



Racking up points

House of Commons purchasing scores with clients

by Richard Bisson

How often have you heard that your purchasing department is not doing a good job and that your internal clients are unhappy? This happens many times in both the private and public purchasing arenas and trying to get a handle on these feelings of dissatisfaction is difficult and frustrating. There is a way, however, that you can get your hands on the root cause of these problems and improve the service level as defined by customer satisfaction.

One of the guiding principles in the quest for continuous improvement is that one can only improve that which is measured. The method that is presented here uses this principle in a simple and direct way. By measuring your client's satisfaction after a major procurement activity you can build some concrete numbers that will show you where you are performing well and where you can improve. The trend of your scores over time will stimulate the competitive juices of your purchasing team to obtain higher numbers and thereby satisfy your clients.

The tool we use is called the "Purchasing Services Performance Scorecard" (see next page). It was developed by the purchasing services team at the House of Commons and introduced in the fall of 2000 to the team's internal clients as a way of obtaining feedback. The results are very encouraging.

Here's how it works:

- Whenever a request is received to initiate a major competitive process, agreement negotiation or amendment, the purchasing advisor introduces and explains the use of the Purchasing Services Performance Scorecard to the client and the evaluation team.
- The client completes column B (weight) of the questionnaire at the beginning of the process and remits it to the assigned advisor.
- The advisor reviews the weighting factors and uses them to guide the process in order of importance to the client.
- Once the activity is completed, the client completes column A (actual score) and remits it to the assigned advisor.
- The advisor calculates the totals and the overall final score is obtained.

Once the scorecard is tabulated, the results are presented and discussed at the weekly purchasing services meeting to draw lessons and pinpoint the processes that may need attention. At the end of the month, a summary scorecard of all the scores received is prepared. This larger sample of results clearly indicates which areas need improving. A small team identifies and proposes solutions with a recommendation. This team then implements the changes to the processes.

There are many advantages to using the scorecard. Clients appreciate the effort to understand and identify their major concerns *before* beginning the procurement process; purchasing personnel use the results to focus on areas that need further professional development; and management has a very real performance measure of the purchasing service over time. The scores form a basis of discussion for periodic meetings with major clients. A low score is immediately followed up with a client to better understand the problem area and make the appropriate correction.

A further benefit is that you move away from that often-heard, vague criticism, "I'm not happy with purchasing." The scorecard encourages the client to be more precise. The scoring trend shows whether a low score is specific to a particular client, a purchasing team member or a general process. If a client does not take the time to complete the scorecard then a good case can be made to place any future negative comments in a different context. The use of the scorecard is a rational and practical method for clients to express their feedback.

The introduction and use of this approach to measure client satisfaction has been greeted with enthusiasm by the purchasing services at the House of Commons and a healthy rivalry has developed between purchasing advisors to continuously improve individual scores. It has been in place for over a year and the average score was 89 percent with a high of 98 percent and a low of 71 percent. Improvements have been initiated based on the feedback obtained from the scorecard. The bottom line – happier clients. *MM*

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