



## THOUGHTS OF THE ALCHEMIST

**You do NOT have To be The cheapest To WIN**

Fairly early in my career, I worked with a Sales Professional to win a deal that we could not win. The organisation wanted the customer and needed to show our eagerness and strength through bidding for contracts we were not placed to win.

The customer had a long relationship with the competitor, they had wall to wall equipment from them and it was all proprietary. Only the competitor could service it or knew how it worked.

So, we set off on the bid, just the two of us, the organisation was not going to invest in a team for a losing bid.

The Sales Professional lived in the north and the bid was running in the south, near my house. Rather than live in a hotel, he stayed in my house and we used his expenses to fund our food and beer.

Each night, the conversation would include the bid and after a few hours we would have wacky thoughts about how to win. The deal was twice his annual target, so there was a win for him and a win for us in doing the impossible.

Then in a blind flash of drunken minds, we hit upon the idea. Take the bid away from being about products and service. Make it about a partnership and people. So, we did, we dismissed the issue of servicing the products with our ability to recruit the same engineers from the competitor once we had won the deal. I created a unique governance model, built around innovation and efficiencies. So unique that I saw the "Pillars of Partnership" picture I created in bids for the next 20 years!

Well, we won. After winning, I asked the chief buyer, why. *"We really felt good with you, we felt you wanted the deal and wanted to make us successful"*. No words about the solution, the service, or the price. It was all about people.

Move on 15 years and I am called into a deal we are losing but really want to win. We are more expensive, do not have the local capabilities, record, or relationships. What we did have was the right culture for the customer. They were in a mess through rapid growth and no one is better to work with than us, when you are in a mess. We are a forgiving organisation, we do things and think about charging afterwards, we feel the customer's pain. We do not just say they words, with live by them.

Nothing in our proposal talked about this, so I built it as a new need for the customer and went about teaching them how important it was.

A year later, we won the deal and the competition could not even see how.

We always say, people buy from people. But sometimes, the difference is our people and the culture rather than the easier to evaluate product features and price.