

The Proposal Happiness Index 2026

Strategic Proposals
in partnership with
the APMP Mental
Health Affinity
Group



Strategic
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Welcome

to the second edition of the Proposal Happiness Index – the world’s largest research report into wellbeing in the bid and proposal profession. Over 200 of you told us how you feel about your work. You covered the globe, from Armenia and Australia to the UK and the USA.

Our goals? First, to share how your fellow professionals are feeling right now. But more importantly to pool experiences – and offer practical tips that might help you with your wellbeing, and your organisation to get better at supporting you in your work.

The research has been carried out by Strategic Proposals, a consultancy with offices around the world. And we’ve again worked in partnership with the APMP Mental Health Affinity Group, which we’re proud to sponsor.



APMP’s Mental Health Affinity Group (MHAG) is thankful for Strategic Proposal’s support and effort put into the Proposal Happiness Index! The Proposal Happiness Index helps create a space for open conversation, connection, and practical support, the MHAG helps proposal professionals prioritize mental well-being while navigating the pressures of the profession. A healthier proposal community is a happier one—and that’s an important part of building sustainable success. Please join the Mental Health Affinity Group’s meeting on the 3rd Wednesday of every month at 12 PM EST.



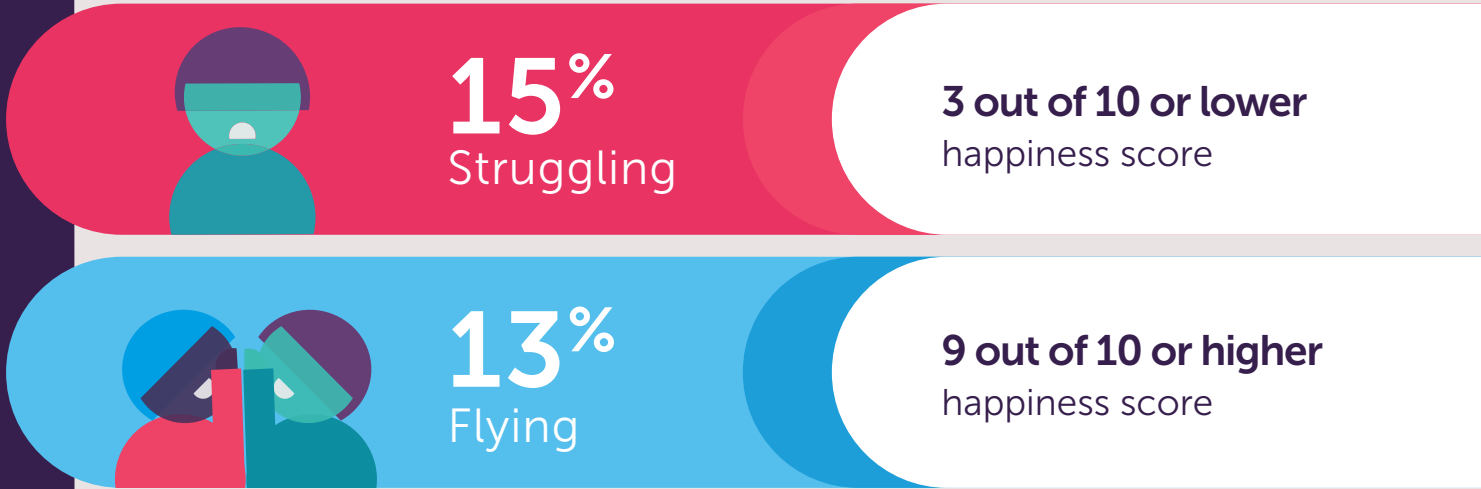
Tori Bunk, Co-Chair, APMP Mental Health Affinity Group

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Headline scores

	2025	2026
How happy are you in your role?	6.8	6.4 ↓
How meaningful do you find your work?	7.2	6.9 ↓
How valued do you feel?	7.2	6.9 ↓

The **good** news is that some of you are thriving. *Worryingly*, many are not.



