

# Friedrich Nietzsche? For Proposal Professionals?

By JAYME A. SOKOLOW, Ph.D.

Today, bookstores are awash with self-help advice books claiming to apply the ideas of great thinkers to the business world. We have Machiavelli for managers and Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* for those ready to do battle in corporate boardrooms. But there are no business books about the infamous Friedrich Nietzsche. Could there be a link between Nietzsche and the lives and work of proposal professionals?

*Nietzsche prided himself on his ability to "say in ten sentences what everyone else says in a book..."*

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who is often associated with the concept that "God is dead," is considered one of the most controversial and influential philosophers of the modern age. You can purchase excellent editions of his major works in New York City, Paris, Tokyo, and Kathmandu. Articles, biographies, and scholarly studies about Nietzsche seem to appear almost daily. Clearly, we are fascinated with Nietzsche, who prided himself on his ability to "say in ten sentences what everyone else says in a book — what everyone else *does not* say in a book."

He wrote many bold books on a wide range of topics — ethics, morality, Christianity, art, music, and the development of European culture — that gained him great notoriety soon after his death. Of all the nineteenth century's philosophers, Nietzsche still speaks to us today in a strong and uncompromising voice that is both contemporary and compelling.

"Nothing," he wrote, "has been purchased more dearly than the little bit of reason and sense of freedom which now constitutes our pride." Independence of mind was his greatest passion, but for Nietzsche intellectual autonomy always came at a great cost — self-examination and

*In this book you will discover a 'subterranean' at work, one who tunnels and mines and undermines. You will see him — presupposing you have eyes capable of seeing this work in the depths — going forward slowly, cautiously, gently inexorable, without betraying very much of the distress which any protracted deprivation of light and air must entail; you might even call him contented, working there in the dark. Does it not seem as though some faith were leading him on, some consolation offering him compensation? As though he perhaps desires this prolonged obscurity, desires to be incomprehensible, concealed, enigmatic, because he knows what he will thereby also acquire; his own morning, his own redemption, his own daybreak?*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudice of Morality*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.1.



The first essay vividly contrasts the morality of masters and slaves. According to Nietzsche, the word “good” was first associated with the life of warriors and aristocrats. It “presupposed a powerful physicality, a flourishing, abundant, even overflowing health, together with that which serves to preserve it: war, adventure, hunting, dancing, war games, and in general all that involves vigorous, free, joyful activity.” This is what Nietzsche calls the morality of masters.

After the collapse of the ancient world, these values were challenged and replaced by their opposite — a slave morality. In contrast to the noble who lives in “trust and openness with himself,” slave moralities shout that the “wretched alone are the good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are the good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God.”

The second essay examines the concept of guilt and bad conscience. Nietzsche did not believe that conscience is the voice of God in humanity. Instead, he called it “the instinct of cruelty turned backwards after it can no longer discharge itself outward.” The instinct for freedom has been “pushed back and repressed.” Now, according to Nietzsche, guilt and bad conscience mean that individuals are ashamed of their most noble instincts and have become weary, pessimistic, and mistrustful of the riddle of life.

The third and final essay examines the ascetic ideal, which Nietzsche believed dominated contemporary Christianity, philosophy, and academic life. Like bad conscience, asceticism calls into question and poisons “most dangerously our trust in life, in man, and in ourselves.” Nietzsche, who has been repeatedly accused of nihilism, turns the tables on his accusers. It is they who are the real nihilists in their love of suffering and their loathing of all that is most vibrant and human.

For Nietzsche, there are two incomparable ideals of life and two moralities. The first is the morality of the ancients, whose highest values are vigor, courage, boldness, fortitude in adversity, self-discipline, and strength of character.

Against this moral universe, Nietzsche unfavorably contrasts the second: modern or slave morality, which he associated with a contempt for this world. Although Nietzsche is considered an intellectual revolutionary, in many ways he was the last great defender of the ancients, or at least his own very personal idea of ancient virtue. For Nietzsche, master and slave moralities will always contradict each other, and there is no possibility of reconciling them.

## Nietzsche and Proposal Professionals

Nietzsche may never have written a proposal, but we can be sure that if he had written one, it would have reflected his unique prose style and polemical approach.

As a stylist, Nietzsche clearly has limited applicability for proposal professionals. In addition, probably few proposal professionals think that there is an inherent conflict between master and slave moralities. Probably even fewer have conceptualized their day-to-day work on proposals in this way. Nonetheless, I believe that if we read Nietzsche carefully there is plenty of practical advice for us to follow without having to call ourselves Nietzscheans, which I would not recommend as a career-enhancing strategy.

The chart on the previous page suggests some practical and direct ways in which Nietzsche’s philosophy can benefit us as proposal professionals.

