

Josh Descoteaux: 0:06

Greetings and welcome to the NASPO Pulse, the podcast where we are monitoring issues in state procurement.

Kevin Minor: 0:10

We've got our finger on the pulse.

Josh Descoteaux: 0:12

I'm your host, Josh Dakota, and I'm Kevin Miner, and we are so glad to be back in the studio after our first live recording in Austin, Texas. Yeah.

Kevin Minor: 0:21

You know it's good to be home, but that was awesome getting to interview Dan in front of a live audience.

Josh Descoteaux: 0:26

Dan was so cool and, yeah, if you haven't, go back and listen to our live recording on vendor performance tracking. We have games gotta love the games and audience participation and we already mentioned Dan is a great storyteller and this is one that you don't want in this.

Kevin Minor: 0:43

Yeah, so stop listening to this episode, go back, listen to those episodes and then come back and finish listening to this episode. Absolutely, I think next time I want to get one of those like light up, applause, laugh signs for the audience.

Josh Descoteaux: 0:56

That's what the laugh tracks are for, Kevin, but actually in all honesty, we didn't even need them, that's true, that's true, absolutely.

Kevin Minor: 1:03

So what's on the agenda for today, Josh?

Josh Descoteaux: 1:06

Ah yes, we are talking with Thor Vu, Chief Procurement Officer for the great state of Alaska. For the past few years, the Alaska Procurement Office has been going through a centralization process.

Kevin Minor: 1:17

We're going to ask Thor to discuss some of the challenges his office has faced thus far during the process buy-in, cooperation, implementation, stuff like that.

Josh Descoteaux: 1:28

Yep, and we'll also talk to Thor about Alaska's new centers of procurement excellence and the experiences he can share with other states.

Kevin Minor: 1:35

We're also going to play a new game with Thor, called the Key Takeaway Game, where Josh and I each present Thor with a key takeaway from the interview, the pressure is on Thor because he will decide whose takeaway is better, but we already know who's going to win.

Kevin Minor: 1:52

Are you insinuating that you're going to win the takeaway game? Maybe, okay, well, we'll see about that. You got questions, comments? We'd love to hear from you. Email us podcast at naspoorg, if you haven't already. Make sure

you subscribe to us on Apple Podcasts, spotify, google or wherever you get your podcasts, and make sure to check out our blog, pulsenaspo.org, and catch up on some procurement articles written by your very own NASPO staff. All right, let's take the pulse.

Josh Descoteaux: 2:19

Yeah, thor, can you briefly give us some of your experience in procurement and your responsibilities in your role as CPO?

Thor Vue: 2:26

Sure, josh. Yeah, and first of all thank you for having me on this NASPO experience. I think it's a wonderful opportunity to share my experience and the experience of Alaska. So, to answer your question, my procurement and contracting career started in the federal government side. I started in contracting with the Department of Defense, actually, and Air Force, down by Benro Air Force Base in Santa Barbara, supporting the Western Launch Range essentially. So if you're familiar with space launch and missile launch and whatnot, the Western Launch Range is basically where all that has happened, wow. And then from there went over to the Department of Homeland Security, also in the federal government, doing a lot of the immigration and naturalization procurements and supporting that mission, and then ultimately went to the US Department of Veterans Affairs and in that I oversaw all the procurement for all the hospitals in the state of Texas. I was the VHA deputy director and then later director of contracting, supporting all of those hospitals. So it was a very, very exciting time.

Thor Vue: 3:40

And then after that I went to a local government and dealing specifically with transportation procurement.

