



Acquiring the Quality Products You Deserve



Software acquisition has been the theme of many issues of this journal because it is such an important topic in today's defense software community. With the continuing trend of outsourcing software development to industry, government acquisition professionals must continue to sharpen their acquisition skills to ensure they are purchasing quality software within budget and on schedule.

Some acquisition-related training courses often make the analogy of building a house to acquiring large software intensive systems. I can relate to this as several years ago, my husband and I acquired an acre of land and began plans to build our dream home upon it. Similar to an acquisition professional, we soon found ourselves knee-deep with bids from contractors. How did we know who to trust to carry out our dream? We were new to the area and had not had the luxury of watching homes be built over many years in the surrounding neighborhoods. The extremely costly bids promised superb quality and the cheaper bids promised the most for our money. This decision was not an easy one for a newlywed couple, especially for a couple of engineers. Perhaps you can imagine the research and analysis that we performed throughout this undertaking.

We did what we could to evaluate the past performance of the contractors as we toured the homes they had built and talked with homeowners. But all the decisions we made – from choosing the architect, to choosing the general contractor, to choosing a mortgage company – were not easy. We wanted the most for our money and felt we deserved good service and a high quality home in return.

As construction began on our home, my husband and I would regularly take an evening drive to look firsthand at the contractor's work for the day. I can still remember the evening we discovered a wall in our great room that was not supposed to be there. The framer had assumed we would want a wall between the breakfast room and family room. We were happy that we had caught this in time, but frustrated that we were the ones reading the plans for the framer and general contractor and reminding them of our requirements.

I am happy to say that we ended up with a beautiful home that we continue to be pleased with. And, my marriage did survive the "building your dream home" test. But I truly feel that as the customer and end user of this product, we would not have gotten the quality that we deserved if we hadn't verified our requirements by performing routine inspections.

As our theme articles discuss this month, there are many skills besides contractor selection and requirements verification that a software acquirer must be skilled at performing. We begin with *Applying the Software Acquisition Capability Maturity Model* by the Software Engineering Institute's Dr. Matthew J. Fisher, Wolfhart B. Goethert, and Dr. Lawrence G. Jones, which discusses a model framework that can help organizations improve software acquisition processes. *Achieving SA-CMM Level 2 at PM Abrams* by Col. Donald P. Kotchman, et.al., shows how an organization successfully institutionalized the model for its software acquisition processes and applied it to their M1A2 Abrams Main Battle Tank System Enhancement Package project.

Next is a re-notification of an April memorandum from the Under Secretary of Defense E.C. Aldridge Jr. on the subject of evolutionary acquisition and spiral development. The memo defines these approaches and clarifies how they can be used in providing "the warfighter with an initial capability, which may be less than the full requirement as a trade-off for earlier delivery, agility, affordability, and risk reduction."

Also, don't miss reading Lloyd K. Mosemann II's *Did We Lose Our Religion?*, a well-received speech at April's Software Technology Conference 2002 in Salt Lake City. Mosemann eloquently reminds us that government acquirers must be "smart enough to enunciate the basic processes that will be employed by the contractor" (to produce software that works on a predictable schedule and at a predictable cost).

A special thanks to our other authors who contributed such informative articles to this month's issue: Quentin W. Fleming, Lawrence H. Putnam, Ware Myers, David P. Quinn, and Lt. Col. Ken Alford, et. al. And finally, I wish those in the defense acquisition community the best of luck as they continue to implement processes and best practices to aid in obtaining the quality products you deserve.

Tracy L. Stauder
Publisher