

Kevin Minor: 0:02

Greetings Pulse Takers and welcome to our Supplier Engagement miniseries. I'm your host, Kevin Miner, and in this miniseries I interview suppliers live from the 2023 NASPO Exchange Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. We discuss forming relationships and how to make the contracting process smoother. Today I'm talking with Mark Mayer, director of Strategic Partnerships at InTime Tech. Give us a like and a follow wherever you get your podcast, and enjoy the show.

Mark Mayer: 0:38

Hi, my name is Mark Mayer and I am the Director of Strategic Partnerships with InTime Tech out of Boise, Idaho, and we are a software services firm and we do application development and application modernization both in the public sector and the private sector.

Kevin Minor: 0:59

Mark, I want to talk a little bit about relationships and relationship building. That's a big part of this conference. How do you introduce yourself to a chief procurement officer and how do you maintain, how do you build and maintain a relationship with government procurement professionals?

Mark Mayer: 1:17

You know, I spent 23 years with the state of Idaho and so I have a great perspective on both the public sector side and the private sector side, and it really does come down to relationships. When I was on the public sector side, the vendors that came and helped educate me or bring value without actually doing a strong sales pitch really resonated with me, because I felt like they were interested in helping solve my problems, not just sell a product. And so I take that same approach when we're talking to procurement officials what can I bring of value? How can I help educate? And it's not just all about what I want and need, but how can I serve and help them be successful in their roles also.

Kevin Minor: 2:09

So what I'm hearing is a very real, sincere approach.

Mark Mayer: 2:14

Absolutely yeah. We look for a win-win situation where it's a good partnership and people have successful outcomes both for us and for the government agencies.

Kevin Minor: 2:26

Can you expand a little bit on your unique perspective of being both with the state and then being on the private side at a conference like this?

Mark Mayer: 2:38

You know it's interesting because I think a lot of the challenges both on the government side and the vendor side are very similar. You have to have a contract in place to be able to do business and you have to have an awareness of what available solutions are out there in the marketplace. And from the government perspective it's really hard sometimes to really know what the solutions are that are out there, because you're just so busy trying to keep the lights on and just keep things running. And so the vendor community in my mind really can play a great role in just helping with education and bringing solutions to the table that people in government and the procurement folks may not have time to really go out and research and understand at a deeper level.

Kevin Minor: 3:28

Interesting. That's a really great perspective. I appreciate you sharing that. I want to switch gears just a little bit. What's your experience with working with government attorneys? Have you had success with that in the past? I see you smiling over there when I asked that question.

Mark Mayer: 3:44

Let's see. You know I haven't had that much experience with government attorneys I've. We had some procurement issues at an agency I was with at one point that I wasn't involved with, but I got called in and talked to attorneys. But for the most part we really don't get into very strict legal interactions. It's usually through an agency, who then talks to their attorneys, or procurement, who then talks to their attorneys.

Kevin Minor: 4:16

Well, no, but that's an interesting perspective. You know, we get a lot of different people that have had range from absolutely no, you know, connection with attorneys to, yeah, we talk to them every single day. So it's interesting to hear kind of yours sounding maybe more like it was a little bit adversarial. But you know, I think they play an important part, right, they play an important role, especially at the state they do.

Mark Mayer: 4:41

And I think it you know we rely on them to clarify things or to make sure that within the state rules and regulations you don't step outside of those kinds of things. They do provide a viable service. I think the flip side of that is sometimes there can be more risk averse.

Kevin Minor: 5:02

Well, yeah, that's their whole shtick, right yeah.

Mark Mayer: 5:05

And so then that can affect how things move forward or not, and so that can be a challenge.

Kevin Minor: 5:15

Yeah, absolutely, and this is actually a great question for you, since you have had experience on both sides. What is the best way for public procurement officials to educate you on the procurement office? Like, the procurement process, changes updates where the position that you're in now.

Mark Mayer: 5:35

It's really challenging, especially if you're working across states, because every state has a little bit different rules, regulations, processes, so that can be challenging. I think just having ongoing conversations with the procurement folks, asking questions outside of the solicitation, just to spend the time to be able to understand the rules and regulations, what they're dealing with, what their challenges are, are really important. You know, just basic procurement. A lot of vendors don't spend the time just understanding the constraints that government procurement folks have to deal with, that the government procurement folks have to deal with and so, especially if they're new to the process, they'll stub their toe or look kind of foolish because oh, I didn't understand that we can't sell to them because we don't have a contract or whatever.

Kevin Minor: 6:30

Interesting. What's one thing that you've learned at the conference that you're taking back with you?

Mark Mayer: 6:38

We've had some great conversations and really trying to get our heads around RFPs and the need for better ways to find better ways to build out requirements for projects, because a lot of times RFPs come out they have really vague requirements and yet as vendors we're supposed to give a proposal based on that, which really all the risk then is on the vendor side, because you might bid it with a fixed bid but then as you start to build out the project, there's all these unknowns and all these assumptions that were in there but were never stated, and so that causes a lot of risk from scope and you know the requirements that you just didn't know about.

Kevin Minor: 7:30

Sure, especially with how fast everything moves and changes nowadays. Right, yeah, absolutely Like state government, not necessarily being one of those things.

Mark Mayer: 7:39

Yeah, yeah. And you know, the bigger the project, the more complexity, the more risk. And it's hard for even the the government agency side to be able to scope and cost out what they think a solution is going to be, because they don't get to the level of of detail that sometimes they probably should.

Kevin Minor: 8:00

You got any message for our people? What do you want to say to the procurement staff listening out there?

Mark Mayer: 8:06

You know, really, really appreciate all the work that they do. It's a tough. It's a tough job and most of the folks that I've talked to don't have enough resources and are really trying to do the best they can to deliver great service to their agencies and to vendors. But I would say, look for creative ways to shortcut and make more efficient some of the processes Vendors spend. I mean, it's amazing how much time they spend responding to things, trying to fill out the right forms and do all these kinds of things with a small chance that they're actually going to get the business. And so if we can make that, if there are ways to make that whole process more efficient and I've heard a couple of those, like being able to use contracts from other states there was one talked about from Michigan where they were doing proof of concept so they'd actually do demos from different vendors and then that would shortcut the whole RFP process.

Mark Mayer: 9:15

So there's some creative thoughts out there. I'm just not sure how much those are getting circulated and how much they're restricted by state law to be able to implement. Right.

Kevin Minor: 9:24

Well, mark, thank you so much for talking with us today. I really appreciate your time. All right, thank you.