Thor Vue: 3:47

So I worked for the Valley Transportation Authority, basically the transit authority for the Silicon Valley and San Jose, and then now in my role as the chief care officer for the state of Alaska. You know, basically I see myself as the strategic leader and senior procurement executive and so I provide basically policy guidance and recommendations to the executive branch. I go through the trenches if I need to, all the way to writing policies and procedures so I'm very hands-on. And procedures so I'm very hands-on. I've routinely been involved with our teams on basically how to craft ROPs and if we need to go a certain route, I provide guidance on that as well. And of course, I also oversee the procurement function, all the procurement function in the state of Alaska, and, as I mentioned earlier, writing the policies and procedures to make sure that that happens in a way that is in the best interest of the state of Alaska and, as I mentioned earlier, you know, writing the policies and procedures to make sure that that happens in a way that is in the best interest of the state.

Josh Descoteaux: 4:48

Just a little bit of procurement experience.

Kevin Minor: 4:51

A lot of leadership experience too, Thor. How is it different working for the state? It's very interesting how you came from one area to the other. How do those two compare?

Thor Vue: 5:03

Yeah, so excellent question. You know, I think, that because they're both in the area of public procurement, I think that they share very similar objectives in the sense where, you know, we're trying to utilize the taxpayers' dollars in the most efficient and fair and transparent manner possible. So you'll see that as an overarching theme both in the federal government and the state government, no matter what role you play. So that in itself, I think, is the primary similarities. There are nuances, little differences, depending on what the objectives is for the state and the state departments, and so those minor differences, I think, are a little bit more subtle, but for the most part the processes and procedures are very much the same Transparency, openness and, you know, and full, open competition

wherever we can, Right right, Thor.

Josh Descoteaux: 5:58

I'm really interested in the policies and procedures part of it. So when you got to Alaska, were there any specific policies and procedures that you saw an opportunity to either enhance or change or add?

Thor Vue: 6:09

Yeah. So I think that the procurement process in the state is pretty robust in the sense where we model our procurement process under the American Bar Association Model Procurement Code. So for the most part we covered the majority of the areas that we need to ensure that we do to protect the state. But there are areas that I think we're a little lacking in, and particularly in areas of contractor performance evaluation, past performance information and taking that little extra step to be a little bit more transparent and also a little bit more inclusive in how we utilize state contracts. So some of those things you know, we tackled head on. Obviously, the COVID experience in the last year and a half or so has kind of diverted us a little bit from some of those initiatives. But you know, we are looking, potentially looking at some rewrites to the procurement code and particularly to our policies procedures to ensure that we modernize our processes and are in sync with our sister agencies, our sister states and then also with the federal government as well.

Kevin Minor: 7:20

Yeah, yeah, that's actually a great segue into our conversation today. The reason that we've asked you to talk with us is that we know that Alaska's procurement office has been going through the centralization process and we want you to tell us about that a little bit and your role in that. I know you kind of touched on that. Is there a specific team in your procurement office that manages the centralization efforts, or is that outsourced?

Thor Vue: 7:50

Yeah, so that's an excellent question. Let me just give a little background on the procurement consolidation effort and then I'll go ahead and go into that question on who's managing that effort. So Alaska operates in a sort of fragmented and decentralized procurement model, in the sense where the chief procurement officer is named by the legislature as the procurement head for all the state, but then the CPO delegates that authority independently to the departments, and so the departments then have a lot of unlimited authority to essentially contract in whatever manner is best for them to meet the mission. So that kind of fragmentation and decentralization has its benefits, in a sense, where they're provided some flexibilities to the departments, but obviously also had a lot of drawbacks. There's a lot of duplication efforts, duplications of policies and whatnot, and so the governor saw that, and so in 2019, the governor issued administrative order 304, which called for the consolidation of all state procurement functions in the state into one central office, and we call that central office the Office of Procurement and Property Management. So OPPPM, opppm, um right, um, this started back in 2019. Um, so, um, right after the admin order, um, the Department of Administration did an independent study with a third-party firm to focus on some of the back office support functions, including procurement, and how best to utilize those support functions, and then that sort of kicked us off into the procurement consolidation.

