



VIRGINIA

LONDON

VIRTUAL

# OPTIMIZE 26

THE BID CONFERENCE  
SUMMARY

[VisibleThread.com](https://www.VisibleThread.com)



# Thank you for joining Optimize26.

On behalf of VisibleThread, we extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who joined us for Optimize26. This year marked a significant milestone as we expanded into a three-day, multi-location experience. We united our global community through our flagship virtual event and our first-ever in-person gatherings in London and Virginia.

We are especially proud of our 30+ speakers whose strategic leadership and real-world expertise provided the backbone of this year's program. Their insights covered navigating UK public procurement and mastering data readiness for AI. And challenged us to move beyond traditional bid management toward a disciplined, intelligence-led approach.

Optimize has evolved into the premier forum for proposal, capture, and contract professionals. At Optimize26, we deepened our focus across the entire RFP lifecycle: from early-stage market assessment and opportunity qualification to the rigor of post-award contract intelligence. Our sessions moved past the "what" of proposal development to the "how" of execution. Explaining how to leverage technology to drive clarity and compliance at scale, without sacrificing the human element of brand storytelling and leadership.

This year's event also reflected VisibleThread's 18-year commitment to this industry. For nearly two decades, our mission has remained constant: to provide the platforms and insights that empower your teams to perform at their peak. Optimize26 was a testament to that mission and to the collective resilience of this community.

Thank you for being part of this journey. We are honored to support your work and look forward to the continued innovation and impact we will achieve together.

Warm regards,

**Micheál McGrath**

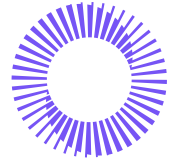
VP of Marketing and Business Development

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PRESENTATION TITLE

# Prompt vs Persuasion: The Human Nuance in the Age of Bidding

SPEAKERS



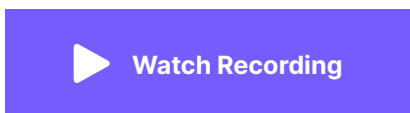
**Elizabeth Hibbert,**  
Proposal Writer,  
CGI

DESCRIPTION

This session revisited the core fundamentals of high-impact bid writing, focusing on how to maintain quality and brand identity in an AI-driven landscape. Elizabeth Hibbert shared strategies for humanizing the evaluation process, identifying client “hot buttons,” and using AI as a strategic “sparring partner” to accelerate research. The discussion highlighted how to move beyond generic, AI-generated drafts to create compelling, evidence-backed narratives that reduce evaluator risk.

KEY LEARNINGS

1. Pass the “Logo Test”: Differentiate your content so your unique value remains clear, even when your branding is removed.
2. Treat AI as a Strategic Sparring Partner: Use it to challenge weak thinking and accelerate research while keeping strategy human-led.
3. How can writers move from technical reporting to storytelling that addresses an evaluator’s specific professional risks?



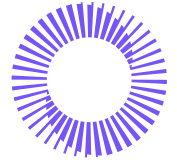
**“If we are to compete and win in this new AI world, we need to maintain our quality, accuracy, and our individual brands.”**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Guide:** [The AI Prompt Playbook for RFP & Proposal Teams](#)

**Blog:** [From AI Hallucinations to FAR Flexibility: The New Rules of Federal Buying](#)

**Podcast:** [TechCyclone – The Nexus of AI Potential and Cyber Threats](#)



PRESENTATION TITLE

# The Great Reset: Navigating the Revolutionary FAR Overhaul and the Warfighting Acquisition Shift

SPEAKERS



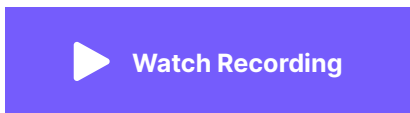
**Tim Brett,**  
VP of Product & New Markets,  
[VisibleThread](#)

DESCRIPTION

This forward-looking session analyzed the radical structural shifts defining the 2026 GovCon landscape, from the “commercial-first” mandate to the aggressive consolidation of Best-in-Class (BIC) vehicles. Tim Brett detailed the rise of “Neoprimes,” the rigid enforcement of CMMC 2.0 as a contractual gatekeeper, and the “Barbell Effect” currently squeezing mid-tier firms out of the industrial base. The discussion highlighted how AI has transitioned from an experimental tool to an operational core, driving 85% efficiency gains in capture and ensuring deterministic accuracy in high-stakes compliance.

