

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.



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.



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-

pit lead and zinc mines in the world and the largest private employer in Yukon, Faro Mine was placed into receivership in 1998. Ongoing extensive care and maintenance activities are required to prevent the discharge of contaminated water from the pit mines into the surrounding environment. Following almost 30 years of mining, there were 70 million tonnes of mine tailings and 320 million tonnes of waste rock.

The sheer size of the project was challenging. And then there were the many competing objectives to be managed.

The site is 65 kilometres west of the Kaska Nation, home to the Ross River Dena, and upstream from the traditional territory of the Selkirk First Nation. The nearby First Nations communities have an acute interest in the environmental effects and in the economic opportunities for their people in the clean-up work.

The environmental and regulatory considerations were extensive and the deteriorating site presented complex engineering challenges.

Stephen and Mike were determined that this project would maximize economic opportunities for the First Nations people, fully comply with all environmental and regulatory obligations, have first-rate engineering, meet timeline commitments, have none of the competing objectives outweigh any other, and obtain best value for the money.

Wishful thinking? Some certainly thought so. But with determination and a willingness to be creative, the project has received approval to proceed from both levels of government, has won the support of the First Nations, and is well on its way to achieving all its objectives.



Recent and tragic events involving members of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP have served as a reminder of the debt we owe to our men and women in uniform. In recognition of the sacrifices, Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) offers health care benefits and other services to qualified war and Canadian Forces veterans, current members of the Canadian Forces, the RCMP and others.

VAC's Federal Health Care Claims Processing System is one of the largest and most complex health claims processing systems in Canada. Since 1989, when VAC entered into its first contract for the processing of benefit claims, the scope of the services has grown significantly. Via its contract, VAC utilizes the services and systems of a

contractor to process authorizations, payments to health care providers and reimbursements to veterans.

Based in Charlottetown, **Bernard Butler** and **Micheline Charest** have led the effort to re-tender the latest contract for the Federal Health Care Claims Processing System – an enormous undertaking.

Bernard, Micheline and their colleagues conducted a tremendous amount of research to identify every possible opportunity for improvement within the new contract. Satisfaction surveys were sent to veterans and health care providers, audit reports and studies were analyzed and external best practices were benchmarked for comparison.

What makes their achievements to date notable is not the

tight timeline or the complexity of their task; it is their passion. Taking care of veterans is what VAC is all about, and the staff routinely demonstrates an almost old-fashioned sense of duty. The efforts of Bernard, Micheline and their colleagues have been no exception.

The quality of their work has earned praise from both their colleagues within VAC and the frontline members of the RCMP and the Canadian Forces.

What is it that has made each of these contributions so noteworthy? If asked, each would likely say that they didn't start out with a great depth of expertise in the field of government procurement, although each certainly knows a great deal more now than when their projects started.

I believe that what makes them special is their willingness to risk failure when taking on a difficult assignment; their ability to persevere in the face of adversity; to be creative and innovative in overcoming obstacles; and to be utterly uncompromising in their pursuit of excellence – the hallmarks of an all-star in any walk of life. 