DEALCRAFT ADVISORY

WHITEPAPER · OCTOBER 2026

Lessons From the Losses

How to run a loss review that wins the next bid: a five-step method, a debrief question bank and a one-page template for SAP and ERP bid teams.

HEAR IT
What the buyer actually saw

TRACE IT
Which battle we really lost

FIX IT
Three actions, three owners

Written for bid directors, sales leaders and practice heads.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A lost bid is the most expensive research you will ever buy

A large SAP or ERP pursuit can cost months of senior time. When it is lost, most teams get back a letter, a score and a few days of quiet. Then the next RFP lands and the lesson goes unlearned.

The problem is rarely that teams don't care. It is that the usual post-mortem is run by the people who wrote the bid, about the bid they wrote, before anyone has asked the buyer. It explains the loss in the team's own terms, usually price, the incumbent or politics, and changes nothing.

A good loss review does three things differently. It **hears** the buyer's account before reaching a verdict. It **traces** the loss to the stage of the pursuit where it was really decided, which is usually weeks or months before submission. And it **fixes** something specific, with a name and a date next to it.

Up to 70%

of the time, the reason sellers give for a lost deal differs from the reason the buyer gives.

Corporate Visions[1]

53%

of buyers in lost deals say the losing vendor could have won by doing something differently.

Corporate Visions[1]

15 days

is the limit for an EU public buyer to explain, on written request, why your tender lost and what made the winner better.

Directive 2014/24/EU, Art. 55[3]

WHAT THIS PAPER GIVES YOU

A method
Five steps, from the hot wash in the first 48 hours to three owned actions, with timings for public and private tenders.

A question bank
Twelve debrief questions that get past "your price was high" to how the buyer actually decided.

A template
A one-page loss review that traces the loss to one of eight battles every ERP bid has to win.

FROM THE BOOK

The slow loss

This paper draws on *The Bid Director: Win the Deals That Matter*, a new book from Dealcraft Advisory. One of its war stories follows Kestrel, a €200 million outsourcing re-compete that ran for most of a year and was lost without a bang.

> "Not every award day comes with minutes. Some come with silence, and then a letter."
>
> THE BID DIRECTOR · AWARD DAY: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

Before bidding, the team had taken Kestrel through a full qualification session. By the end of the day the wall showed it all: friends high up in the client and very few further down, incumbents who had been there for years and employed some of the client's own former staff, and some history at the account that nobody wanted to talk about. The client kept its incumbents. All of them.

None of that was news. The method had done its job. What it hadn't done was make anyone act.

> "Every red flag on that wall deserved a name next to it and a decision: fix it, price it, or accept it, out loud. Most of ours got a shrug and a hope."
>
> THE BID DIRECTOR · DAY ONE: THE CHEAPEST NO YOU'LL EVER SAY

That is the first lesson of loss reviews: **most losses are known before they happen.** The review's job is not to discover the reasons. It is to find out why known reasons weren't acted on, and to make sure the next pursuit acts on them.

The second lesson is about what the client was really buying. Kestrel's client was more frightened of leaving a supplier it knew than of staying with one that cost too much. A debrief that only asks about price will never find that out.

> *An incumbent's greatest asset isn't its price or its technology. It's that the client already knows what will go wrong.*

WHY LOSS REVIEWS FAIL

Five ways to learn nothing from a loss

Most organisations hold some kind of review after a big loss. Few of them change the next bid. The same five patterns explain most of the gap.

FAILURE MODE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
Blaming the price	"We were 12% higher." The review stops there, because price feels objective.	Ask why the buyer didn't value the difference. A price is only "too high" relative to what the buyer believed it was getting.
Marking your own homework	The bid team reviews the bid team, and the conclusions protect the people in the room.	Have someone who wasn't on the pursuit chair the review, and agree in advance that it reviews decisions, not people.
No buyer voice	The verdict is reached from inside the team's own emails and memories.	Get the debrief first, in the buyer's words. Hold the team review after it, not before.
Wrong timing	Either the morning after, when emotions run high, or months later, when nobody remembers.	Capture facts within 48 hours. Reach conclusions after the debrief, within three to four weeks.
No owner	Fifteen findings in a slide deck that nobody opens again.	Three actions at most, each with a named owner, a date and the next pursuit it applies to.

REVIEW YOUR WINS TOO

A win hides as many mistakes as a loss reveals. Buyers are often more candid with a supplier they have just chosen, and the lessons are cheaper to apply. A team that reviews only its losses learns only what not to do.

