



Purchasing tips from industry pros

Purchasing: report from the front lines

By Mike Andresen, CSFM

Lately it seems that getting any purchase past administrators or purchasing agents at our university has become daunting. Three recent purchases that went through the state mandated bidding process were for a wide area mower, an aerifier and a 3-year paint supply contract.

Our athletic director's philosophy that we "hire good people and give them tools to effectively do their jobs" rings sweet to our Facility and Grounds Department. Discussing need for those big ticket tools is not for everyday banter. The only time I discuss purchasing equipment is during the budget process. Don't constantly put your administrator in the position of listening to you cry about the condition of your equipment. And believe me, that's how they hear it. We have a place holder in long-range planning budgets for equipment replacement. If the department wins the lottery I want the boss to easily find a way to spend the windfall through us!

In working with purchasing professionals it's my job to make their jobs easy. Telling an agent we only want a specific brand machine puts that person immediately on red alert. Most purchasing agents have seen most of the tricks so you may as well come in humble and accept their rules. Besides, in our case the state makes the rule and this person is simply the messenger. Kind of like being a turf manager many times.

When we're ready to bid a piece of equipment I personally gather all the specification information on at least three like machines. I'll meet with the agent and be very honest about my professional and our

department's business relationship with distributors and manufacturers. The visibility of Athletics puts us in a unique position for potential gift-in-kind, donation or even sponsorship premiums relative to purchases. Take the time to educate the purchasing agent about the need to offer addendums to your bids that will allow for creative bidding that may benefit both your department and the supplier.

I love trade shows such as the one we have at the STMA National Conference. We draw up the wish list at the conference but we won't consider a major purchase without a demonstration at our facility. Our bid requires a demonstration of equipment and I exercise this right on the low bid or more if a couple bids are close. During demonstrations we'll take pictures and document our thoughts on the performance. The purchasing agent is required to be present during a demonstration and he or she documents comments and conversations as well as asks pertinent questions more related to warranties and contracts. It's impossible to document too much or have too many people watch the demonstration!

During a grueling paint bid process documentation and follow through was critical. Few things are more important to athletic departments than the field presentation for each sport. Paint budgets can be significant. Educate and develop a relationship with your purchasing agent to ensure they understand the importance of this purchase as well as the details, chemistry and nuances of paint materials and their application. Our process of evaluation was complex. All paints (white and colors) were applied at exactly the same ratios. From that point we kept a daily series of photos and a diary of comments on each product. Every couple days the purchasing agent visited the test sight to

make his own observations. When we sat down to compare notes it was striking how similar the observations were. Pre-bid education of the agent made the decision unanimous.

Avoid skirting or playing tricks with the formal purchasing process. Trust is the most important characteristic you carry. Trust with the purchasing agent and trust from the suppliers that they will and do receive a fair shot at your business. Don't waste your time or anyone else's time by being deceitful. Your reputation is on the line.

I've worked in the private sector and now the public. At times it would be nice to just make a call and tell a salesperson, "Please deliver this product" but there's benefit to adding people to your successful team. You are the leader of your team. When the preferred equipment or supply does not come in as the low qualified bid, remember it's not your opinion that ultimately determines if you have a satisfactory conclusion to the process. As it is with most every other aspect of our job, build the relationship first. ■

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Purchasing perspective from the director's chair

By Matt Mandia

As with most things in life, a learning curve exists for those who are not familiar with a certain task or profession. This is certainly the case when it comes to educating Parks and Recreation Directors as to the complexities and multitude of challenges encountered by turf managers in keeping sports turf surfaces in playable and sustainable condition.

Although I could be wrong, I don't believe the majority of turf managers have a degree in teaching or in the field of edu-

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