.

I have used this in bids, I hold it as the invisible customer criterion. It can hold a large evaluation score and yet your competition cannot see it.

You and the entire bid team must live it. Not just in words in your proposals, but in every conversation and every action. In one deal, we made a mess of part of the solution. So, we told the customer. We had made a mistake and needed to reshape the solution part. There would be a cost implication and we would wear it. We made an offer. We stick to the offer.

The buyer asked why did we tell them? Easy, because we do not keep things the customer needs to know, secret. I will wager that every competitor made mistakes, the temptation is to cover up. Guess what, you cannot. It is the same as a child saying they did not scribble on the wall. You can see the lie in body language and in the bid, you can see it in subtle changes to the proposition or debate. You may think that you have got away with it, but all you have done is broken the trust.