Even more worrying – the number who are struggling has risen year-on-year, and the number who are flying has fallen.

As some of you said

“I’m just trying to keep my head above water.”
“it’s been so busy it’s been hell.”
“I have stopped caring.”

→ If you’re in that camp, we hope some of the ideas in this report might give you glimmers of hope. And if you’re a leader, think about how the experiences that people shared in the survey might help you to improve the wellbeing of those working for you.

A note on AI

As you might expect, we heard far more about AI in this year’s survey than in 2025. One in seven of the survey respondents mentioned it this time around.

Interestingly, 72% of those who raised AI framed their comments about how helpful they find it. But the 28% who were negative about it – that it’s something being done to them rather than with or for them – averaged only 3.1 on “How valued do you feel?”. That’s half the overall score.

Done well, AI has the potential to improve happiness. Done badly: quite the opposite, with a really adverse impact on wellbeing.

"Weekends are for people and not just Day 6 and Day 7 of the working week."

"Give the proposal team a seat at the table. When we win, we all win. If we lose we all lose."

"A lack of planning on the stakeholder's part does not constitute an emergency on mine!"

"Reignited our social events. Quiz events over Teams and sharing insights outside of work...what's good to watch on TV/films etc., sharing new hobbies and recipes - anything non work related."

"Create a day to gather as a team to celebrate wins, recognize good work and bond as a team without the pressure of work."

"Always have perspective. My job is important but it's not saving lives. Take a deep breath and do your best. Ultimately in the grand scheme of life, none of it really matters. This has always helped me to approach high pressure tasks with bravery."

Quotes we love

"45% of the time they don't tell me [the result] at all. My contribution is completely forgotten."

"Change the narrative of the sales rep wins the bid but the bid team loses the bid."

"Leadership thinks AI makes us more productive and therefore we should bid on as many things as possible."

"Worry about what you can change and not about what you can't."

"Bidding brings in the future (no bids, no future)."

What change would make things better?

We asked what one realistic change in the next year would most improve wellbeing at work for those working on proposals in their organisations. Based on their replies, here's a checklist of things you might want to consider

In each case, we've left space for you to think about how your organisation is doing right now, and whether there's anything that could change that would help.

#	Improvement area	What could you or your organisation do to improve here?
1	Recognition and respect. Too often, bid and proposal professionals feel treated like admin staff, not strategic contributors. You want to "feeling valued by stakeholders" with "authentic and real gratitude", to be given "due credit" and to be "treated like a revenue generating team, not an admin team." And there's a direct correlation in the data between "feeling valued" and "happiness".	
2	Better workload management and resourcing. Overwork, burnout and unrealistic volumes were major concerns. People called for "better resourced teams so that workload is proportionate" and "less workload, less stress".	
3	Stronger bid qualification. Working on too many deals with low win probabilities is incredibly demotivating. That's not news, right? But you're still crying out for "more considered decisions around whether to pursue an opportunity" and "saying no to tenders that stand no chance of success". And the number of you mentioning this has nearly doubled since last year.	
4	Leadership understanding and engagement. People want senior leaders to understand the discipline, join bid calls, support processes, and communicate transparently. It'd be nice "for senior leadership to take an interest in learning what we actually do".	
5	Cross-business collaboration. Winning a bid isn't solely down to the bid and proposal function! You're looking for better cross-functional support, earlier SME input, and shared responsibility for wins and losses. "Stakeholders taking early accountability" would be nice, as would be "equal effort from others involved in the proposal process".	
6	Life-work balance. You expressed a strong desire for healthier boundaries, reduced overtime and remote working. You wanted your organisation to recognise that weekends are not workdays, impose "working 'curfews'" so all proposal work is done in-hours" and acknowledge that "weekends are for people".	
7	Clear roles and processes. People are crying out for "clarity around roles and expectations", better planning and more structure workflows. We loved the idea of "a proposal team charter that clearly delineates proposal managers' responsibilities and mission."	
8	Technology and content Infrastructure. You asked for "better AI tools to support the team's actual workflow". And content is queen or king: there needs to be focus on "development of a comprehensive, accurate, and current content library to enable more effective use of AI."	
9	Professional development. Training, learning time and clearer career pathways were widely requested – as well as more support for junior staff early in their bidding careers. When, for example, did you last have time to hold "sessions with SMEs to get a better understanding of their subject"? Do you have a professional development manifesto for your team – and yourself?	
10	Culture, community and psychological safety. Respondents called for healthier team dynamics, less negativity, more social connection (especially in teams that work largely remotely) and "for my voice to be heard". Worst case? One person who talked about the way their former company treated them as being "an abusive relationship".	

