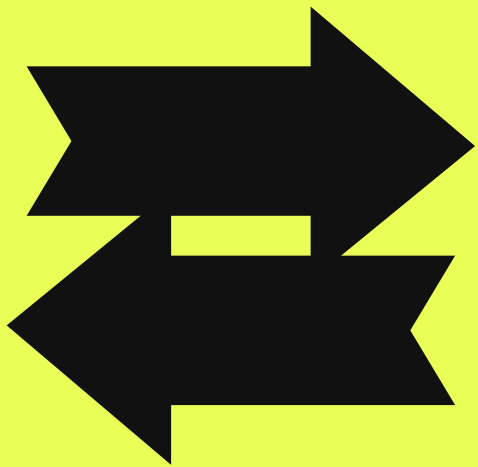


THE RELATIONSHIP STARTS HERE.



TEN COMMITMENTS. BOTH SIDES.

A MANIFESTO BY PATRICK HOWELLS

FOR THE PEOPLE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE PITCH.

We talk about partnership when we want the work.

I think it is time we behaved like partners while deciding who gets it.

A pitch is our first piece of work together. Before the appointment, before the contract, before anyone puts “a trusted extension of your team” in a credentials deck.

It tells us how we listen. How we value people’s time. Whether we can talk honestly about money. What happens when someone asks an uncomfortable question.

And whether our promises mean anything when keeping them becomes inconvenient.

That relationship has already begun.

So why do we accept things during a pitch that would damage it after appointment?

A deadline that matters in only one direction.

A brief that changes without a conversation.

A demand for original thinking from people who cannot speak to the person whose problem they are supposed to solve.

There are people behind that response. Behind the budget, too. People making commitments to colleagues, clients and families. People whose time costs something, whether or not it appears on an invoice.

We cannot keep talking about how much we value people while building processes that make their time disposable.

I asked for recent pitch experiences because I wanted this thinking challenged. The answers included frustration, but also pitches that worked and people who wanted nothing changed.

Good. This should survive contact with experiences that do not suit the argument.

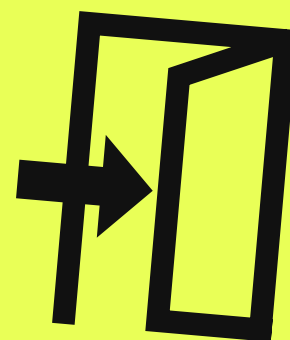
The small, entirely agency-side response does not give me a mandate to speak for an industry. It does give me a reason to ask what we are prepared to expect of each other.

What follows is the bargain I believe we should make.

It asks something of clients. It asks something of procurement. And it asks agencies to stop treating their own participation as somebody else's responsibility.

A fair pitch is something both sides have to be prepared to uphold.

01



GIVE US A REAL CHANCE, OR GIVE US AN HONEST CONVERSATION.

If the decision is already made, don't stage a competition. If you are exploring the market, say so. Tell agencies who and how many they are competing with, including the incumbent, or explain what genuinely cannot be disclosed. Let people make an informed decision about the investment you are asking them to make.

02



BRING THE PROBLEM INTO THE ROOM.

Leave enough space for the answer to surprise you. “Challenge us” must mean more than finding a more attractive way to confirm what has already been decided. Agencies, earn that invitation: understand the problem before falling in love with your solution.

03



CHANGE YOUR MIND OPENLY.

A brief can evolve. Sometimes it should. But everyone still competing deserves to know what has changed and what that means for the work, time and money. Nobody should discover the real criteria in the rejection feedback.

04



LET US MEET THE PEOPLE WE WOULD ACTUALLY WORK WITH.

The people who own the problem belong in the conversation. Procurement belongs there too. Together, make the decision better. Don't ask an agency to build a partnership through a process that prevents one from forming.

05



HAVE THE MONEY CONVERSATION BEFORE THE WORK CONVERSATION BECOMES FICTION.

Share a credible budget or range and what it needs to cover. Agencies, price honestly. Don't hide the cost of delivery to make the cost of winning look irresistible. The number still has to work after the applause.

BOTH SIDES / 05

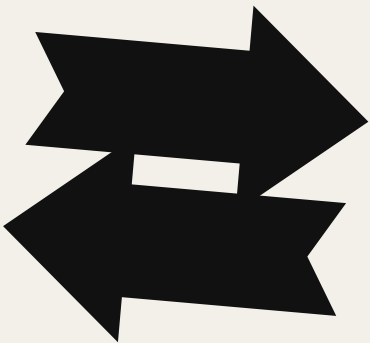
06



GIVE THE THINKING SOMEWHERE TO DEVELOP.

Make room to ask, listen, challenge and reconsider before the final presentation. Let both sides see how the other works when the answer is unfinished. That is part of choosing a partner. Presentation polish cannot carry the whole decision.

