



Notes from the Lunch & Learn Forum

PDC Lunch & Learn Notes - Your Next Gig: Strategic Bidding and Effective Lobbying May 23, 2018

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IF YOU WANT TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN BIDDING, THOU SHALT...

Know thyself & prioritize. You must know what you want and why you want it. Be explicit about your professional and personal goals. The more certain you are about what you bring to the table and what you want to accomplish in your onward assignment and your broader career, the more bureaus know they can trust you. This includes your standing vis-à-vis in cone experience, DC experience, fair share, the Career Development Plan (CDP), the Professional Development Program (PDP), tandem bidding, etc.

Market thy prioritized self. Tailor your past accomplishments to suit the bureau's needs. If you're bidding on a reporting job, tout your writing skills. If you're looking at a job that requires management skills, talk about the PD programs and grants and budgets you've managed. If you served in Djibouti, you have insight on China – use this if you bid on EAP. Conversely, if you don't have a track record in EAP, think strategically about how to aim for the most popular spots like Tokyo and Hong Kong without bureau street cred. And look into hidden gems like Consulates and other smaller posts whose names you may not recognize at first glance. And be sure to have your resume and your PAR ready, especially when you reach out to bureaus where you are not a known quantity.

Be knowledgeable. Speaking of your street cred, you can't market yourself if you don't know what the bureaus want. Collect good information and use your networks to inform yourself about various jobs. Projected vacancies are good, but talking to people you know and trust who are in those bureaus or posts is better. Find out how many people are bidding and where you rank, know whether a particular position is a consultative job between multiple bureaus. Timing matters - be aware of things that are going on that might affect a bureau's bandwidth: EER season, DCM/PO bidding cycle, PSP, summer transfer season, and bureau specific summits/events.

Reach out, but listen. If you contact a bureau in May and they ask you to come back in September, listen to them. If you have the opportunity to meet with bureau decision-makers in DC, take it. And be wary of a scattershot approach. It's okay to go broad if your skill set and goals match a wide array of positions, but don't waste bureaus' time with half-hearted bids.

Be flexible and open to the unexpected. Bureaus are not simply trying to fill seats with warm bodies. It is in their best interest to match the right person to the right job. It is not a knock on you if a bureau says: "Thank you for your interest in X, have you also considered Y?" Indeed, it's not a knock at all. It's an opportunity. If you are too rigid, you will miss those opportunities. You might also find yourself disappointed if you put too much stock in long term plans, such as trying to combine language training, your onward, and a linked assignment that covers 6+ years. Things happen, so don't get hung up on a single path. You can also find excellent PD opportunities in unexpected places. OES has \$5 million for programming, grants and exchanges, for example. Look out for Flex Connect, TDY, and Y tours as well.

Stretch sparingly. It's okay to bid on a stretch position, but be careful. If you're an FS-02 and FS-01 jobs are saturated, you're going to have a hard go. To be successful on a stretch, you probably need to be exceptionally qualified and/or the job cannot be highly bid by those in grade. Bureaus that have a harder time attracting bidders will have more stretch opportunities.

Be honest and be human. Bureaus talk. If you're not straightforward about your priority bids, the bureaus will figure it out. And don't forget human interactions. A coffee or a phone call can reveal more than a resume or a reference. So remember that human touch.

Deploy reasonable and recent references. Your references should know you well and they should know you from recent experience. It's great to have an ambassador refer you, but only if the work experience is recent and substantive. And if you do ask a high-ranking heavy hitter to refer you, be reasonable and be selective. Their time is valuable, so don't ask for it unless it's a job you truly want and for which you are truly competitive.

Do your job. If you do your job, you'll have lots of good anecdotes to share with bureaus, and you'll have a wide range of current and former colleagues who can vouch for you, provide advice, and point you toward opportunities you might not have seen. Use that network to gather information. Figure out who you know and where they are, so you can call on them for help. But it all starts with your job. So whatever you're doing, do it well.

Be ambitious and realistic. That's what it all boils down to. Above all, don't get discouraged. There are always opportunities out there. And while ambition is important, excellence is perhaps the most important quality. If you've shown excellence, you'll land on your feet.