KEY LEARNINGS

1. Acquisition strategy is as critical as capture. Without seats on mandatory Best-in-Class (BIC) vehicles, your addressable market is rapidly shrinking.
2. Commercial-First is the hard mandate. Agencies must now provide senior-level justification to bypass commercial solutions in favor of custom-built software.
3. How can firms shift from probabilistic GenAI to the deterministic, logic-based workflows needed to survive a federal audit?



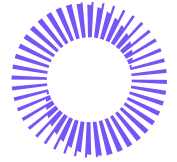
**“Cybersecurity is no longer a future requirement. It’s becoming a gatekeeper. It is no longer theoretical. It is contractual.”**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**On-Demand Webinar:** [The Great Reset: Navigating the Revolutionary FAR Overhaul](#)

**Blog:** [Alan Thomas on Trust, the FAR Overhaul, and the Future of GovCon](#)

**Podcast:** [Hallucinated Bid Protests and the Future of Federal Buying](#)



PRESENTATION TITLE

# Process, People, Platforms: The Trifecta of Successful Change Management

SPEAKERS



**Kemi Solanki**,  
Head of Bids,  
TPXimpact



**Rachel Charlton**,  
Owner,  
Sticky Communications



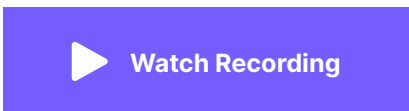
**Christina Carter**,  
Founder,  
Stargazy

DESCRIPTION

This high-level panel explored the essential integration of strategic capture, human psychology, and emerging technology within the RFP lifecycle. Experts from TPXimpact, Sticky Communications, and Stargazy discussed how to prevent “efficiency chasing” from diluting win strategies, emphasizing that technology should enhance, not accelerate, the decision-making process. The conversation highlighted the “golden thread” of capture, the necessity of data-driven bid/no-bid qualifications, and the predicted shift toward “chemistry tests” and face-to-face evaluations as written responses become increasingly commoditized by AI.

KEY LEARNINGS

1. Start the Clock Early: Real capture begins 6–24 months pre-RFP. By the solicitation drop, the opportunity to influence requirements has passed.
2. Leverage the “Human Ceiling”: AI raises the quality floor, but human judgment and empathy are the only true differentiators in a crowded market.
3. How can teams move from “gut-feeling” qualifications to data-driven bid/no-bid processes that mitigate burnout?



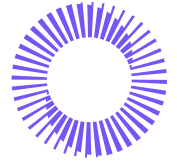
**“I feel like government agencies might start filtering all the RFPs because... it’s becoming like a LinkedIn job post where you have a hundred unqualified applicants because you’re attracting everyone and the kitchen sink.”**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**On-Demand Webinar:** [Process, People, Platforms: The Trifecta of Successful Change Management](#)

**Blog:** [Overcoming Automation Anxiety: How to Successfully Introduce AI](#)

**Guide:** [From Silos to Synergy: Maximizing Success Through Collaboration](#)



PRESENTATION TITLE

# VisibleThread Product Keynote: New Features, New Workflows, Unified Platform

SPEAKERS



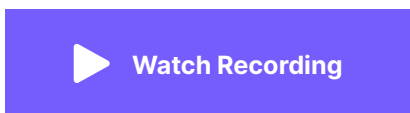
**Allison Ritz**  
Director of Product Marketing  
[VisibleThread](#)

DESCRIPTION

This session introduced the new VisibleThread 7.0 platform, highlighting its evolution into a full-lifecycle RFP intelligence solution. Allison Ritz demonstrated how the platform combines deterministic logic for 100% compliance accuracy with Generative AI for creative drafting and summarization. Key features showcased included automated SAM.gov opportunity tracking, traceable technical alignment, and secure “Collections” that ground AI in a firm’s trusted past performance data.

