



Summary

# **Overcoming Burnout in Proposal Management: Strategies for sustaining productivity and well-being**

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# Introduction

This insightful session at Optimize23 featured Mairi Morrison. Mairi shared her latest research on burnout in proposal management and provided valuable strategies for sustaining productivity and well-being. She discussed the causes of burnout and its impact on proposal managers and teams. She also shared practical tools and techniques for preventing and managing burnout. This session gave tips and tools you can use to overcome burnout and thrive in your role.

View the full session with [Mairi Morrison](#)



[View full session](#)

# Introducing our speaker

Mairi Morrison a senior proposal manager at [Strategic Proposals](#) and CEO of [APMP UK](#) (Association of Proposal Management Professionals). Mairi has 21 years' experience helping technical and sales teams win global contracts in public and private sectors.

Mairi is passionate about all phases of the proposal process, from pre-engagement to submission, debriefing, and presentation. Her primary areas of expertise and interest are pre-engagement and complete proposal lifecycle management. And offering client-focused writing and editing help.





# Is your mindset towards change negative or positive?

**“The world hates change, yet it is the only thing that has brought progress.”**

**Charles Kettering** – American Inventor

The pandemic has brought a whole set of unprecedented challenges to the bid and proposal industry. Many of us struggle with the strain of ever-increasing deadlines, limited resources, and working from home. The impact on our mental health and well-being is immense.

Mairi's research found that 1 in 12 people rated themselves at 20 or less out of 100 on a scale of how they felt. This indicates that many are having difficulty coping with the changes brought about by the pandemic.

## These challenges include:

- Feeling isolated and uncertain about their work situation;
- Adapting to new digital ways of working can be challenging, especially with blurred work-home boundaries, and
- Facing an overload or lack of work due to changing economic circumstances.

The effects of all these factors can be overwhelming, leading to burnout and other emotional and physical health issues. We must recognise this reality, support one another, and foster positive mental health practices in the workplace. By raising awareness and offering education and training, we can prioritize mental health in our culture. Something no one should ever feel ashamed about doing.

**More than 1 in 7 proposal people work over 50 hours each week. This is not sustainable.**



# Three factors contribute to proposal management stress

## 1. Procurement Cycle:

Responsible for deadlines. Deadlines in the world of proposals are “fixed”. They often don’t account for the practicalities of life. For example, setting a deadline on a Monday will lead to long weekend work. Companies often face tough decisions on deadlines due to the revenue potential of winning the contract.

## 2. Management:

Responsible for supporting their bid teams. In many cases, they over-simplify the demands on proposal teams and set unrealistic expectations. And they can inadvertently create stress. Instead they should understand their team’s strengths/weaknesses, stay attuned to their emotional needs throughout the process.

## 3. You:

Responsible for your own mental well-being. Too often however, you’ll burn the midnight oil to hit the deadline. Instead, take breaks, speak up when overwhelmed, and practice self-care activities like yoga daily. All this helps manage stress.

**51% said they suffered mental well-being issues attributed to their bid and proposal role since the pandemic began**

## Who wants to work in a job that makes you feel like this?

The pandemic has greatly impacted the mental well-being of individuals in the bid and proposal role. 51% reported they have suffered from issues attributed to it. This job often comes with relentless workloads, short deadlines, and a lack of F2F contact. This can result in feeling isolated, overworked, and having little work-life balance. When you cannot escape these issues at home, the job pressures are amplified. And may result in health problems, stress, anxiety, and burnout from being unable to handle demands.



# The impacts

**“Working 10 days straight with hardly any sleep, to submit a bid on time that I know wasn’t good enough.”**

This comment came from one respondent in Mairi’s research survey. Why is this happening?

Many reasons cause burnout. These include working long hours, lack of sleep, and not meeting expectations with the bid.

## Working 10 days straight

Did management not notice?

Did you bring it up with your manager?

Employees under proposal deadline pressure may work extra hours without taking breaks. Managers should notify their team of long hours and offer extra resources or personnel to avoid burnout. Additionally, employees should take regular breaks to stay alert and focused while working on proposals.

## Hardly any sleep

It is our responsibility to look after our health and say no when it is being badly affected. One of the most common causes of burnout during the proposal process is lack of sleep. When we do not get enough restful sleep, our bodies cannot function at their best. This results in poor concentration and energy levels leading to lower productivity and motivation during work hours. Employees must create boundaries between their personal and work lives to prevent burnout due to lack of sleep. This helps them relax and recharge before starting another day with new tasks.