Thor Vue: 9:32

So starting in March of 2020 is when we first kicked off the consolidation effort. We spent meetings, so we had a couple of meetings with the cabinet members, the commissioners of all the different departments, and basically just shared with them our plans, upcoming milestones, and then, of course, answer any questions concerns that the cabinet members may have, and then from there we went into the weeds. Essentially, we started having one-on-ones with departments and tried to understand what their needs are. So at this point, primarily, my role is the change champion, but also, more importantly, I'm also the cheerleader. So I work with department staff, department leadership and key stakeholders to articulate and collaborate a vision of what state procurement should look like in Alaska.

Thor Vue: 10:27

So your question then is you know whether this is outsourced or whether it's kept in-house? It's definitely kept in-house. One of the challenges we have here, I think and we'll find it with other governments everywhere is a constrained budget, and so we articulated the vision to our commissioner and she challenged us to see if we can do this in-house without relying on any sort of external contract or support. So I many, many times these major transformation issues. You know you hire multiple program managers and consultants, you know, and they kind of run with you and partnership and they create training videos and videos to informational videos, communication videos and and fun little things. You know we didn't have the budget for that, unfortunately.

Thor Vue: 11:14

So what, what, what? Essentially what it is we, we, we did, we did a lot of these work in-house. We managed it independently. I think that the OPPM leadership team took the charge and then, in addition to that, collaborations and partnerships with the department commissioners and our department admin services directors were also a key part of that, you know. I mean they were a key partner in driving the vision and the mission forward. And, of course, you know our state procurement staff and other partners, such as our ERP program managers, finance officers, logistics and inventory officers. You know all of those are key players in the centralization effort. You know that the state is leading. So you know all it was all done.

Kevin Minor: 11:59

Potentially all of these are done in-house so I'm hearing that there's a lot of communication, a lot of partnership and maybe just a hint of luck in there yeah, I think that would be fair to say right, well, yeah, because I mean you've got to get you've got to get a lot of different signature, you gotta get a lot of sign off and a lot of buy-in, and that's not necessarily an easy thing to do, especially while you're still doing your job. Right, right?

Thor Vue: 12:25

And I think that, because we're doing this in a time with COVID as well, it presented the additional layer of challenge. So not only were we doing our normal day-to-day work, we were responding to a worldwide pandemic that was impacting Alaska significantly, and then, on top of that, we were also driving a major transformation initiative in the state of Alaska, you know, to consolidate these efforts. So you know, I think that you mentioned buy-in. I mean, buy-in was definitely one of the things, one of the key ingredients that we needed, and you know, it was a little challenging at first.

Thor Vue: 12:56

You know, I think, that for the most part, change is always a little unsettling to, to, to folks, and I know myself, you know, I mean, I don't like change either. You know, when I'm in a certain you know areas and parts of my life, so, but you know, I think that that was one of the first challenges that we had to overcome, you know. And then, in addition to that, you know, I mean, I think that there are other. You know, as I mentioned earlier, our personal resource constraints, I think were, were, were another big factor. And then we, we did a lot of these work, all of them in house, and so that took a lot of our times too. I mean, it wasn't uncommon for for my team and I and some of some of our leadership teams in the departments, to be working 10 to 12 hour days during some of these time periods just to manage all these competing priorities.

Josh Descoteaux: 13:48

Thor, I had a question about you being a cheerleader and I'm going to go out on a limb and say that this is a pretty heavy lift in terms of decentralization, that this is a pretty heavy lift in terms of this centralization. But how did you convey the value of the centralization and create that buy-in with the agency heads? What were some of the things that you passed on to them of how this would really help their agency in terms of the cabinet leaders' buy-in?

Thor Vue: 14:15

Yeah, joshua, I think that's an excellent question.

Thor Vue: 14:16

I think that one of the key things that we needed to show was a unified vision and, of course, the overall goal at the end.

