# Lecture 31

Pre - Tender Meetings



Many times pre-tender meetings are called by the tendering authority to explain about the projects and to get the views of the tenderers about it. It is a high opportunity to get complete information about the tender called and to get the explanation of any ambiguous condition that may be present in the tender.

# Make Pre-Tender Meetings Work for You

Many contractors fail to make the best opportunity of pre-tender meetings. Indeed, some firms invited either refuse the invitation or accept but do not appear. Such a casual attitude does not best represent their interests. The pre-tender meeting is probably the best opportunity your firm will have to gain an insight into both your fellow tenderers' perspectives and the thoughts of the issuing authority.

Larger firms often consider the pre-tender meeting as an occasion at which they should be seen but not heard. They believe silence best protects their interests, so ensuring they do not disclose to others the direction of their own quotations or ask questions, the answers to which may help competitors, and suggestions they may make may be incorporated into the other's quotations. These are, of course, valid points, but total silence allows other firms the opportunity to express through their questions a professional approach that will be remembered by the issuing authority's personnel after the event. Such an impression can play an important part in the evaluation of tenders at a later date.

Small, experienced, professional firms must avail themselves of every opportunity to promote their expertise. As they do not have the benefit of being associated with a renowned firm, the pre-tender meeting is an occasion at which they can express their technical ability to the full, in open competition with established and renowned firms. This serves to raise their firm's profile and can leave the issuing authorities with a high opinion as to their capabilities. Failure to grasp this opportunity of marketing your firm's strengths can be a fatal mistake. A small firm has to overcome the issuing authority's knowledge gap.

# Presentation

* The following points should be considered during the presentation:
* Contract Terms; Personnel; After-Sales Service
* Respond positively to the invitation.
* Always prepare and write down your questions in advance of the meeting for easy reference.
* Always be represented by at least two personnel, one to ask the questions, the other to take notes of the answers, questions and remarks of others.
* Ensure the personnel representing your firm are technically competent both to ask and answer fully, questions pertaining to the tender documents.
* Do not send senior management figures to impress the issuing authority personnel. This is a common mistake, which leads to their perception that your company may be technically incompetent.
* If possible, tape the whole meeting and replay to other personnel involved in preparing your firm's tender documentation. Never rely on your memory to recall events.
* If only one representative of your firm is present, his attention is drawn to seeking opportunities to ask his questions and not to listening to the answers to others' questions.
* Even momentary distractions can result in missing important information or intimations. Possibly this could relate to areas the issuing authority deems of paramount importance when considering submitted tenders.
* By listening to the direction of questions from each of the other tenderers you can gain valuable information as to how they perceive the tender. This may give you some insight into the way they will present their proposals.
* Whilst asking questions do not deny others the opportunity of also doing so.
* ® Never ask questions which are either irrelevant or likely to cause offence.
* The occasion is one at which to market your ability, but this should be done tactfully. Allow the questions you ask to express your company's expertise.
* Seek information in detail on those points in the tender documentation which you consider most important.

Often you will find that the issuing authority has not fully considered the consequences of some of the requirements they have stipulated in the invitation to tender. In many instances the tender invitation has been compiled by personnel not involved in the actual activity and may include totally irrelevant terms and conditions. Having these problems drawn to their attention may result in these being disregarded or amended.

# Sit to be Seen

It is also important to understand the significance of where to position yourself at a pre-tender meeting. At all costs avoid being out of easy eye contact with the contractor's personnel.

Do not consider you should sit as close as possible to the authority's personnel if this results in loss of eye contact.

Speakers wish to convey their message to as many people present as possible at pre-tender meetings; they wish it to be seen that they are distributing their attention fairly. They will not, therefore, be comfortable in maintaining eye contact which excludes others. Therefore, position yourself where you can be seen whilst allowing the speakers to scan those around you easily. As a general rule, sit left or right of center opposite the speakers.

# Build Recognition

When asking your questions, introduce your name and firm name and indeed repeat your firm name as frequently as possible. This will ensure you are remembered after the meeting is concluded. At the end of the meeting often only a brief interchange with other authority personnel is recommended. This may carry a positive reflection of your firm.

# Equal Consideration

Never consider one representative on the panel as more important than another. It is surprising how often the obvious junior member on the panel is excluded from expressions of appreciation. Remember, when you leave the meeting, they will be included in the authority's deliberations and the fact that you thanked them will have increased their self-esteem and result in their higher opinion of you and your company; this will be reflected in their conversations with senior personnel at a later time.

# In Summary

* Always seek and attend a pre-tender meeting.
* Prepare all questions prior to the meeting in written format.
* Never go alone.
* Ask questions which show your professional ability.
* Do not dominate the proceedings.
* Listen to others and note their questions and the answers they receive.
* Take notes, either recorded or written.
* Choose seats which allow you easy eye contact with the speakers.
* Nod in appreciation on points made by the speaker (this reassures the speaker, makes him seek that reassurance, and thereby increases the likelihood of his directing his speech to yourself and consequently improves your profile in his consideration).
* Treat all the authority's staff with equal appreciation and consideration.
* Do not ask irrelevant or silly questions.
* Make sure your questions are rounded.
* Don't only ask about financial points or quality points, show through questions you understand all facts of the contract.
* Do not be afraid to seek clarification.