What have you changed in the past year?

As well as looking forward at areas that could improve wellbeing, we asked people to share experiences of things that have worked.

The question we posed:

What’s one thing you’ve done in the past year that improved your wellbeing at work - and that other bid/proposal professionals might want to try?

So here, quoted verbatim, are nearly 80 tips from your fellow professionals that you might want to consider. We’ve left room for you to note any ideas that you might want to take forward.

Personal care

- 1

I took the time to meditate and center myself. I started using the Calm app and I really feel like it has helped me to gain better work life balance.
- 2

Learned to us AI (Copilot) to help manage my workload/daily activities, especially as a neurodivergent individual. I find Copilot has helped me feel grounded when I feel overwhelmed and, by assisting with my day/week planning, freed up time/mental space to focus on bidding activities.
- 3

I started volunteering in the community and it has really filled my cup. It makes me feel good to give back and I have brought that into my workplace. Now we have small teams that regularly volunteer at our local animal shelter and with Habitat for Humanity. Not only is this great for team building, but we are making a difference in our local community.
- 4

Starting off my day with reading a different quote by my favorite author.
- 5

I recently began seeing an ADHD coach to help me with my career.



Which of these ideas might help me / our team?

Changing approach

- 1

I was fed up of constantly feeling angry and anxious so I’ve tried to reframe my own thought process to intentionally think positively which helps to avoid feeling so overwhelmed. It doesn’t always work but by intentionally making that decision, I feel more in control.
- 2

Accepting the transition of influence to the next generation as I’m nearing the end of my career.
- 3

Set a clear list of personal development goals.
- 4

Managing stress better.
- 5

Stepped back from everything that doesn’t make me money or make me happy.
- 6

Receiving and giving feedback.
- 7

Listened more.
- 8

Not taking the negative comments personally.
- 9

Manage expectations and accept that certain proposals will just be good, not excellent.
- 10

Journaling my experience, capturing things I’m learning, what’s working well, what are the frustrations and any solutions I can work on.
- 11

Travel. I spent a month in another country/time zone but worked normal days for most of it. Just the relocation was incredibly helpful at making my remote job more valuable.
- 12

Cleansed and organised my Email inbox personal files, downloads etc. This gives me a clear space to work from. Less clutter, less chaos.
- 13

I divide my day into four blocks. Must do, will do, can do and delegate. It helps me have an order in very busy proposal times



Which of these ideas might help me / our team?



"No" not "yes"

- 1 I learned how to (respectfully) say "no" or "not yet, but I will" to tasks that get put on my desk so that I can finish the one that actually needs my full attention and workflow at the time.
- 2 Being able to say no - knowing my boundaries and limits have really helped me keep control of my mental health.
- 3 Standing up for myself.
- 4 Asserted positive boundaries. That's explaining what you can do, rather not what you can't do. I've gotten so much better at saying "no" to some things so that I can say "yes" to other, more important things. True professionals will respect "no," which is also a complete sentence.
- 5 Honestly, pushing back harder. Refusing to work on a bid which drops at 5:30 and is due the next day. Not to say we don't help at all - we support them in self-serving.



Which of these ideas might help me / our team?



Which of these ideas might help me / our team?