Thor Vue: 14:26

So I think that having a unified structure in procurement not only provides a lot of consistency and redundancy of work and allows our staff to get things done quicker, but in addition to that, it also creates an organization where our staff can actually grow and because it's a large, large organization now the housing of every procurement state employee it gave our staff the flexibility to be detailed to certain departments, to be detailed to certain areas.

Thor Vue: 14:58

You know, I mean, having come from the federal government, working in a defense procurement space, in a health care procurement space, you know, in the transportation procurement space. You know sometimes you kind of lose vision or lose sight of some of the other specialties that are needed when you do procurement in other areas. You know, like public safety or natural resource or fish and game other areas, you know, like public safety or natural resource or fish and game. So being able to have that large organization and have our folks potentially move between departments, I think is one of the key areas that we also, you know, convey to our staff to try to get that buy-in and you know, and try to, just you know, it was essentially a cheerleading effort and continuing to communicate the vision and the milestones and the benefits of consolidation with key stakeholders.

Josh Descoteaux: 15:43

That's great, and did you notice that some of the agencies that you were talking to actually invited what the centralization could provide for them in terms of those aspects of procurement and being able to provide that service to them to responsibly purchase what they needed?

Thor Vue: 16:03

Yeah, it definitely does help, and I think that what we actually did was we actually did a two-step process where we implemented an early adopter program which comprised of just a few of the departments, of just a few of the departments, and essentially they were our tip of the spear to learn all the essential issues and problems, and then, after the early adoption program, we brought in the rest of the states. So I think that kind of approach has been very helpful. That's great.

Josh Descoteaux: 16:33

And so you've touched on a couple of these, but your main overall strategy that you've practiced for the centralization effort, what would you say that you have been focusing on and directing your team to focus on to make sure that you all are on track to provide the centralization for the state of Alaska? For?

Thor Vue: 16:54

the state of Alaska. Yeah, so I think that some of the most important strategies that we implemented were basically communication is foremost one of them, being transparent and also being flexible and being adaptable. So, communications first. I think that that is paramount because any kind of major transformation initiative, when people aren't given answers or you know your answers are not provided, they start making up answers to to their questions. And so it's.

Thor Vue: 17:24

It was very important, very clear for us to articulate a vision and articulate a message continuously, you know, message and communicate to the stakeholders and our staff. And so that, you know, no one was basically left in the dark, so that that that went from the cabinet level all the way to. You know, no one was basically left in the dark, so that went from the cabinet level all the way to. You know, our most junior Cameron staff. Everyone was in sync and knew what was going on with the consolidation and essentially knew the next steps and the milestones. So that,

I think, was one of the main strategies that was paramount and important in this effort, you know. The other is, of course, transparency and our willingness to pivot and modify milestones as needed to accommodate the unexpected. Yeah, I mean, I think we started this just a month before COVID started, so that kind of gave you an you know, sort of a feel of how we had to pivot quickly because we thought that we're just going to do consolidation and then we had to do not consolidation.

Kevin Minor: 18:15

Understatement quickly is an understatement, I think probably.

Thor Vue: 18:23

Yeah.

Thor Vue: 18:23

So just being transparent on where we are, uh, what, what some of the pros and cons are, uh and, and what the next steps will be, I think it is very important, uh, to be able to buy and well, to to be able to establish trust.

Thor Vue: 18:32

Trust is important in this kind of effort and so having that you know makes the the whole process much easier, because now you know you don't, you're not doubting yourself and other people's aren't doubting your motives or intentions as well. And then I think the third thing, the third strategy that we utilize, is just being flexible and being adaptable. You know there's just things that are going to be unanticipated. There's unanticipated events that are going to arise, and you know it's going to be unanticipated. There's unanticipated events that are going to arise and it's going to just blow your milestones out of the water, and then you have to just kind of look at it, readjust and then just keep moving forward. So I think that flexibility and adaptability, I think it's also very important. It was definitely a strategy that we ingrained in our staff and ingrained in our folks to make sure that you know that they understood that.

