My Christmas Wish List

It is that time of year—Christmas. And this is the time of year that we get to send all of our wishes to Santa. I know that I am a little old to believe in Santa Claus, but that shouldn’t deter me from making my wishes. No matter how old I am, I can still dream, can’t I? And shouldn’t the chief estimator deserve a few “gifts?” So here goes, Santa, this is my list.

One more “good” year that will allow me to keep the same staff size. I know that all the predictions are for our economy to continue to slow, but if we could have just one more year of good economic conditions, I can actually complete the training I started a few years ago. I will be able to have the entire team together and we can really begin working together—as a team. We will be able to produce more bids, more accurately and manage more projects more efficiently. All we need is the opportunity. My lump of coal would be for the economy to make a downturn, which will allow the owner to mandate cuts in our staff I have spent time training outstanding estimators, but they will be on the loose for other companies to hire. The outcome will be that we will have to compete against improved competition, and I will have to begin the training/organizing process all over again.

An architectural firm that has something more than a just an abstract idea as to how to build the exterior and interior wall systems and who is given an actual budget that will allow them to produce bid documents that we can use. I know that it is a pretty unrealistic wish, maybe even impossible. But what the heck, shouldn’t wishes be for something important, no matter how delusional they may be? For this wish, I am just not sure what my lump of coal could be. Can the drawings get worse? Somehow, I can’t imagine that happening, so anything here should be an improvement.

An owner who understands the estimating/sales process and who believes it is possible that a bad job can be the responsibility of the field and not the estimate. I know, I put two wishes in one, but who is keeping score? For once, I would like the estimating staff to receive the recognition that we deserve. I am tired of being viewed as a “necessary evil” as I am often reminded. We perform one of the most difficult functions in the company. We estimate costs based on loose information and by doing so, we put our body parts on the chopping block for any and all Monday morning quarterbacks to take a whack at. As a viable part of the industry, we deserve a little respect. And the other thing: Not all jobs are a result of bad bids. Everyone is aware that a bad bid can be ruined in the field. That is stated as fact often around our shop. If that is possible, isn’t it just as reasonable to believe that a good bid can be ruined in the field? Would it be too much to ask for the upper level management of the company to withhold the assumption that any project that doesn’t look as good as it should started out as a bad bid? We estimators should be innocent until proven guilty!

A computer system that actually can stay working more often than the employees. Computers and software cost money, but these are the tools we make our living with. Would it be too much to ask of Santa to bring us a computer system that will stay working? I ask this of Santa because I already have beaten my head against the wall asking my boss.

Fewer attorneys in the world. I saved this one for last, but wouldn’t the world be a better place without so much litigation? Wouldn’t we be better off without having to review the contract language so carefully? Wouldn’t it be so much easier to understand the contracts if there were no lawyers around to write them in that foreign language? My life and the lives of my staff would improve greatly if we just had a lot less legal mumbo-jumbo to deal with.

There you have it, Mr. Claus, my Christmas list. I’ve been a good person this year. I haven’t fired anyone, and heck, the few times I have had to yell at one of my staff it was well deserved. I have cussed a few times, but I am getting better. It is just because of those quirky old computers and those darned lousy drawings.

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