

Should you choose that firm whose lead partner looks incredibly competent? There's a lot at stake, so you have to get it right. Consultants may tell you this means a complex process with multiple selection rounds and months of analysis, based on hundreds of formulae and countless spreadsheets. And if you're in the pub-

competent-looking chief executives, but instant judgments seemed remarkably accurate. Perhaps your next RFP might ask simply for photos of the lawyers who want to do your work, with the winning firm selected by the legal department's latest hire—someone who knows none of the lawyers whose photos will be judged for perceived competence.

lieve that “a good process” automatically results in a good outcome might freak out, but this doesn't mean that the exercise is taken less seriously. Indeed, it demonstrates that you focus only on what really matters.

It might also help encourage firms to do likewise. Once I gave a lawyer a dozen document folders a few days before a critical meeting. The lawyer arrived with a single sheet of paper for our meeting, not the usual 20-page opinion. Four quadrants represented each option, with a few bullet points in each. Within a few minutes, the right course was clear. It was equally clear that this lawyer could distill a complex transaction with uncertain law and difficult options into a framework enabling effective decision-making.

Some firms would have felt the need to justify the time spent with a suitable weighty “output” (the long advice letter). But the lawyer's “output” was largely irrelevant; instead, the “outcome” was all-important, and a savvy lawyer with a single page of well-ordered notes helped facilitate smart commercial decision-making.

If you set the scene well, firms who distill the essence of the value they can add to your business should stand out from those simply preparing the same old slick pitch.

And you will of course have their photos to help make sure you choose wisely. 📷

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NOTE

1. N Rule & N Ambady, “The Face of Success: Inferences from Chief Executive Officers' Appearance Predict Company Profits,” *Psychological Science*, 2008, 19(2), 109-111. The data were excluded for participants who recognised chief executives.

Mugshots and Elevator Pitches

BY RONALD F. POL

lic sector, that's just to decide what font to use in the RFP documents.

Despite all this process, do you sometimes seem to select the firm you pretty much knew would be chosen? This doesn't mean that the outcome was predetermined, but that the process simply produced the result you intuitively expected anyway. Coincidence?

Remember those biographies of the prospective firm's lawyers, complete with qualifications, work experience, and photos? You may have only glanced at this section. After all, every good firm has well-qualified lawyers, and surely their photos are irrelevant in the decision-making process. Maybe not.

Recent research suggests that the completely uninformed can identify top-performing companies simply from photos of chief executives who appeared most competent.¹ Shown photos of the leaders of the 25 highest and lowest ranking *Fortune 1000* companies, analysis that controlled for race, sex, age, emotional expression, and attractiveness found a link between perceived leadership traits and profitability. The researchers accepted that it was unclear whether competent-looking chief executives helped their companies succeed, or whether successful companies chose

If that's a little far-fetched, think about the venture capital firms that invest tens of millions of dollars in unknown people, companies, and products, and famously base their decision on a business plan distilled into a few pages and a presentation pitch of a few minutes. If you can't distill the essence of what you offer in the time it takes to ride the elevator from the ground floor, it will be too complex to succeed, and you will never get to the penthouse.

So here's a radical concept: For your next RFP, get the team to create a shortlist of firms you'd be happy to work with. Then invite them each to prepare no more than five pages on what they can do to help your business. Frame this carefully; it's not how well they know the law, or what areas of law they specialize in, but how they can help your business. Then give each of them 10 minutes to tell you what they will do for you.

It should quickly become apparent who can do little more than offer the same old platitudes you've heard countless times before. Stripped of the usual 100 pages of beautifully manicured text recycled from their last RFP, these firms will stand out like snowmen in Arizona.

Sure, the process junkies who be-



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