Kevin Minor: 19:19

Yeah, you know it's interesting. We've talked to chief learning officers from different states and we've talked about change management and we've talked about how you implement changes and you talk a lot about messaging. Can you give us an example of a way that you communicated some of these changes to the staff specifically and how you were kind of successful in getting them on board?

Thor Vue: 19:45

Sure, yeah. So I think that we utilize a variety of different methods. We did a lot of one-on-ones, so we met one-on-ones with the departments to uniquely explore some of their challenges and their situation and see how we can help them, support and alleviate some of those challenges. But we also did a lot of town halls as well, where we are communicating to the larger audience, and our town halls was inclusive, including anyone that had any kind of touchpoint with procurement in the state, so that didn't have to be procurement officers. It could be our finance officers, our budget officers, our admin staff, anyone that potentially would be impacted by the consolidation. So, by utilizing those two-pronged methods, I think that helped us in getting that buy-in that we needed to be able to move this ginormous mountain.

Josh Descoteaux: 20:42

Thor, when you are going through this centralization effort and the consolidation that you are encountering from agency to agency, is there anything that your procurement office or the central procurement office has learned about what other agencies have have done and um, is there an opportunity to incorporate some of the things that you've learned into um the efforts going forward when you do finally, uh, centralize?

Thor Vue: 21:09

And Josh, I think it's an excellent question. I think that you know, what we learned is that every department is as unique as uh as individuals within them them.

Kevin Minor: 21:17

I like that.

Thor Vue: 21:20

I would like to put that on a t-shirt. I think there are definitely some departments that are very mature and they're preparing processes and there was a lot of lessons learned that we're able to capture from that and use to, to to showcase. You know, it's some of the reasons that rationale is behind consolidation. You know, look, we can utilize these, utilize these RFI templates or these RFP templates that are very thorough. Then you and all these other departments don't have to keep coming up with new forms to do it. So those kind of things, I think, were very meaningful and helped us to help push this momentum along.

Josh Descoteaux: 21:56

Yeah, because some people think that by itself centralization has a negative connotation about it. But there also is an opportunity and some benefits that come out of the centralization, as knowledge sharing comes in and just kind of gleaning a lot of those best efforts and best practices to be able to formalize a really solid procurement effort once that centralization is completed.

Thor Vue: 22:24

Yeah, josh, and if you don't mind, I'd like to piggyback on that comment. I think that's a very valid point. You know, because we hear words like centralization, consolidation, those generally, you know, connote things like you know, know slash and burn fires and layoffs and things like that. You know, and we had to make it very clear at the very beginning of this you know that that there is no plan to lay any staff off or not, and that you know that's purely an effort to to better align the state's purchasing power and purchasing authority so that, you know, we can leverage our. That's been better, and so we made it very clear that there wasn't no change, there wasn't going to be a change in physical location. You know families weren't going to be forced to move from one city to another. You know employees weren't going to be laid off.

Kevin Minor: 23:11

Yeah, yeah, talk about demotivating people. What, to you, has been the toughest process or aspect of centralization? I'm sure that there's been many, but maybe if you could just pick the top two, Sure, yeah.

Thor Vue: 23:26

So I think that the top two. I think the first one would be user acceptance to the new normal. I think that's one and I'll elaborate a little bit more on that. I think the other challenge and the toughest part of this process has just been the standardization of forms and processes throughout the entire state.

Thor Vue: 23:47

So my first comment regarding the user acceptance of a new normal. I mean I think that as professionals and as human beings we get comfortable with that doing things a certain way, and when change happens, you know it forces us to realign ourselves, realign our priorities and our objectives and reconsider. You know what kind of value we're playing to the organization, to the state and to our own departments, and so you know that could create some, you know, unease in folks and you know and anytime you're also realigning employees and supervisors or not, that always brings some feelings of uncertainty. So we have to make sure that we're very careful to that. This consolidation effort has not been just a technical transformation. It has been an emotional one as well, taking care of the emotions and how our staff could potentially be facing the emotions and challenges that they could potentially be facing. So we were looking at all that.

