

by David  
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# All-star Performances

“Here’s the thing,” the boss said, as you sat down in her office that fateful day. “The department is up against a wall on this issue, and I need to put one of our top people on it. A major contract tied to one of the department’s biggest programs will be expiring soon, and senior management has just ruled out the extension we hoped for. With time running out, we need to get a new procurement process underway immediately. Don’t worry, everything should be pretty straightforward,” she said reassuringly.

Ah, if you only knew then what you know now: Endless meetings on intellectual property ownership; conflicting opinions from so-called experts on limitation of liability considerations; a stream of briefing notes on contract penalty clauses; requests to debrief unsuccessful bidders; the threat of potential bid challenges – and all of it landing squarely on your desk.

The twin pressures of demographics and downsizing have taken a substantial toll on the ranks of government procurement specialists. Responsibility for the purchasing function has been increasingly downloaded to a group of program managers, many of whom have received little if any training, don’t understand the rules, and would much rather that someone else be doing it for them.

For the manager left virtually alone to navigate its many obstacles, the procurement process is often lengthy, frustrating, with a complex web of rules that both bewilders and paralyzes, while inspiring fear about getting it wrong. Add the risks of lawsuits, negative media coverage, political fallout, critical audit findings... the list goes on. Who in their right mind would willingly step into the middle of this mess?

Despite all this, some get it right. Allow me to introduce you to a few of them.



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When their new program comes on-stream later this year, **Nancy Webster Cole** and **Bob Noakes** of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) will become increasingly popular with their fellow Canadians – and deservedly so. As members of the team responsible for implementing the new National Do Not Call List, they will have played a key role in reducing the number of unsolicited telemarketing calls that Canadians receive.

In July 2007, the CRTC issued an RFP to develop, implement and manage the Do Not Call List. In December 2007, a five-year contract was awarded, with the provision that it be made available by September 30, 2008.

Under pressure to expedite the process, the RFP was completed in record time by a small team from within CRTC, with only limited outside support. Neither Nancy

nor Bob had ever been directly involved in developing such a large and complex RFP. In fact, neither had any significant procurement experience or training before taking on this challenging assignment (both work within CRTC’s Telecommunications branch).

And the contract will cost taxpayers only \$1 per year, due to an innovative arrangement requiring the contractor to operate the list using only the fees that telemarketers will have to pay to subscribe.

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**Stephen Mead** is a senior project manager with the Yukon government. Mike Nahir is the senior engineering advisor with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, in Gatineau, Quebec. Together, they were responsible for the procurement process associated with selecting the contractor who will work to contain the extensive environmental contamination at the Faro Mine Complex in Yukon.

Once one of the largest open-

