



THE ROADRUNNER



October 2023

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Save the Date:

October 23-26, 2023 are the dates for the 2023 Annual TACERA Conference.

Final arrangements for the 2023 Conference in College Station are complete. We look forward to seeing our friends across the State this month.

Do you have an article you would like to put in our newsletter? Send them to us at TACERA or bryan.neaves@bellcounty.texas.gov



A view from the newly renovated Rooftop Bar at the College Station Hilton.

THOUGHTS ON EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

Most leaders in our department will testify that it is a challenge to find and retain good employees. There is a shortage of applicants that are skilled, productive, law abiding, and add value to the team. I have high standards for myself and other people. I have encouraged foremen to set high standards and not settle for those that are not up to those expectations.

We have made a great effort to improve our interviewing and promoting processes. Each foreman prepares interview questions seeking the answers for the priorities needed to fulfill the vacancies. Knowledge, skills, abilities, past behavior, outlooks, and performance are typically evaluated after an interview. Asking open-ended questions allows the candidate to provide feedback about particular traits. They allow the person to share their experiences for comparison against the supervisor's standard. The Superintendent and I sit in the interview to assist the foremen during the interview. We participate in the questioning to dig further into the applicant's skill. After the interviewing is completed, a brief discussion about the "pros and cons" is held. The foremen are allowed to make the final decision on who to hire because they will be the one dealing with the person on a daily basis. Counseling and directing will be between the foreman and the employee. Each time the foreman conducts an interview, they gain experience in the process and confidence in selecting the person with the best traits. The decision can be difficult when two or more candidates are well equipped for the vacancy.

Training is a part of the puzzle to build a strong team. We must find the weaknesses of people and develop their skills. Cross training is an excellent way to maintain productivity while helping the employees learn new things. Managers should seek ways to provide on the job training and having people cross trained to fill in when people are absent. Leaders should be mentoring their employees to make way for future position changes within the organization. People often overlook evaluating their weakness and make self-improvements. I continue to read books and attend conferences at my own expense to develop my knowledge. We should set goals and make periodic evaluations to track our improvement. Practicing newly learned skills is the ultimate way to see theory become useful.

Counseling and firing is an integral part of management. Morale of a team is hurt when managers do not address performance issues of employees. Praise and recognition of good results enforces desired future performance. It establishes expectations and encourages continued behavior. Constructive criticism is valuable to correct poor performance and should be done in private. Positive



THE ROADRUNNER



October 2023

and negative feedback helps the employee see what the desired performance goal is. Counseling requires time and two-way communication.

Progressive discipline, proper documentation, and employee counseling are important activities for managers to exercise. We have dealt with poor performance and improper behavior in recent months. It takes courage to engage problem issues and internal fortitude to make the tough decision to terminate someone. We attempt to give people a chance to meet expectations, but sometimes it doesn't work out. Educating our leaders in the current HR laws and proper methods of hiring, firing, and counseling is one of my major goals to obtain a well-managed department.

ARE YOU PREPARING GOOD CONTRACTS?

Many of us have prepared contracts or construction plans during our life. While it is not my favorite role as an engineer, I have spent a significant time of life developing plans and felt compelled to remind us of key elements of contracts. Good contracts are important for all parties involved.

Know your client's expectations. You should gather as much information possible to begin the process. Knowing the wants and needs of the owner will help you prepare a list of deliverables. Questions regarding the desired completion date, size of the project, life use of the product, materials, aesthetics, "must have" and "wants", the budget, and special requests should be known.

Build the details. Often, we can start with a boilerplate template. It may be required by the County Auditor or a framework of a past project. It will be a standardized format that we begin to change and add our details.

"A picture is worth a thousand words" is an adage. The unique elements of the project show up here. Plan views, elevation views with benchmarks, cross sections, hydraulic calculations, and connection closeup views are a few examples. Location of utilities, right of way, and "do not disturb" zones may be part of these drawings.

Notes and specifications are another part of the details. These are the "how to" and "shall do" clauses. There may be standard specs already prepared that are time tested and acceptable to use. A close review will determine if they may be useful to the contract. General notes outline processes and sequence of the work. Special notes inform the bidder of specific areas that require attention. Often material testing requirements are included.

You may write the specs for a dump truck. Begin by researching the typical specs on various makes of equipment and outline the common requirements for the truck. We must know the "important and not so important" specs of the truck. We should try to not favor one source. There may be a special need for the vehicle like a bed size, tank volume, or drive train requirement. Include that information so the bidder understands your need and includes it in the quote.

A project estimate is important to the parties. It can itemize the pay items or be a source for showing quantities expected to be used. A lump sum estimate may be acceptable for small projects with few items. However, this type of estimate may cause a bidder to inflate his cost if there are vague details. A good, itemized estimate usually helps eliminate unknown factors and help the bidder give more accurate unit costs. The owner may decide he needs to increase his budget or remove some other items from the scope of work before bid packets are sent out. Itemized estimates help during construction for progress evaluation and incremental payments for work completed.



THE ROADRUNNER

October 2023



Make it clear. Being transparent to the bidder builds a good relationship from the start. This area outlines who is responsible for what. The testing and inspection costs may be placed on the owner. The contractor may be responsible for utility locations and repair costs. You should check the contract details to eliminate conflicts or errors. Ask yourself how you would build it and include clear ways expected to perform the tasks. You may choose to require a prebid meeting to clear any questions and give answers before the bids are submitted.

Make it fair to all parties. The owner wants a good quality product, on or under budget, and on time. The contractor usually wants the same things while making a profit. Consideration should be given to reasonable time to complete construction process and unforeseen conditions like weather or underground seepage. Sometimes material availability can cause some delays outside the bidder's control. A fair payment interval and liquidated damage clause should be made. Being fair to all parties builds a positive relationship and promotes a willingness to encourage bidding on future projects.

Members of the Newsletter Committee are:

Chad Davis	Wise Co
Bryan Neaves	Bell Co
Johan Petterson	DEC
Don Ward	Pav Restoration
Curtis Wilson	Reeves Co

Brought to you by **TACERA** *Texas Association of County Engineers & Road Administrators*

www.TACERA1.ORG

P.O. Box 185276, Ft Worth, TX 76181-0276

512-260-1376 **Hours: T-TH 9 AM- 4PM**

<https://www.facebook.com/TACERA1>