

TRUTH AND HONOR

By: Grant Brekke

What happened to “honor and integrity”? Where did it go? How about “respect”? What’s going on in today’s competitive markets, that all respect for an engineer’s specification is lost? When did the written specification become as worthless as the paper it is written on?

Excuse me, but I’ve always thought that the specification was a contract, a standard of quality, a road map to how a structure was built, and how an engineer intended it to be built. Writing a specification and holding it is one thing; writing a specification and having a manufacturer’s rep try to destroy it with an unequal, unapproved product is another.

They both happen, but the trend, in my opinion, is leaning towards the “old end around”, where a product is forced upon the engineer after the bid. I call this “back dooring”. But I’ve seen specifications that meant exactly what they said, and I have seen specifications that meant nothing after the bid. So why do engineers author specifications that mean nothing at all, where anything goes, where “fair is foul, and foul is fair”?

In fairness to many engineers, I have seen great spec’s, written around great plumbing practices, authored by great designers and engineers, torn apart and scavenged by unscrupulous sales people. It seems to me that because you can get such a wide variety of specifications, some with value, some worth one cent, that the reps who do prey on the “less valued” specifications tend to devour all the specifications. Regardless of the intent and value of the specification.

Is not one specification safe from the wolves? Why? What would make a salesperson want to “back door” his product, go around the engineer, embarrass him in front of the very person who is paying for his services, his client, and risk getting into that engineer’s specification ever again?

Is it the desire that not one sale can be conceded to the product of choice by the engineer? Where is the “honor” in that? Where is the future planning in this type of selling technique? Get one order today, but concede the possibility of being written into the specification and getting orders for years to come?

This question could be asked: are the engineers and designers penalizing those Reps who pose the biggest threat to their specifications? Are the engineering firms losing control? What does the owner think when an engineer loses control of his specification?

It’s a given that some of this occurs by owner request. As I see it, the first breakdown of any specification is caused by the “back door” sales approach. Truth and Honor? Hardly!

Am I bitching, or do I have a solution? Both! My solution has two parts:

- 1) That the engineers write what they want, and get what they write.
- 2) That the manufacturers reps respect the written word of the specification and honor it.

If you don’t get in the spec today, you might tomorrow. I’ve never known an engineer to enjoy defending his specification to his client. As reps, we shouldn’t put him in this predicament.

As reps, we should put “Honor and Respect” for the engineer and his specification, way ahead of getting the sale. After all, if you live by the engineer, you die by the engineer.