



BIDDING

By Monroe S. Miller

It's been a few years since I've seen such fierce competition in the marketplace where we do most of our business. That's generally good news when you are on the buying end of it.

There is a lot of scrapping going on in the fungicide business; distributors are all working hard and pricing to get a share of sales. The bidding process has become a stronger part of that.

The fiveplex fairway mower market is seeing a lot of activity, and new introductions have toughened the competition there. Bidding for these machines is sharpening.

The same thing is going on for those interested in buying new walking greensmowers and the smaller utility vehicles. Close bidding is offering up some real bargains.

But nearly 20 years as a golf course superintendent makes one just a little suspicious and a lot cautious. I've seen this before. Sales people will love to read this: there is more to a wise pur-

chase than just accepting the lowest bid. They love to read it and hear it because it is true.

The bitterness of poor quality or lousy service remains long after the sweetness of a low bid is forgotten.

The problem too frequently is not our own judgment but pressure from green committees, finance committees, club officers or club directors. They can force decisions based on cost only. It's certainly the easiest way, and they are insulated, by and large, from ensuing problems related to poor service and poor quality.

I feel lucky, in my own case, to have been allowed the room to make several decisions on major projects and purchases based on "the best" and not "the lowest" or "the cheapest".

When we built our maintenance facility a few years ago, we invited only the best builders in town to participate. The same was true a few years previous when our pumping station was

constructed: only the best — building and equipment and service for both.

The same rules applied when our new irrigation system went in two years ago. The key to the project was reducing any risks of future problems as a result of marginal equipment or sloppy installation.

It also seems illogical to expect companies who are generous in their support of the NOER CENTER to be the last penny low bidder all the time.

Advice from author and economist John Ruskin, given in a piece entitled "The Lowest Bidder", applies in our business. Let me share it with you:

"It's unwise to pay too much, but it's worse to pay too little. When you pay too much, you lose a little money — that is all. When you pay too little, you sometimes lose everything, because the thing you bought was incapable of doing the job it was bought to do. The common law of business balance prohibits paying a little and getting a lot — it can't be done. If you deal with the lowest bidder, it is well to add something for the risk you run, and, if you do that, you will have enough to pay for something better."

By the way, Mr. Ruskin gave that advice over 100 years ago.

Some things never change.

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