Thor Vue: 24:49

But still, even today, I think that the user acceptance of a new procurement structure, a new procurement model, is still one of our ongoing challenges and it's just going to take time.

Thor Vue: 25:00

I mean, I think any major change, any traumatic change in any person's life, it just takes it to have just has to go through a cycle.

Thor Vue: 25:07

Right, you know it's going to, it's going to take time before you know, that there's a genuine acceptance of that new process, where that new normal. And then the other thing that I mentioned was the standardization of forms and processes, and I think that that's one of our biggest, you know, toughest challenges, as far as the situation as well, and you know, working with 14 different unique state departments. You know and I'm not even going to talk about all the different agencies, the hundreds of other agencies underneath those departments, you know the 14 state departments, you know, and all of them doing things also separately through the fragmented, through a very fragmented process that I mentioned earlier. You know, I think that to standardize all those forms and processes is a challenge and it's going to be an ongoing challenge, and you know it's not something we're going to be able to do overnight, but you know it's a challenge that we're willing to work with the departments on and come up with a solution as a team.

Josh Descoteaux: 25:58

Thor, I was going to ask you about the Alaska Centers of Procurement Excellence. So your office has set up seven of these new centers as an effort for the consolidation to manage strategic purchasing and statewide contracts. Would you be able to elaborate on this and what it means for your state and really what the goals are for these centers, because it sounds like a really, really cool idea.

Thor Vue: 26:20

Yeah, so our, you know I'm very proud of our Alaskan centers of current excellence. They are basically our statewide contracting centers. You know that manage, you know all of our statewide contracts and so you know, I think what we saw with our previous current model in the state was that, you know, there was a lot of duplication and efforts and buying the same thing. We have one department buying groceries, for example, for the prison inmate, and then another department buying the same thing for their staff, their firefighters, fighting forest fires in remote areas of Alaska. So a lot of those things are being duplicated and that's just one example. And so what the consolidation effort allowed us to do was actually look at all of these redundant spend being processed by, you know, by redundant folks just kind of doing the same thing, and look at ways to streamline and more strategically align those duties under one functional area. So we came up with the Alaskan Centers for Precarious Excellence as a way to do that.

Thor Vue: 27:22

And, as you mentioned, josh, there are seven centers of excellence. You know, travel, health care and medical, for example, transportation, those kind of those kind of things, and so each center is managed by a center manager, manager and their job is basically to do overall and they're to basically look at the overall spin of the state related to their specific centers and their search of the functional areas and then try to consolidate all those purchases into one one center and manage it at the statewide level, um, and so that reduces, as you can imagine, reduces a lot of the redundancy and personnel effort and just issuing out the same RFP or issuing out the same award for that contract. So the Alaska Central Procurement Estates are basically very non-department specific teams, as I mentioned. They award our statewide master agreements and contracts that can be utilized throughout the state, not only by our departments but also by our local government and jurisdictions as well.

Thor Vue: 28:27

And then, of course, the objective is to basically just get a better grasp of our spend management, be able to leverage our spend, be able to do it in a way that is the most beneficial to the taxpayers and utilizes taxpayers' dollars in the most efficient and fair way, so that, in addition to some of the other benefits of the centers, is to basically just provide great consistency in goods and services. So you know, instead of having a variety of different specs, for example for laptops, we can work with our office of information technology to come up with very defined parameters and then now we have consistency in being able to service our equipment, because now there's not 200 different operating systems and configurations and whatnot, 200 different operating systems and configurations and whatnot. There's a very finite amount and it's easier for us to troubleshoot and work on those kind of things. So those are some of the things that I think, some of the benefits that have resulted as part of the consolidation effort and also the standing up of the Center of Excellence.