Although Nietzsche believed that we are governed by unconscious desires and drives, he also had great confidence in the

power of reason to unmask our own delusions and what we call morality. With passion and eloquence, Nietzsche argued that individuals could have very positive consequences on their colleagues and organizations. He was certainly not blind to questions of hierarchy and power (what nineteenth-century Prussian could ignore it?), but Nietzsche fervently believed in the power of one. Little things and individuals could make a big difference, as Malcolm Gladwell has recently demonstrated in his national bestseller, *The Tipping Point* (2000).

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Ultimately, Nietzsche would have said, the best way to improve proposals is to improve ourselves. Our proposals can only be as good as the passion, intelligence, and capacity to question that we bring to them.

Nietzsche believed that our times called for a thoroughgoing re-evaluation of our work and our values. But it “would require habituation to the keen air of the heights, to winter journeys, to ice and mountains in every sense; it would require even a kind of sublime wickedness, an ultimate, supremely self-confident mischievousness in knowledge that goes with great health.”

As proposal professionals, are we up to Nietzsche’s sublime challenge?

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Jayne A. Sokolow, Ph.D., is founder and president of The Development Source, Inc., a proposal services company located in Silver Spring, MD that works with businesses, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations. He has enjoyed reading Nietzsche for the past 25 years. He is also Assistant Managing Editor and Chair of the Editorial Advisory Board of *Proposal Management*. He can be reached at [jsoko12481@aol.com](mailto:jsoko12481@aol.com).



# Nietzsche's Benefit To Proposal Professionals

Subject	Nietzschean Philosophy	Contemporary Application for Proposal Professionals
Morality of Masters	Nietzsche is the last great defender of the morality of the ancients, whose highest values are vigor, courage, boldness, fortitude in adversity, self-discipline, and strength of character.	Embracing these virtues can lead to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Peak performance</li> <li>• Better proposals.</li> </ul>
Life Fulfillment	Life can be fulfilling when personality, expertise, and purpose converge. Nietzsche goes beyond Sigmund Freud's argument that "love and work" are keys to a satisfying life. For Nietzsche, love and work must be combined with a personal morality that affirms rather than despises life.	If you enjoy your work and find it personally satisfying, you will be happier and more productive.
Mission	Everyone must define the mission of his or her work. We must constantly ask ourselves fundamental questions, such as: What are the reasons that led us into our work? Are they the same reasons that motivate us now, or have we changed? And if so, in what direction?	Define the mission of your work. Ask yourself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you enjoy your work and find it satisfying?</li> <li>• What are you most passionate about in your work?</li> <li>• Are your personality and expertise well suited to your job?</li> <li>• Is your organization compatible with your personality and expertise?</li> <li>• Are you making a positive contribution to your organization?</li> <li>• Is your employer making a positive contribution to your life and work?</li> <li>• If you are dissatisfied, what is the source? What are you doing about it ?</li> </ul>
Models/Heroes	Throughout Nietzsche's works are portraits of individuals he admired and tried to emulate, such as the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). Admitting that he liked to philosophize with a hammer, Nietzsche admired Emerson's gentle serenity, cheerfulness, his quiet New England self-confidence, and his capacity to challenge us.	Identify heroes and try to emulate them. Don't confuse celebrity for heroism. Search for individuals inside and outside the proposal profession who have the capacity to inspire you to achieve.
Self-Examination	Unless we learn to be profoundly dissatisfied with ourselves, we will never be able to attain the self-mastery that is the foundation of lasting creativity and happiness. Without self-mastery, we cannot be productive or achieve independence of mind. In <i>Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality</i> (1881), Nietzsche asked, "Why does man not see things? He is himself standing in the way: he conceals things."	Look yourself in the mirror and decide whether you are proud or embarrassed about what you see. We ask Red Teams to challenge the assumptions, themes, approaches, data, and means of persuasion in our draft proposals. How many of us, however, undertake the same kind of analysis of ourselves and our proposal teams?
Question Convictions and Beliefs	Nietzsche wanted us to constantly question our most ingrained beliefs and habits, believing that without questioning there could be no progress.	Tough questioning must be built into the core of the proposal development process, especially in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy</li> <li>• Key personnel selections</li> <li>• Red Team evaluations</li> <li>• Short- and long-range recommendations for improving the proposal process</li> <li>• Proposal lessons learned.</li> </ul>
What is truly important?	Nietzsche recommended we focus attention on what is important in our lives with all the courage and strength of character we can muster, for "there is not enough love and goodness in the world for us to be permitted to give away to imaginary things."	When developing proposals, we must focus our attention on what is most truly important—our most profound convictions—and see them as potential barriers to success. By focusing on what is most important in the proposal development process, we can better ourselves and improve our proposals.