## The bid was not good enough

Did SMEs (Subject Matter Experts) not provide correct content on time?

Should it have been a no-bid?

Unmet customer expectations in proposals can overwhelm employees with feelings of failure and unmet goals. This often happens when SMEs do not provide accurate content on time or when it is better not to bid at all. Ensuring SMEs understand their responsibilities and deliver content accurately within deadlines can prevent such incidents from happening again. They should also be able to identify unrealistic bid outcomes early on, so objectives can be changed accordingly.



# It's all about you

Proposal writing is a stressful experience that can affect mental well-being. Fortunately, there are practical strategies to help writers develop and maintain their mental health.

## 1. Access to Wellbeing Professionals.

Proposal writers should have access to therapists and counsellors for mental health and stress management guidance. These professionals help individuals manage their challenges and address issues related to their mental well-being.

## 2. Training on Mental Wellbeing Issues.

Webinars and courses on topics related to mental well-being can improve mental health while engaging with proposal writing. The courses will cover topics such as recognizing stressors, understanding different coping mechanisms, and practising mindfulness techniques.

## 3. Team Calls.

Establishing support networks within the team is essential for maintaining good mental health when tackling proposal writing tasks. Virtual happy hours, flex work, and regular check-ins boost morale, productivity, and teamwork when tackling tasks.

## 4. Regular Care Packages.

Regular care packages can boost staff morale by showing appreciation from the company. These care packages may include snacks, books, self-care products, or stationary for managing stress while working on projects.

**64% of bid and proposal professionals said their workplace provided them with ways to improve mental well-being.**

### Reaching out made me feel:

#### Positive



"Liberating"  
 "Validated"  
 "Valued and Understood"  
 "Grateful"  
 "Like I had a voice and was finally being heard"

#### Both



"Weak and Brave"  
 "I now have tools to deal with it better, but workload remains the same"

#### Negative



"Worried that I'll lose my job"  
 "Overwhelmed and less confident"  
 "Like I've failed"  
 "Humiliated and embarrassed"  
 "Demoralised that nothing has changed"



More flexible working hours and regular breaks throughout the day can improve the mental well-being of proposal writers. Additionally, team collaboration should be implemented. And organizations could provide an outlet for employees through social activities or mentorship programs that promote mental health awareness.

Proposal writers have faced unique mental health challenges during the pandemic. To deal with these issues, many have found peace in activities such as meditation, exercise, me-time and talking. Through this process of self-reflection, 78% of people have noticed new things about themselves and their mental well-being. These realisations were key to understanding the importance of routine, drawing boundaries with employers, or recognizing signs of stress. They helped manage mental health during this difficult period.

On the positive side, 63% believe management is more aware of supporting their team's mental well-being. Actions such as organizing regular check-ins with staff members reflect this. Providing access to free online resources or creating a culture where employees feel comfortable speaking up about potential issues. From all this, it is evident that people are taking steps towards better managing proposal writing-related mental health. This will be incredibly beneficial for those who take part.

## How Automation Can Help

Proposal writing is a demanding task that requires careful attention to detail and an exceptional level of organization. However, with the help of automation, proposal writers can avoid burnout and reduce their workload.

By using automated proposal templates, writers can focus their attention on crafting compelling content instead of wasting time on formatting. Proposal automation software can identify repeated content and suggest reusable content, saving time and effort. AI-powered tools can also help identify patterns and provide proposal writers with more informed insights. Additionally, automated workflows can ensure that each step of the proposal process is completed efficiently and on time, reducing stress and burnout.

Automation tools such as [VisibleThread's VTDocs](#) can accelerate the administrative aspects of compliance, helping teams to work more efficiently and effectively. With automation, proposal professionals can deliver better results in less time, with less stress.





## Key Takeaways

Mairi's research provides essential information for proposal managers who want to sustain productivity and well-being. Her strategies for sustaining productivity and well-being are ones that all proposal managers should consider.

She covered the challenges faced and how people are starting to view the bid and proposal role differently. People are prioritizing work-life balance and shifting their attitude towards work importance by moving to smaller companies. Refocusing on balance rather than a promotion, shifting attitudes towards work, and being more cautious when committing. Not saying "yes" to something if it means saying "no" to themselves. These are all important factors to consider when trying to avoid burnout.

For even more insights into overcoming burnout in Proposal Management, view the full session with Mairi Morrison here.

[View full session](#)



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how you can avoid these mistakes.