THE METHOD

Five steps, from the letter to the next bid

1

WITHIN 48 HOURS

Hot wash: capture the facts, not the verdict

Thirty minutes with the core team while memories are fresh. Build a simple timeline: what we knew, when we knew it and what we decided. Write down every assumption the bid relied on. Ban the word “because” until the debrief.

2

WITHIN THE FIRST WEEK

Ask for the debrief, in writing

For a public tender, send a short written request for the reasons, the characteristics and relative advantages of the winning tender, and your scores against each criterion. For a private buyer, ask the sponsor for thirty minutes and offer to go to them. Ask for the conversation, not a justification.

3

WITHIN THREE WEEKS

Hold the debrief: listen, don’t defend

Send two people: one senior, one who will take notes. Use the question bank overleaf. Do not argue with anything the buyer says, even when it is wrong. A buyer’s misunderstanding of your bid is itself a finding about your bid.

4

WITHIN FOUR WEEKS

Trace the loss to the battle where it was decided

With a chair from outside the pursuit, map the evidence onto the eight battles every ERP bid has to win (Tool 2). Most losses trace back to one or two of them, and usually to an earlier stage than the team expects.

5

BEFORE THE NEXT BID STARTS

Decide three actions, and give each an owner

No more than three. Each one names an owner, a date and the next pursuit it will be tested on. Then send the buyer a short thank-you note. A good debrief is the start of the next pursuit with that client, not the end of this one.

RULES OF THE ROOM

Review decisions, not people. Separate what the buyer said from what we believe. Every finding needs evidence. Silence counts as agreement, so the chair asks each person directly. And nothing leaves the room as blame.

TOOL 1

The debrief question bank

Twelve questions in three groups. You won't get through all of them; choose five or six in advance and let the buyer talk.

How they decided

1 What problem were you most trying to solve when you went to market?
Tests whether you shaped your bid around their real priority.

2 At what point did the winner pull ahead?
Shortlist, orals and BAFO tell different stories.

3 Who had the most influence on the final decision, and what mattered most to them?
The power map you should have had.

4 Was there a moment when our bid lost ground?
Buyers often remember one question, one slide or one answer.

How they read us

5 In one sentence, what did you understand we were offering?
If their sentence isn't your storyline, the story didn't land.

6 What made the winner's proposal feel safer?
Most ERP decisions are risk decisions.

How they read us (continued)

7 Was our price unclear, high, or high for what you believed you would get?
Three different problems with three different fixes.

8 Did our team feel like one team?
Partner seams show more in orals than on paper.

What would have changed it

9 If we could have changed one thing, what should it have been?
The single most valuable question in the list.

10 Was there anything you needed from us that you didn't get?
Missing evidence, references, a person, a guarantee.

11 Is there anything in how the tender was run that you'd do differently?
Buyers learn too, and they remember who asked.

12 May we stay in touch as the programme goes on?
Opens the door for the next pursuit.

DURING THE DEBRIEF

Thank them for the time. Ask, then stop talking. Write down their words, not your summary of them. Never argue a score in the debrief; if you have a genuine concern about the process, raise it separately and in writing.

TOOL 2

Which battle did we lose?

The Bid Director describes eight battles every ERP bid has to win, in order. Lose any one of them and the best solution comes second. Map the debrief onto them.

#	BATTLE	THE QUESTION	WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE IN A DEBRIEF
1	Shape	Did we help shape the requirement before the RFP?	"The winner understood what we were really trying to do."
2	Qualify	Should we have bid, and did we act on the red flags?	"Honestly, it was always going to be hard to move away from our current supplier."
3	Decode	Did we know how we'd be scored, and by whom?	"Your technical answer was strong, but the value case was less clear."
4	Assemble	Were we one team across partners?	"It felt like several companies presenting together."
5	Story	Would our story survive being read aloud?	"We weren't sure what made you different."
6	Draw the line	Could our price and scope be read only one way?	"We couldn't compare your price with the others."
7	Win the room	Who answered the hardest question, and how?	"The orals didn't match the written proposal."
8	Land	Did they believe we'd deliver what we sold?	"We weren't confident about the transition."

The one-page loss review

BATTLE LOST	THE BUYER SAID	OUR EVIDENCE	ACTION, OWNER, DATE, NEXT PURSUIT

Pursuit: _____ Buyer: _____ Decision date: _____ Review chair (not on the pursuit): _____

PUBLIC TENDERS IN IRELAND AND THE EU

Your right to reasons, and the clock that keeps running

In public procurement above the EU thresholds, a debrief is not a favour. Unsuccessful tenderers are entitled to reasons, and the courts expect those reasons to be real.