KEY LEARNINGS

1. Master the Hybrid Workflow: Use deterministic logic for “zero-fail” compliance and GenAI for drafting to balance precision with speed.
2. Ground AI in Truth: Eliminate hallucinations by using “Collections” to ensure every proposal claim is traceable and defensible.
3. How can teams safely leverage Generative AI in air-gapped environments without compromising data integrity?



**“We eat, sleep, and breathe security. Our platforms are built with your regulations in mind.”**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Guide:** [AI Readiness Checklist for Proposal & RFP Software](#)

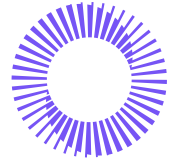
**Blog:** [Introducing the Next Chapter of VisibleThread](#)

**On-Demand Webinar:** [Data Readiness for AI & Tech Adoption Success](#)

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PRESENTATION TITLE

# Beyond Survival Mode: Preventing and Reversing Burnout by Cultivating Resilience

SPEAKERS



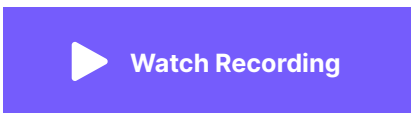
**Erin Andersen,**  
Vice President of Proposal Development,  
**Aetna**

DESCRIPTION

This session explored the critical distinction between true resilience and the unsustainable habit of “powering through” stress. Erin highlighted burnout risks specific to the proposal profession, provided a framework for identifying the early stages of exhaustion, and redefined resilience as a proactive capacity to recover and adapt. The discussion concluded with actionable strategies for sustaining high performance without compromising long-term team health.

KEY LEARNINGS

1. **Prioritize Recovery Over Endurance:** Resilience is the capacity to recover, not just endure. Without “tempering” cycles, teams face permanent burnout and disengagement.
2. **Build the Business Case for Capacity:** Use data—like 122% workload metrics—to justify resource trade-offs and mitigate the 5% win-rate penalty tied to team stress.
3. **How can organizations stop rewarding “superhuman” endurance and start incentivizing the strategic recovery cycles that protect long-term revenue?**



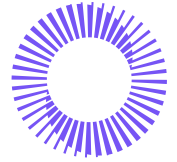
**“Burnout’s been quietly normalized. We wear busyness like a badge of honor. We push through. We power on. We tell ourselves just how proposal work is. But it doesn’t have to be that way.”**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**On-Demand Webinar:** [Beyond Survival Mode: Preventing and Reversing Burnout](#)

**Guide:** [Overcoming Burnout in Proposal Management](#)

**Blog:** [Collaboration, Time Management, and the Need for Change](#)



PRESENTATION TITLE

# Data Readiness for AI & Tech Adoption Success

SPEAKERS



**Allison Ritz**  
Director of Product Marketing  
[VisibleThread](#)

DESCRIPTION

This strategic session analyzed the critical “readiness gap” separating AI ambition from measurable value in GovCon environments. Allison Ritz explored why most AI initiatives fail not because of the technology, but due to “data chaos” and immature workflows. The discussion provided a practical roadmap for building an AI-ready knowledge stack, emphasizing the shift from large, unstructured documents to modular, tagged content blocks. By focusing on the four pillars of integrity, accessibility, process, and governance, organizations can ensure that AI acts as a multiplier of excellence rather than a scaler of existing disorder.

KEY LEARNINGS

1. Standardize Before You Scale: AI is a mirror, not a magic wand. Without structured, modular knowledge stacks, you only accelerate the delivery of “fast rubbish.”
2. Map the Outcome-First Roadmap: Identify data gaps by working backward from specific deliverables to ensure your AI sources are traceable, owned, and trusted.
3. How can leadership reframe data governance as a strategic win-rate driver rather than a back-office IT burden?



