

PIPELINE

piping systems inc.

COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL/INSTITUTIONAL MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS

FALL 2011

7 Elements For Successfully Selecting An Outside Contractor

Valuable points help industrial plant managers minimize downtime, maintain quality and safety, and improve operations

As I was reading through the latest issue of Facilities Engineering Journal (www.AFE.org), I ran across the following article. Although the piece was written from the point of view of a protective coating contractor, you could easily replace those references with "mechanical contractor" or "piping contractor."

At some point every industrial plant will need to bring in an outside contractor to do specialized work such as boiler blasting, concrete waterproofing or ceiling painting that in-house staff often cannot perform in a cost-effective manner. The challenge lies in deciding which contractor is best able to perform the job on time, within budget, with the best outcome and the least lapses in safety. With the right selection, an outside contractor can act as an ongoing partner to help plant managers and facility engineers lower costs and add value to facilities over the long run. But what is the best way to select an outside source of help? We've compiled a set of seven tips for choosing a commercial contractor.

Precise Planning

The need to run at 100% production levels at all times heads the list of priorities at nearly every processing plant, and downtime for maintenance can lead to interruptions in the revenue stream. The best way to avoid having any outside work disrupt the production process is to have the contractor provide a precise, highly detailed plan of the project work in advance.

"If a contractor can't tell you how he's going to do that job, and lay it out in an organized, detailed, step-by-step fashion, they you shouldn't hire him," said Michael McMahon, president of Coating Systems, Inc. (CSI), a SSPC QP1-certificate specialty maintenance contractor company that provides a full range of industrial painting and protective coating services.

"Put another way, if you can't build it on paper, you can't build it in reality," continued McMahon. "For example, we use 'critical path method scheduling' which incorporates close to 30 items. It covers the scope of work, the crew, the specifications, the safety checks, the tasks broken down by each different craft, and a complete timeline from start to finish. Such a project schedule should be provided to the plant manager in advance of any work."

Access To Spare Parts And Equipment

Every product manufacturer understands the need for a

second source supplier. It should be no different for contractors who show up to do critical work at a plant. The contractor must outline a systematic process to acquire spare parts on an urgent basis when the inevitable emergency occurs. "You have to have 'Plan B' as well as 'Plan C,'" said McMahon. "To really be on the safe side, the contractor should have duplicate pieces of machinery ready so if a part breaks it won't halt the work."

Constant Communication With Plant Management

Upon completion of a project, few plant managers like surprises such as unexpected, expensive change orders or up-scoping. A conscientious contractor must be willing to provide project reports upfront, on a daily basis.

"Clarity with the customer is crucial," said McMahon. "I recommend that the customer receives three separate reports at the end of each day, covering construction overview, safety and quality."

A Willingness To Partner For The Long Run

An index of suspicion should rise when a contractor appears anxious to take the money upfront. Some eventually declare bankruptcy, leaving plant management with no recourse if anything goes wrong. Look for a contractor who is willing to maintain an on-site presence well after completion of the scheduled work. Even beyond that, added value stems from a contractor who is willing to act as a resource for long-term maintenance planning. Such partnerships actually free up the plant's workforce to concentrate on more immediate needs.

"Plant foremen can benefit from permanently delegating some of their technical services to a contractor with expertise in their respective fields," said McMahon.

A Qualified Workforce

Given today's scholastic environment where far more

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Coffee: Good For More Than Just Waking Up Early

That cup of coffee that gets you going in the morning—or keeps you energetic in the afternoon—may have some positive health benefits. Though no one is recommending massive doses of caffeine, coffee in moderation may be good for more than just keeping you awake and alert. Here's a look at some of the research:

- **Gallstones.** Some scientists believe that drinking coffee may reduce a person's risk of developing gallstones by stimulating gallbladder contractions and lowering concentrations of cholesterol in bile.
- **Kidney stones.** Studies have suggested that coffee consumption (caffeinated or decaf) cuts a person's chances of developing kidney stones by as much as 10%.
- **Diabetes.** Research involving more than 450,000 patients indicates that drinking four cups of coffee or tea a day may reduce one's risk for Type 2 diabetes by 25%-35%.
- **Parkinson's Disease.** Men who don't drink coffee are apparently five times as likely to develop Parkinson's Disease as those who consume lots of coffee—though the link between coffee and Parkinson's hasn't been definitely established. Studies with women have been inconclusive.

Just don't go overboard. Doctors recommend drinking no more than 24 ounces of coffee a day. That's four 6-ounce cups.