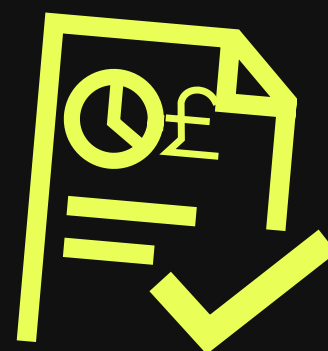
07



MAKE THE PROMISE IN BOTH DIRECTIONS.

Submission date. Decision date. Both agreed. Both taken seriously.
If something changes, explain it and agree what happens next.
Nobody owes anyone a win. We do owe each other an answer.

08



AGREE WHAT YOU ARE ASKING PEOPLE TO GIVE.

Selection requires effort. Substantial creative development requires a proper conversation about scope, payment and permitted use before it starts. An opportunity to win the work cannot be the answer to every question about what the work already costs.

09



RESPECT THE WORK YOU DECIDE NOT TO BUY.

Rejecting an agency does not settle the terms on which its concepts may be used elsewhere. If you want that work, agree permission, scope and payment. Put it in writing. “We went in another direction” should never mean “we took yours”.

10



AGENCIES, BE PREPARED TO MAKE THIS INCONVENIENT FOR YOURSELVES.

Keep your promises. Tell the truth about the price. Listen to feedback. Set boundaries before committing, and be prepared to decline a process you cannot responsibly support. Principles that disappear whenever the opportunity looks attractive will change very little.

BOTH SIDES / 10

None of this guarantees that the best agency wins.

It gives both sides a better chance of knowing what they are choosing - and what they are agreeing to become together.

There is a cost to taking this seriously. A client may have to challenge its own approval process. Procurement may have to question an established procedure. An agency may have to turn down an invitation it badly wants to accept.

That is where conviction becomes a decision.

I am putting this forward because I believe the work deserves better beginnings. So do the people doing it.

If you agree, bring it into the next briefing meeting. Put it beside the invitation you are about to send, or the response you are about to commission.

Ask which of these commitments you are prepared to make.

Then ask the harder question: which are you prepared to honour when they cost you something?

The relationship starts before the appointment.

Let's decide how we want it to begin.



PATRICK HOWELLS

BIG HUMAN ENERGY

© 2026 BIG HUMAN ENERGY Ltd.



A POSITION. NOT AN INDUSTRY VERDICT.

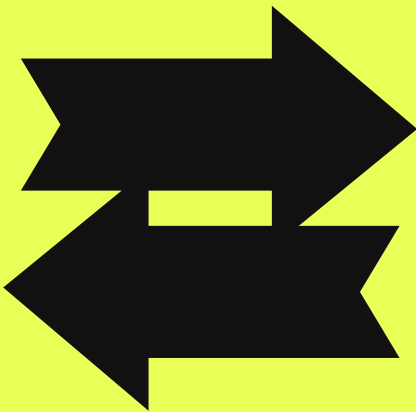
Informed by eight usable, self-reported agency-side responses. No completed client or procurement perspectives were collected.

Payment, subsequent use of concepts and preselected competitions were not measured by the questionnaire. The commitments are a proposed reciprocal bargain.

bighumanenergy.com/research

**NOBODY OWES
ANYONE A WIN.**

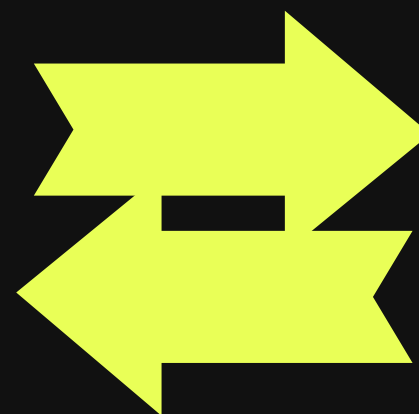
**WE DO OWE EACH
OTHER AN ANSWER.**



THE RELATIONSHIP STARTS HERE.

**PRINCIPLES THAT
DISAPPEAR WHENEVER
THE OPPORTUNITY
LOOKS ATTRACTIVE**

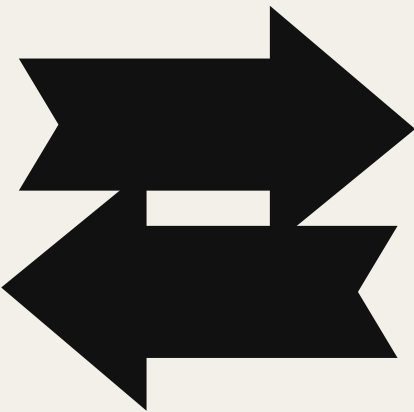
**WILL CHANGE
VERY LITTLE.**



THE RELATIONSHIP STARTS HERE.

**WE CANNOT KEEP
TALKING ABOUT HOW
MUCH WE VALUE
PEOPLE**

**WHILE BUILDING PROCESSES
THAT MAKE THEIR TIME
DISPOSABLE.**



THE RELATIONSHIP STARTS HERE.