Kevin Minor: 29:40

What's an experience that you could share with some other states, maybe that were looking to do something similar or or just really liked this idea.

Thor Vue: 29:48

Yeah. So I think that that's an excellent question and for any organization looking to go through, or perhaps is currently going through, a similar effort, I guess my, what I, my advice and what I'd like to share with them would be to just be patient, be patient and be prepared to continually articulate the vision and the motives and the motivations for why you're doing what you're doing. It's not going to happen overnight, and we found that sometimes the information that we share with staff, we have to share multiple times and articulate it in many different ways and in many different forums, through one-on-ones, through town halls, and sometimes it still doesn't get through. And so you just have to be patient, you just have to know that it's going to take time, and if you're patient enough, persistent enough and get other folks to buy in on the vision, then ultimately you'll slowly get there, you'll slowly get to the end of the finish line.

Josh Descoteaux: 30:53

So that would be the advice that I would give to anyone looking to go through something similar, thor, when you were talking about the strategy and when you have stood up, these seven new centers of excellence, what had you discovered in terms of consolidating contracts? Was there some particular contracts that particularly needed consolidated? And then, how did the agencies react to that? On one hand, they can say we want this control, we've always had this contract, we want the control of it, we want to buy what we want to buy, or where some agencies like you guys can take this, go ahead. You know, you know, in terms of those two scenarios, I'm guessing that you've seen, maybe could you. Has there ever been anything like that in your experience?

Thor Vue: 31:38

Your comments are really relevant. I think that we get the whole spectrum. You know, there there are, there are. I think that your comments are really relevant. I think that we get the whole spectrum. There are some departments that say, you know, don't touch my contracts. And then there are some that say, hey, why aren't you taking our contracts? Take them all. We get the whole spectrum and I think that from us we use objective criteria.

Thor Vue: 32:00

How many departments does this type of contract touch us? And if it touches multiple departments, then it makes sense to go to one of our centers and if it's something that's uniquely tailored to support the mission of a particular department, then it makes sense to leave that with procurement staff in the department. So that was our objective. But I think that there isn't one solution to the answer. I think that it really just depends on the customer, on the departments and then what their objectives are, and then weigh that with the risks. Is there, is there a risk? And and having, you know, some of these contracts be managed outside of the centers? Or or is the risk low? And what is the value proposition of having those managed outside? And then, if that's the case and all that, you know after doing that analysis. If it makes sense, you know, then, then you know. Then we either take it in to the center or we leave it with the departments.

Kevin Minor: 33:04

Yeah, and like you said it's, it's still in its infancy, so I think you'll probably find out more about that. You'll probably be able to answer that question with a little more info in a year from now.

Thor Vue: 33:14

Yeah, of course.

Kevin Minor: 33:15

So, thor, now we're going to move to a new segment called key takeaways. Key takeaways, thor. This is actually the first time that we're doing this, so we really appreciate you being our guinea pig, so to speak. Thor, josh and I are going to present you with key takeaways that we've got from the interview. Thor, you're going to decide whose takeaway is better mine or Josh's. Okay, and really the point here is just to reiterate the message in a fun way and also for me to brag to Josh later about how much better I am, so I'm going to let Josh go first. Josh, will you present your key takeaways to Thor?

Josh Descoteaux: 33:58

All right, thor, I uh. My key takeaway is that centralization is easy. It's the easiest thing in the world.

Kevin Minor: 34:04

I'm just where have you been?

Thor Vue: 34:06

That's right there, I'm definitely going to win.

Josh Descoteaux: 34:12

You've done such a good job. I was just sucking up but in all seriousness I really like the takeaway of user acceptance of a new normal. We can apply that in our regular lives. Obviously the new normal you know in quotes that's almost been beat to the ground, but in terms of centralization, really having the user down at the user level, be comfortable and accept the new normal that what you hit on is being a cheerleader and having that emotional aspect to really create that buy-in and create that user confidence. I really like the acceptance of a new normal. I guess that was pretty good.