- 1 Taking proper breaks during the day to go outside.
- 2 Getting / walking a dog = forced breaks away from the desk.
- 3 Consciously build short reset breaks into busy bid days, especially after high-pressure meetings or review sessions. Even five minutes away from the screen can help clear your head, reduce stress and make the next task more productive.
- 4 Purposefully stepping away from the desk EVERY DAY to take a walk or otherwise engage in the world beyond the computer bubble.
- 5 Have a five minute break to walk around / read a couple of chapters of a book every hour.
- 6 Put a visible lunch break on my calendar and eat away from my desk.
- 7 Reserve a "meeting free Friday" 4-hour block to catch up on work at the end of the week.
- 8 Left large group Teams chats
- 9 Stopped looking at emails all the time. Instead checking 5 mins every second hour, marked up the ones needing action and booked time for that.
- 10 Being more intentional about protecting time for focused work and not letting constant urgency take over the day.
- 11 Not working on bids during Annual Leave; I no longer take my work laptop on holiday.
- 12 Booked my holidays in advance and took them....really switched off.
- 13 Not checking emails on holiday and letting people handle things on their own

Re-align the working (and non-working) day

- 1

I have stopped checking work emails early in the morning before I take the dog out for a walk. I wait until I am at my desk to start work properly.
- 2

Being strict on finishing work on time. I feel more productive in working hours by not allowing the "indulgence" of working late on anything, and making sure I'm switched off about anything work related once the clock strikes 5.
- 3

Made my workout time a priority by leaving the office to arrive at my exercise class on time... I'm not going to miss my Pilates classes that help keep me strong and fit and mentally well!!
- 4

Putting in place a boundary between work and home. Most importantly, holding this boundary firm in the face of challenges has earned respect from the business and its leaders. I do not need to always be available all of the time!
- 5

Made time for myself and set clear boundaries with key stakeholders, been strict with finish times to ensure my family also get the time they need with me. Doesn't always work but 85-90% of the time it has.
- 6

Stop cancelling plans - if you have a loved one's birthday or a special event, don't cancel it to bid - work around it.
- 7

I've turned off notifications on my phone so that I'm not constantly seeing every message and email after my working hours.
- 8

I started a four-day work week
- 9

Worked a 9/80 schedule.



Which of these ideas might help me / our team?



Let's talk

- 1

Reached out to mentors outside the organization, to keep my perspective positive and looking outward.
- 2

Sharing my feelings and stress with colleagues to find better solutions.
- 3

Attending webinars focused more on the soft skills / mental health / wellbeing types of topics where you find other proposal professionals may be feeling the same as you -- you don't feel as alone.
- 4

Created discussion/text chat groups with other proposal writers
- 5

Touch base via phone to coworkers instead of just via e-mail or messages. Human connection helps.
- 6

Started a creative writing lunch group
- 7

Ensuring I thank all those that contributed to the proposal and leaning in when needed.
- 8

Desk Escape! A weekly (optional) initiative that team members share a picture that represents how they have escaped their desk during the working week. Could be a dog walk, gym, coffee - as wild or placid as they like.
- 9

Use of a structured approach to internal comms through Engage (e.g. 'week in the life' rotated around all colleagues), team days, sports days, team dinners, business update calls with associates, informal pay day nights out, trained wellbeing champions, sponsored social value event participation.



Which of these ideas might help me / our team?



Embracing AI

- 1 Embracing new tools like Copilot
- 2 Introduced AI as a core part of how we operate
- 3 Leveraging AI for both process and creative proposal work.
- 4 Embraced using copilot
- 5 Building AI agents and challenging leadership in improving the process.
- 6 Sent AI slop back to author rather than fix it myself
- 7 If I had to pick one thing, I would say that the gradual and careful use of AI in the context of bids has improved how I feel about my overall contribution and ability to offer feedback when it comes to the written word.



Which of these ideas might help me / our team?