Measure Your Commitment

Success depends on your commitment to your goal, whatever that goal may be. To evaluate your ability to commit, ask yourself these important questions:

- **Can you be completely honest with yourself?** You can't afford to fool yourself about your strengths, weaknesses and potential.
- **Can you accept people for what they are, not as you'd like them to be?** You don't have to agree with them, or even like them, but to work with the people around you, put away your prejudices and judgments so you can focus on what's important.
- **Can you put other people's needs ahead of your own?** It's a paradox, but you can reach your own goals more easily by helping your collaborators accomplish theirs. Don't be so single-minded in your pursuit of success that you ignore other people's needs.
- **Do you know what you're great at?** A thorough, honest knowledge of what you do better than most people is essential to making the right choices about where to put your energy.
- **Are you excited about your goals?** If you can't generate enthusiasm on your own, you won't persuade others to help you. And if you're not really excited by what you're trying to do, your commitment won't be very strong. Why bother?

Failing To Succeed

Success is about...failure. At least, it's about learning how to fail without letting it stop you from moving forward. As personal and business coach Jane Herman writes:

"You have heard the expression, 'Anything worth doing is worth doing well.' Here's your new motto: 'Anything worth doing is worth being willing to do badly.' If something is important to you then you have got to be willing to try it, even knowing that you may fail. If you have the attitude that you can't do something unless you can do it well, or perfectly, then you will never take a step. Be willing to take the step."

Too Busy Online To Work?

The 24/7 Wall St. website (<http://247wallst.com>) examined a series of studies on workplace productivity (and the lack thereof) and compiled this list of the top ways workers goof off online when they're supposed to be working:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| • Social networking | 1.24 hours/week |
| • Online gaming | .56 hours/week |
| • Personal e-mail | .45 hours/week |
| • Portals (like Yahoo and AOL) | .24 hours/week |
| • Instant messaging | .22 hours/week |
| • Watching online videos | .21 hours/week |
| • Personal Internet search | .19 hours/week |
| • Online shopping | .15 hours/week |
| • Fantasy football | .12 hours/week |

SPEED BUMP

Dave Coverly



Second Chances

What would you change if you had your life to live over? Here are a few suggestions attributed to humorist Erma Bombeck:

If I had my life to live over, I would...

- Spend more time listening—and less talking.
- Spend more time on loved ones—and less on work.
- Spend more time living in my living space—and less time cleaning it.
- Spend more time learning from the older people in my life—and less trying to convince them I already know it all.
- Spend more time with the windows rolled down—and less worrying about mussing my hair.
- Spend more time using the stuff I have—and less time collecting more.
- Spend more time playing—and less planning.
- Spend more time sharing the burdens of those I love—and less trying to get them to share mine.
- Spend more time participating in life—and less watching television.
- Spend more time taking care of myself when I'm ill—and less trying to convince myself that the world can't get along without me for even a day.
- Spend more time having fun—and less being practical.
- Spend more time finding joy in each moment—and less wishing time would pass quickly.
- Spend more time on love and forgiveness—and less on anger and insults.

Most of all, wrote Bombeck, who died in 1996, "given another shot at life, I would seize every minute...look at it and really see it...live it...and never give it back."

Making A Positive Impression At Work

Job security depends on doing your job well, but it's also about being the kind of employee people want to work with. Little things go a long way in making a good impression on your boss and co-workers. Cultivate these habits to show you're good to have around:

- **Keep your desk neat.** Cut back on the clutter. Tidiness conveys that you're organized and have things under control.
- **Set a good example.** Find out what kind of behavior your managers and colleagues expect, and do your best to practice it.
- **Be sincere and generous with compliments.** People like to be told you appreciate them—bosses and friends alike.
- **Do your homework before meetings.** Know what's on the agenda, and bone up on the information that may be covered.
- **Return phone calls and e-mails promptly.** It makes co-workers and customers feel valued.
- **Be on time.** Don't make other people wait for you. It makes them suspect that you feel your time is more important than theirs.
- **Wash the dishes.** If your company has a shared kitchen, don't be "above" doing the dishes, making more coffee, and such.

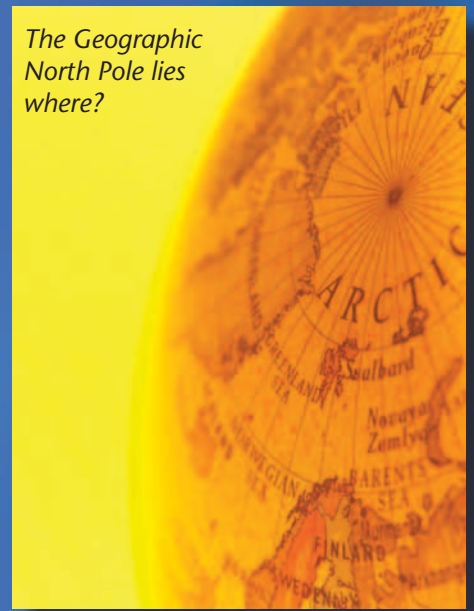
Diminishing Returns

The county hired Milton to paint a white line down the middle of the highway between two towns that were 20 miles apart. They gave Milton a can of paint and a brush and drove him out to the city limits, where they left him to his work.

