

Some Thoughts on How to be a “Value Added” Property Manager

BY GARY D. SWANSON, CPPM, CF, DUKE CITY CHAPTER

In many companies and organizations, property management is a function that is grudgingly accepted as something that must be done, either because it is required by the contract or because it is a “sound business practice.” There are many reasons for this and as the Property Manager, we must try to understand them and take any action we can to overcome them. If we are successful in changing the way our customers think about property management, it will enhance their willingness to participate and cooperate in the function and will add value to the company or organization’s mission accomplishment.

In this article, I am going to describe a number of ways I have observed in which value has been added to a company or organization’s work as a result of a method, attitude, or some other idea that has encouraged the employees to participate more fully in the effective management of government property.

Many years ago (in the late 1980’s), when I was the Property Manager for one of the major offices of a company that primarily performed research and development work for elements of the Department of Defense (DoD), I was invited to make a presentation about property management by the Vice President of a major organization. Several months prior to this, a contract for which the organization was responsible failed an audit conducted by the Government Property Administrator (GPA). The VP invited me to make the presentation to ensure that all the members of her organization were aware of the property management responsibilities they had under the various contracts for which they were responsible. In my presentation, I was upbeat and passionate about property management and presented the information in an interesting manner. After the presentation, several young engineers whom I knew from the locker room where we saw each other as we dressed for our lunch hour exercise pursuits approached me. They asked me how I could get so excited about such a boring subject. I responded that it was important to the

In last year’s annual training a detective theme was used.



company that we meet our contractual property management responsibilities and hoped that the energy I demonstrated during the presentation would be contagious to those attending it. In the months following the presentation, I received many questions and requests for advice and assistance from the members of the organization. Had my presentation been a dry, boring, just the facts type, I don’t believe it would have had as significant of an impact.

While working for the same company, I became aware of a retired Air Force officer who complained loudly about what a waste of time it was to develop and maintain property records for the contracts for which he was responsible. I knew that because of his attitude, property management was probably not being accomplished effectively on the contracts. When I learned that many of his contracts included the development of prototype small equipment items, I contacted our company’s Property Manager and asked if he had any suggestions on how to meet the property management requirements of the contracts in a less time consuming, more efficient manner. He told me that we should request the contract GPA to authorize us to use a receipt and issue (R & I) method to manage the property on the contract. Using this method, those working on the

contract are not required to make property records for all the parts that are received for making the prototype equipment as long as the parts are used within 30 to 45 days. They were required to use a Bill of Materials (BOM) in place of the records. It contains a description of the parts and columns in which to record receiving and issue documentation. As the parts are received, those working on the contract record the receiving document number for the part, to whom it is issued, and the date in the BOM. The GPA authorized us to use the method. By understanding the retired officer's complaints, I was able to provide him with a more efficient and less time consuming method of completing property management requirements on many of his contracts. He contacted me every time he got a new contract and asked if it would be appropriate to use the R & I method on it. By these actions, I converted an adversary to an advocate for property management. By the way, if you are interested in more details about this process, I wrote an article about it that was published in *The Property Professional*, Volume 7, Number 4.

In my current position as a Senior Property Administrator for Sandia National Laboratories (SNL) (under contract from the Plus Group), I observed use of a technique that has enhanced the performance of physical inventories by SNL Property Coordinators (PCs) for the past several years. The technique involves identifying an inventory theme for the year and introducing it during the training that is conducted annually for the PCs prior to the beginning of the physical inventory. Use of the theme generates excitement in the training presentation that translates to a greater level of interest and involvement in the physical inventory by the PCs. As an example, for the FY 2000 physical inventory, a small dog wearing glasses whose name is Y2K (pronounced "whytwokee") was introduced. The term Y2K was an acronym for the year 2000 and was familiar to all because of the concern that some computers would not recognize it. Small refrigerator magnet type signs were made with the character on them and distributed to the PCs. In last year's annual training a detective theme was used. All property management personnel who participated in the training wore white Fedora type hats and trench coats and a small magnet sign with a detective on them was issued to all PCs. In addition, they were provided with a magnifying glass for checking small, hard to read, serial and part numbers, a flashlight for checking information on equipment in dark corners, a pen and small tablet for recording information, and an apron with pockets for our PDA type scanners, the magnifying glass, the flashlight and the pen and tablet. The use of the themes for the physical inventories has made the annual physical inventory training more interesting and exciting and has energized the PCs to participate more fully in the inventory.

In the late 1990's, while leading a statistical sample physical inventory effort at SNL, I learned that we

required the PCs to submit memos to the Property Manager explaining why the PC was not able to scan an item of property with his/her bar code scanner. Since I was relatively new to the organization, I asked if we had an example format of the memo to provide to PCs. When I learned that the custom was to simply tell the PC what to say and let them develop their own memo, I felt that customer service could be enhanced by developing a standard memo that listed all the various reasons why an item of property could not be bar code scanned. I worked with other members of the property management staff to ensure that the memo included all of the appropriate reasons and began making it available to the PCs for their use. Because this standard memo for use during physical inventories was so well received by the PCs, I developed two other standard memos for other property management actions where the PCs were required to submit a memo to us. All of these memos were very well received by the PCs and continue to be used. I believe developing these standard memos and their use by the PCs have saved valuable time for both them and us and are now pretty much taken for granted as the way things should be done.

Another area in which I believe property management personnel can enhance employee's recognition of our providing value added service to them is to actually walk them through the steps to find information on our web site. I had a woman call me and ask how she could find out if a certain type of equipment was available at our Reapplication facility. I informed her where the facility is located and told her the hours it was open for screening for excess property. However, I also pointed out that we have a "Shopping Cart" web based system that can be used to search for specific types of equipment that is available in Reapplication. I walked her through the steps of locating the system on the web and searching for the specific type of equipment in which she was interested. She was pleased to learn about the system that allows the staff to select excess equipment that is in Reapplication and have it delivered to them. Based upon the reaction I got from her, I'm sure she shared it with many of her co-workers which resulted in more employees taking advantage of the system.

This article has provided some examples of how we can change the way our customers think about property management and how their implementation enhanced our customers' willingness to participate and cooperate in our function. The examples also showed ways in which we can increase our value to the company or organization's mission accomplishment. ♦

GARY SWANSON, CPPM, CF is the Past President of the NPMA Duke City Chapter. He is a Senior Property Administrator, under contract through the Plus Group, at Sandia National Laboratories and has worked there since October 1997.

Sandia is a multiprogram laboratory operated by Sandia Corporation, a Lockheed Martin Company, for the United States Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration under contract DE-AC04-94AL85000.