WHAT YOU ARE TOLD AUTOMATICALLY

The award notice that starts the standstill period must include a summary of the reasons your tender was rejected.[4] The standstill period is at least 14 calendar days when the notice is sent electronically, and 16 days otherwise.[4]

The Irish High Court has held that these reasons must be specific to your tender. Scores alone are generally not enough for qualitative criteria, and generic reasons that could apply to any bidder fall short.[5]

WHAT YOU CAN ASK FOR

On written request, the contracting authority must tell you, as quickly as possible and within 15 days, the reasons your tender was rejected and, if your tender was admissible, the characteristics and relative advantages of the winning tender and the winner's name.[3] Information can be withheld on limited grounds, such as commercial confidentiality.

Ask early. Asking for more information or holding a debrief does not pause the standstill period or the time limits for a legal challenge.[5]

KEEP TWO DECISIONS APART

Whether to challenge an award is a legal and commercial decision, taken quickly and with advice. What to learn from the loss is a slower, internal one. Mixing them makes both worse: a team preparing a challenge stops listening, and a team trying to learn hesitates to challenge. Decide the first with your lawyers; run the second as this paper describes.

PRIVATE BUYERS

Private companies owe you nothing after a loss, which makes how you ask matter more. Ask the sponsor, not procurement. Keep it short, make it easy, and make it clear you want to learn, not to reopen the decision. The buyers most willing to talk are often the ones who almost chose you.

This section is general information, not legal advice. Rules differ below the EU thresholds, in the utilities and defence regimes, and outside Ireland. Take advice on any live procurement.

THE HABIT THAT COMPOUNDS

Learning faster than your competitors

No bid team wins them all. The teams that win more are the ones that learn more from each result, win or lose, and carry it into the next pursuit.

That takes discipline more than talent: a hot wash every time, a debrief every time, a chair from outside the pursuit and three actions with owners. In a survey of 313 business leaders running win-loss programmes, 56% of senior respondents said the programme had helped increase their win rates.[2] The method matters less than the habit.

Three things to do this month

Pick the last significant pursuit you lost. If you never asked for a debrief, it may not be too late to ask for a conversation.

Agree who will chair loss reviews in future. It should be someone senior who is not on the pursuit.

Add one line to your bid/no-bid sheet: every red flag gets a named owner and a decision.

Sources

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2. Klue, "Win-loss analysis statistics", 15 April 2025, reporting Klue's survey of 313 business leaders involved in win-loss programmes. klue.com
3. Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement, Article 55(2), transposed in Ireland by the European Union (Award of Public Authority Contracts) Regulations 2016 (S.I. No. 284 of 2016), Regulation 55. eur-lex.europa.eu; irishstatutebook.ie
4. European Communities (Public Authorities' Contracts) (Review Procedures) Regulations 2010 (S.I. No. 130 of 2010), Regulations 5 and 6. irishstatutebook.ie
5. *RPS Consulting Engineers Ltd v Kildare County Council*, High Court, 15 February 2016, as summarised by McCann FitzGerald, "Unsuccessful tenderers' entitlement to information: Irish court clarifies position", 18 February 2016, and RDJ, "Taking a stand on standstill letters", 30 August 2017.

Quotations from *The Bid Director* (Dealcraft Advisory, 2026); its stories are anonymised. SAP is a trademark of SAP SE. Dealcraft Advisory is independent and has no commercial relationship with any organisation named in this paper.

ABOUT DEALCRAFT ADVISORY

We help SAP and ERP bids get decided before they get written

Bid direction, win strategy and independent reviews for system integrators pursuing SAP and ERP programmes, and buy-side tender support for organisations buying them.

Built on more than 30 years of SAP and enterprise deal experience and more than 225 RFP wins valued at over $750 million, across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

Independent loss reviews. An outside chair makes the difference between a review that protects the team and one that changes the next bid. We can run the hot wash and the root-cause session, prepare your debrief questions and turn the findings into three actions, scoped as a fixed-fee project.

New: *The Bid Director: Win the Deals That Matter*, by Daksh Kumar. One real SAP S/4HANA RFP, worked from the day it lands to the day it is awarded. Read Chapter 2 free at **dealcraftadvisory.ie/book**.

The first conversation is free. Book a discovery call at **dealcraftadvisory.ie** or email **sales@dealcraftadvisory.ie**.

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