On his first day, Milton got off to a good start and he painted a white line seven miles long. The next day, however, he got only four miles further. At the end of the third day, he'd made less than a mile of progress. As he clocked out, his supervisor asked why he was getting less and less far as time went on.

Milton shrugged. "It takes me longer and longer to get back to the bucket each day."

*The Geographic
North Pole lies
where?*



Trivial Matters

1) How many feet are in a fathom?

- a) 6
- b) 12
- c) 18
- d) 24

2) The Geographic North Pole lies where?

- a) Russia
- b) Canada
- c) Arctic Ocean
- d) Greenland

3) Which team lost the very first Super Bowl, playing against the Green Bay Packers in 1967?

- a) Kansas City Chiefs
- b) Oakland Raiders
- c) Pittsburgh Steelers
- d) Miami Dolphins

4) Informercial star and free-money guru Matthew Lesko regularly wears suits decorated with what symbol?

- a) dollar signs
- b) question marks
- c) asterisks
- d) exclamation points

5) When a man holds his arms *akimbo*, where are his hands placed?

- a) clasped behind his back
- b) on his hips
- c) on his head
- d) outstretch with palms up

Answers: 1) a 2) c 3) a 4) b 5) b (In an akimbo position, the feet are spread, the elbows are bent, and the hands are on the hips.)

7 Elements... *continued from page 1*

students study computer science in favor of metalworking, the pool of skilled craftsman continues to dwindle. After soliciting RFQs, the down-selection process must include a careful evaluation of the contractor's complement of tradesmen. Advance determination of such qualities is not as difficult as it seems. Recognized training programs can vouch for satisfactory performance levels from a given craftsman. Additionally, most every technical discipline has credentialing bodies which evaluate respective contractors and their employees for competency.

"The Society for Protective Coatings, for one, offers is SSPC QP1 certification to contractors that meet a set level of performance in key areas such as management procedures, technical ability and quality control," explained McMahon. "Such certification provides facility owners and specifiers a means to determine whether the painting contractor has the capability to perform surface preparations and coating applications on the likes of storage tanks, pipelines, flooring, process equipment, and other plant infrastructure."

Judging work ethic takes more effort. Look for a contractor who features a dedicated, long-term team of workers versus hiring a local crew "off the street." Ask the contractor to provide a list of the potential workers and request their job history. If not available, think twice about hiring them.

The Right Equipment For The Job

Inappropriate or underperforming equipment can greatly increase the time it takes to complete a project. On the other hand, a contractor can actually bring about a cost savings for plant management, and return the plant to full operation more quickly, if the contractor possesses the right equipment for the specific project. Ready access to the proper equipment and tools can make a difference in both the timeline and the bottom line of the project.

"We heard of one informal time/motion study that revealed the average mechanic spends an hour and five minutes each day looking for tools," said McMahon. "Ask to see photographs of the

contractor's equipment and tool trucks. If, for example, you see a gang box filled with a bunch of tools that guys have to dig through to find what they need, then that disorganization can lead to cost overruns."

Safe Work Practices

Safety can never be compromised for the sake of speed. Aside from the possibility of causing pain and injury to workers, a serious accident can stop a project in its tracks and immediately place a project budget in peril. Checking a contractor's commitment to safety begins at the top.

"The mechanics will do whatever the supervisor lets them do," said McMahon. "If the foreman allows the workers to stand on a ladder without a safety belt, they will do it. So supervisors should attend 'process safety management training' classes so they will set the right tone. Once a project begins, conditions should be constantly monitored and safety inspections conducted weekly by the operations manager."

A contractor's membership in the American Society of Safety Engineers also indicates a commitment to reducing injuries. Additionally, the prospective contractor should be able to demonstrate site-specific training of its employees.

—by David Rizzo, reprinted with permission from the May/June 2011 issue of Facilities Engineering Journal (www.AFE.org). Mr. Rizzo writes technical articles for Power PR, based in Torrance, Calif. He has published two trade books and written numerous technical articles and newspapers.

Does our company meet this criteria? We certainly do. From pre-planning, job execution, safety work practices and quality installation, we will not disappoint you. Contact us and let us tell you how we can help you with your next project. Contact us via e-mail at psi@PipingSystemsInc.com or by phone at (508) 644-2221 and ask for Estimating. Visit our website at www.PipingSystemsInc.com. We promise you'll be pleased with our performance.



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