Abraham Lincoln once said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.” Depending on our titles, most of us are working under an authority umbrella that allows us to act on behalf of an agency. Continuing our conversation on NIGP Values and Guiding Principles, I present the last and perhaps one of the hardest values – “Impartiality.” We create contracts that we think are objective, we try to teach evaluation teams on how to be objective, and when we look at ourselves, it is possible we would give ourselves high marks on being objective – or do we really mean impartial? I will leave the scholarly view of objectivity and impartiality to the halls of Academia. However, a quick review of the two terms is necessary to prevent us from becoming the poster child for the poor or abusive use of power.

NIGP says, “Impartiality” is “Unbiased decision making and actions. This value is essential to ensure fairness for the public good.” Objectivity is decision making based on facts. Both sound simple – but in practice, it can be challenging. Facts can be statutes, by-laws, regulations, or the words used to create a contract. Being impartial is a deeper dive from objectivity and requires an open mind. What Manager wants to be in the middle of a conflict where a supplier says, “The Buyer said ...” and when you ask the Buyer, he/she is saying, they said no such thing. Another example could be on the creation of an idea, especially if it is our own idea. Problem solving, creating change, estimating risk or simply letting someone exercise an option that was always available but never practiced, are multiple examples of where the practice of impartiality is important.

As public employees, we sign documents to be honest and free of bias. However, what ensures that a good leader will practice impartiality? For me it is a personal choice and it must be practiced on a daily basis. A document clearly states what the requirements are for an evaluation. Am I being objective and unbiased when I go look for evidence? Yes. When I listen to the supplier about his/her understanding of the contract and then I speak to the buyer who created the contract, I am working toward making a decision that is impartial by giving all sides a fair hearing in order to have an outcome that is effective, transparent and performed in a fair manner.

Impartiality even on the value of an “idea” is important. An idea can be denied or accepted simply based on the job title of the person suggesting the idea. Harvard Business review printed a study on groups and their ability to practice being impartial when in a group setting. They found... “that the ideator’s bias is 37% stronger among employees generating ideas in groups versus alone. Employees working alone overvalued their ideas, on average, by 4% versus those in teams by 41%.” (https://hbr.org/2019/05/how-to-overcome-the-bias-we-have-toward-our-own-ideas) The article goes on to explain that group thinking is not very good when trying to determine if the idea is going to work. People can rely on job position or title to verify the workability of the solution. It is up to all of us to put aside our own prejudices and fears to see a new idea without relying on position. We do that by asking questions and understanding the risks. Whether our impartiality is exercised in judging the error of a solicitation or the basis of a new idea, move away from personal biases and listen, ask open-ended questions, give the benefit of the doubt to what is not yet understood and decide Procurement issues on code. When practiced consistently, becoming impartial is the outcome.

The NIGP Values and Guiding Principles of Ethics, Impartiality, Accountability, Professionalism, Service and Transparency will help us build our relationships with suppliers as well as internal clients. I began this article with a statement by Abraham Lincoln who during his lifetime experienced more domestic turbulence than any other American President. I know he experienced the worst in human behavior among his cabinet members, Doris Kearns Goodwin writes about it in her book, Team of Rivals. We must work being aware of our own personal biases and use all of the NIGP Values, to become the officer who is known to practice the highest ideals. Be impartial, and allow your actions to speak for themselves. In that critical moment when a decision is necessary on the “spirit” of the law, the times you practiced “impartiality” in a dozen other scenarios outside of Procurement will help prepare you for that moment in Procurement.

Time is running short for our 2019 Regional Conference. Are you registered? If not, please do so today. Seats are filling as I write. To register go here: https://www.aznigp.org/insidepages/events/?eventid=AD74A2F4-5056-8960-3E2B-B98470BDEEAFAE

We are looking for nominations for our Volunteer Award and the RDJ Award for mentoring. For more information go to https://www.aznigp.org/

Finally, we are looking for volunteers to fill our committee member and chair positions. There is room for new members, new ideas and new growth. The only thing you have to do is inquire, please write hhodgman@ajcity.net and let her know.

Did you know? Recorded in 1969 for the Abbey Road Album. Inspired while in a garden of Eric Clapton’s on a beautiful spring morning. George Harrison was tired of the winter and dealing with the business side of the Beatles after Brian Epstein died in 1967. Can you guess it? And now that Beatles tune...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQetemT1sWc