Organisational changes

- 1 Redefined the bid / no bid process
- 2 Gave honest, direct feedback to decision makers on what is and is not working.
- 3 Insist on starting early, before the ITN / RFP arrives
- 4 Incorporated additional resources (additional team members and AI tools)
- 5 Created proposal checklists and distribute to responsible staff, hold them accountable rather than doing it all yourself
- 6 Becoming more familiar with industry knowledge has helped with SME relationships. Having a better grasp of what they are saying has improved their level trust.
- 7 Our team is now nicely resourced which means we are not putting a small amount of people under a lot of pressure and not letting bids affect their personal lives.
- 8 Showcasing what we do as a team to other areas of the business not involved in bidding but who we need support from.
- 9 I have a final submission playlist I listen to when I am finalizing a proposal.
- 10 We have moved to a nicer, brighter, shinier office with lots of natural light which the team are loving.



Which of these ideas might help me / our team?

Moving jobs

- 1 I left a work environment that was detrimental to my physical & mental health and joined a new team better aligned to my personal values and work style. It has hugely improved my wellbeing at work! It is better to leave the wrong room, no matter how much time is invested, than to stay in it & be unhappy.
- 2 Left my 9-5 to go freelance
- 3 Moved to a role/company that really valued and invested time and money in their content management system to support bid processes, really harnessing AI to improve workflows.
- 4 Quit my job after being offered a hopefully better one!
- 5 I switched jobs! I got out of an extremely toxic corporate proposal team and moved to a smaller company that actually cares about the employees and sticks to the company core values.
- 6 Changed jobs to move to a four day week, moving to somewhere that values the bid/no bid decisions and bid professional wellbeing - not being overworked.
- 7 When I read an article on LinkedIn on how to spot a toxic boss, and was able to check every box for warning signs, I decided that was it. I was leaving. So, I left. ALWAYS HAVE AN EXIT PLAN when you see signs of your workplace becoming less transparent and more toxic.
- 8 Moving to a company that places more value on the effort and strategy that should go into putting together a meaningful submission.



Which of these ideas might help me / our team?



Conclusions

It's great that many in the profession are relatively content. 38% of those who replied scored themselves at "8 out of 10" or higher when it comes to their happiness at work.

It's encouraging that so many people have made positive changes that have helped their wellbeing. And it's revealing to see common themes emerging for ways organisations can better support their staff.

But let's be clear, Many are struggling, and quite a lot are simply getting by. The numbers are heading in the wrong direction in terms of feeling valued, finding work meaningful – and being happy. This is not, overall, a "happy" report.

If you're personal "Proposal Happiness" isn't where you'd want it to be, we hope some of the suggestions in here might help. And we hope that you can find support if needed to see you to a more positive place.

We've tried not only to share the feedback from the survey responses, but also to use the many great suggestions that people offered to help you to come up with positive improvement ideas. If you try any, we'd love to hear from you!

The Proposal Happiness Index is a now-annual survey of wellbeing for those working in bids and proposals. The 2026 edition shares findings and learning from over 200 professionals worldwide, with practical tips to improve individual and organisational happiness.

About the authors



is the Managing Director of Strategic Proposals UK. With experience in nearly forty countries, Jon has led and benchmarked numerous bid teams, helped win bids totalling over \$25bn, and trained more than 15,000 people. An award-winning writer and trainer, Jon was APMP UK's first chief executive and is a Fellow of APMP, the Royal Society of Arts, the Institute of Professional Sales and the UK Sales Association.



is the Managing Director of Strategic Proposals Canada. She's passionate about helping teams win more — and win smarter. Ceri shares her expertise widely through presentations, webinars, training, podcasts, articles, and posts, offering practical insights that elevate capture, proposal and presentation success. Ceri is an APMP Approved Trainer, Fellow (Class of 2020), and 40 Under 40 award winner (Class of 2019), and a Fellow of the Institute of Sales Professionals (ISP).



0800 009 6800 (UK)



info@strategicproposals.com