
“Are you comfortable?”

Somehow it doesn't help that the guy next to him just had to answer the same question. Buddy feels, rightly, that he's being put on the spot. They all are.

This is late on Day Two of the joint planning session and frankly everyone has had all the fun they can stand. The meeting room is full of operational experts from both partner companies, and the tight quarters are wearing in themselves.

Worse, there are no windows, so it's only their exhaustion and the rock-hard, dried-out bagels and muffins brought in this morning—*Or was it last week sometime?*—that make it obvious it's past the nominal end of office hours. Not that it matters: No one is leaving—going home or to their hotel room—until this is resolved. The schedule allowed two days for this activity: It didn't specify how long those days might be.

“Are you comfortable?”

For two days they've been cutting and squeezing and paring the proposed project organization to the competitive bone. How he knows, I don't know, but the proposal manager now has some sense that the team has gone far enough. Cut enough fat and muscle to actually win this contract by underbidding an incumbent determined to hang onto it. This is the moment of truth.

This is also the moment where they might get to leave for the day. But only if they answer correctly. And only if he believes them.

“Are you comfortable?”

Buddy grimaces and responds for his function, his part of the work.

“No.”

No, I'm not comfortable that these staffing levels will give us the flexibility we need to manage the planned shifts and the unplanned absences.

No, I'm not comfortable that this salary budget will get us the skilled people we need.

No, I'm not comfortable that this materials budget will be sufficient to actually cover the stuff we'll need to buy and use.

No, I'm not comfortable that we can meet contract requirements if we go this low.

It's not all said, but it's all understood. The proposal manager's expression does not change: Nothing betrays whether he feels satisfaction or unease or nothing at all. His nod is pure acknowledgement as he moves to the next victim.

“Are you comfortable?”