Kevin Minor: 34:52

It was pretty good, Kevin.

Thor Vue: 34:55

Pressure's on Kevin.

Kevin Minor: 34:56

I should have went first. We'll flip a coin next time. Yeah, we'll switch it up. So, thor, my key takeaways are that, through changes and through this consolidation, adaptability, flexibility, communication and transparency are key, but even more than that, you talked about a unified structure that grows staff and provides that flexibility. So just paying attention to those key elements are extremely important in consolidation.

Thor Vue: 35:35

Well, kevin and Josh, you guys don't make this easy for me at all. I think that Josh's key takeaway touches on some very important aspect of the challenges and some of the emotional issues that we, as leaders, need to be mindful of, and consolidation. And then I think, kevin, your key takeaway talks is right on point with some of the things that we need to look at to make a transformation successful. So I think that it's going to be a tough one, but I'd say so.

Josh, I'm hoping you have a thicker skin.

Thor Vue: 36:17

I'm saying that I think that you probably hit more than major marks during this discussion oh, alright, Kevin starts 1-0.

Kevin Minor: 36:30

Checks in the mail, my friend no, Josh, we're doing a virtual handshake. That was a good. That was a good run many more to go? One, nothing. Thor, before we go, do you have any advice for our listeners? I know you talked a little bit about advice for the centers of excellence, um your experiences, but this is just more of a general advice for our listeners.

Thor Vue: 36:58

Yeah, Kevin. So I think that you know, whether you're a procurement or not, I mean mean some general advice that I would say is you know, just take time to enjoy the simple accomplishments in the day to day. You know, I think that sometimes we get bogged down in our you know some of our challenges and issues and we forget, you know, that it's those minor, small victories daily that you know keeps us going. So you know things on the procurement thing, for example, things like just awarding a contract or resolving a protest, getting an RFP issue, those are the small day-to-day wins that we have to be mindful of. And if we can use those to support our foundation, you know, I think that we'll continue to keep going and continue to grow. And, of course, you know, just don't take things too personally and have fun.

Kevin Minor: 37:47

Yeah, I think, Thor, I think you actually win the key takeaway, cause that's pretty good advice. Yeah, Thor Vu. Chief Procurement Officer for the state of Alaska. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Thor Vue: 37:57

Thank you, Kevin, Thank you Josh.

Josh Descoteaux: 38:03

It was a pleasure talking with you this morning, Kevin.

Kevin Minor: 38:04

I can't believe you won the takeaway game. Oh, haters gonna hate, Josh, haters gonna hate.

Josh Descoteaux: 38:08

Alright, well, I might have you next time. I think I'm like 0-1 now.

Kevin Minor: 38:14

It is 0-1. Well, technically we played it with Dan and neither of us won, so right now it's 0-1.

Josh Descoteaux: 38:20

0-1-1. I guess we tied one right.

Kevin Minor: 38:22

No, we both lost that one, didn't we?

Josh Descoteaux: 38:24

Okay, next time, Kevin. Well, I really like to see how Thor sees his role as cheerleader as opposed to like the key stakeholder in all of this. He puts emphasis on articulating and collaborating a vision of what state procurement

should look like in the state of Alaska.

Kevin Minor: 38:40

Absolutely. I think it's important in the leadership role to know when to get out of your own way, and I like how much he focuses on the change management aspect too and the buy-in from his staff. It seems like he's really concerned with their mental wellbeing. That's really cool. It'll be interesting to see how those centers for procurement excellence work out like a year from now.

Josh Descoteaux: 39:03

Yes, we definitely have to do a follow-up episode with Thor. This one was great. Well, that's it for us today on the Pulse. Make sure you subscribe to us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google or wherever you get your podcasts. Make sure to check out the NASPO blog at pulsenaspo.org. I'm Kevin Miner. I'm Josh Dakota.

Kevin Minor: 39:24

Until next time you.