Watch Recording

**“Bad processes scale just as well and even more quickly than efficient ones.”**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**On-Demand Webinar:** [Data Readiness for AI & Tech Adoption Success](#)

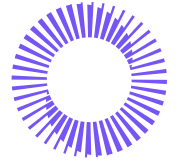
**Guide:** [The Ultimate Guide to AI in Proposal Management](#)

**Blog:** [Cultivating AI Champions - Gaining Buy-In from Leadership](#)

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PRESENTATION TITLE

# The Domino Effect: Aligning Pricing, Compliance, and Capture for Sustainable Growth

SPEAKERS



**Tan Wilson,**  
President,  
Entellect



**Jeff Shapiro,**  
Partner,  
CohnReznick



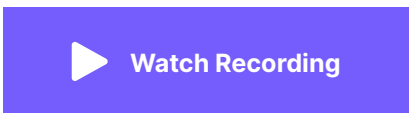
**Teresa Moon,**  
VP of Communications & Marketing,  
Parabilis

DESCRIPTION

This high-level strategic panel dissected the dangerous “domino effect” that occurs when pricing, compliance, and capture are siloed rather than integrated. The discussion challenged the common industry practice of “buying-in” on bids, identifying it as a precursor to cash flow strain and margin pressure rather than a viable path to growth. Panelists also critiqued the current “BIC fatigue,” arguing that many multi-award IDIQ seats act as expensive vanity metrics for firms without a post-award task order strategy. By advocating for “adult conversations” about profit and involving lenders in the capture phase, the session provided a roadmap for transforming business development from a speculative cash-burn exercise into a financeable, sustainable growth engine.

KEY LEARNINGS

1. End the “Logo Count” Obsession: An IDIQ seat is a license to hunt, not a revenue guarantee. Without a funded task-order strategy, these vehicles become expensive vanity metrics that inflate overhead.
2. Treat Financial Capability as a Compliance Gate: As COs increasingly mandate stability checks, integrating your lender during capture is a strategic necessity to prove you are a low-risk partner.
3. How can leadership shift incentives from “total wins” to “executable profitability” to prevent the company from winning its way into bankruptcy?



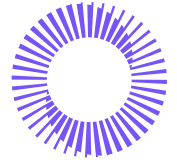
**“Financial capability is an underestimated part of compliance and government contracting. FAR very simply puts that the contracting officer has to assess the financial capability of the contract before award.”**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**On-Demand Webinar:** [The Domino Effect: Aligning Pricing, Compliance, and Capture](#)

**Blog:** [RFP Management: Mastering The RFP Lifecycle](#)

**Podcast:** [Technical Experts: Why Orals Are the Ultimate Procurement Discriminator](#)



PRESENTATION TITLE

# Change Management and Knowledge Management Processes

SPEAKERS



**Kathryn Potter**,  
Partner, Country Manager,  
**CSK Management**

DESCRIPTION

This session addressed the critical intersection of knowledge management and change management, moving beyond the mere “organization of stuff” to a sustainable knowledge strategy. Kathryn Potter outlined why many proposal databases fail—not due to technology, but due to a lack of human adoption and ongoing curation. She introduced the SLIC framework (Searchable, Logical, Indexed, Central) and argued that successful implementation requires managing the “people side of change” through leadership engagement and clear ownership. The discussion emphasized that a knowledge base is a living ecosystem, not a one-time project, and is essential for reducing bid turnaround times and mitigating the risk of “hallucinations” in an AI-driven environment.

KEY LEARNINGS

1. **Adopt the SLIC Standard:** Ensure your knowledge base is Searchable, Logical, Indexed, and Central to eliminate the data silos that block your win rate.
2. **Prevent “Post-Implementation Decay”:** Avoid treating knowledge management as a one-time project; without ongoing oversight, content quickly becomes obsolete.
3. **How can leaders reposition knowledge management as a strategic time-saver rather than an administrative burden?**



Watch Recording

**“The day we think that we’ve got everything nailed is the day that we actually realise we haven’t because that’s when things will break.”**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Blog:** [Overcoming Automation Anxiety: How to Successfully Introduce AI and Automation](#)

**Guide:** [From Vision to Victory – The Ultimate Proposal Management Process](#)

**Podcast:** [Opportunity Starts at the Top - Leadership, Risk, and the Bidding Mindset](#)

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