



“Dear Procurement Stakeholder, Please Show Me Some Love”

NANCY CLINTON - January 4, 2016 7:30 AM |

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Let's kick off our guest posts for 2016 with that perennial question: how do the other business functions see Procurement (and why don't they love them?). Our regular guest contributor, Sigi Osagie, all-round procurement expert and author of 'Procurement Mojo:

Strengthening the Function and Raising Its Profile' -- see our [review here](#) and for more information visit www.procurementmojo.com) tackles the issue.

Many Procurement functions struggle with attaining a solid platform in their organisations, even when they have a formal mandate. Quite often, one of the key challenges is Procurement not getting much love from stakeholders across the organisation.

The issue of stakeholder management has plagued Procurement people since the Devil was a baby. And some purchasing folks still go home most days feeling like they'd like to see a few of their stakeholders suffering a devilish fate. Others feel like crying out to their stakeholders, “Please, please, show me some love.”

But you never get true love by coercion or begging. It always comes from how you make the other person *feel*. **The more stakeholders feel that Procurement is meaningful to their needs, the more Procurement will be deemed relevant and accorded eminence across the enterprise.**

This is less about Procurement's positioning in the organisational structure and more about [its positioning in stakeholders' consciousness](#), i.e., their perceptions of purchasing people and the Procurement brand.

I often remind purchasing people that stakeholders are working for the same P&L and Balance Sheet as Procurement. And stakeholders are important because they have a 'stake' in our Procurement game – not least, as internal 'customers'.

Life is created in each moment. Every moment a purchasing person spends interacting with stakeholders is an opportunity to create a delightful customer experience and nurture productive relationships, thus, building positive perceptions. [Imbibing customer-centricity to our approach](#) is an invaluable aid to engaging stakeholders effectively and positioning Procurement favourably.

Many stakeholders are territorial about their operations and budgets. But, in my experience, most will welcome Procurement involvement if it will generate positive impacts with minimal pain. However, they must be convinced of the value in the first place. Positioning Procurement effectively is about creating the positive perceptions that establish that conviction.

There is no universal panacea to the challenge of managing stakeholders. I know from experience that it's never a piece of cake. I've often been tempted to use my African voodoo powers to cast spells on a few stakeholders during change initiatives. But that'd be unscrupulous.

Sometimes our discord with stakeholders is simply rooted in divergence of views or differences in personality. And it's easy to fall prey to our primal instincts to attack others or defend our perspectives resolutely. But humans have another primal emotion called love. Love is sweeter when it's spiced with positive vibes, mutual respect and understanding. So rather than resorting to voodoo spells, I try to understand individual stakeholders better and grow the rapport, even if I find their views parochial.

An "organisation" is a collection of individuals pursuing a common purpose in an 'organised' manner. Every individual has a role to play. Understanding the factors that compel individuals' behaviour is crucial in engaging stakeholders successfully. And emotional intelligence, [empathetic listening](#) and [persuasive communication](#) are central to such interpersonal interactions. **Don't rely entirely on logic, data, job title or your bucket-load of cost savings to win stakeholders over.** If you really want to feel the love, you must also 'connect' with individual stakeholders as fellow human beings; you'll be astounded how a little effort to create camaraderie at a personal level will massively improve your stakeholder relationships.

This is particularly vital in many large businesses where organisational politics and power plays are inescapable realities.

Dealing with the myriad of political manoeuvres or seemingly irrational behaviours stakeholders sometimes exhibit can often feel like a distraction. And it is, in many ways. But, like it or not, it's also the story of organisational life. **The more adept Procurement people are at handling such organisational dynamics, the more effective they'll be at building affinity with stakeholders.**

Seeing things from stakeholders' perspectives is always a great start. By making the effort to walk a mile in their shoes, you'll gain a much deeper understanding of their drivers and motivations – golden nuggets of wisdom that will prove priceless in shaping your stakeholder engagements. It's similar to the sort of effort successful consumer brands invest in managing their customer relationships. Instilling the tenets of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) into Procurement job roles and [performance management](#) is essential for effective stakeholder management.

Top-notch stakeholder management is a prerequisite for Procurement success. The investment you make here will yield rich returns, not just for the Procurement brand, but also for your own personal brand and work satisfaction.

As we enter 2016, let's embrace it as the dawn of a new era in which we gain more fulfillment in our work, a big part of which is a better sense of self and more harmonious, collaborative relationships with our stakeholders. As I say to everyone at this time of the year, I wish you much love and a Happy New Year; may the best days of your past be the worst days of your future.

