RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING PROFESSIONALS

by

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What follows is a highly idiosyncratic and incomplete list of books that I recommend for contracting professionals in government and industry. I have included some obvious choices, such as the Cibinic and Nash books, and some that may seem peculiar. Some are timeless, but some have been forgotten. All are in print except as noted, but you won’t find them all at Amazon.com and may have to go directly to the publisher. These are not the only books that I would recommend, but they are ones that I recommend highly because I consider them topically essential or especially useful or interesting. I have not included any Government publications, such as the Contract Pricing Reference Guides. Nor have I included any of the hundreds of short monographs (such as Thomson-West’s BRIEFING PAPERS), articles, or periodicals that I could have listed, because there are too many of them.

Specialty books like these are very expensive, some of them more than $200, so you may want to locate them in a library. Some of them will be found only in university or college libraries.

THE CLASSICS

It has been said that Professors John Cibinic, Jr. and Ralph C. Nash, Jr. of The George Washington University Law School invented Government contracting. They didn’t, but their books are the classic legal texts about the subject and a good starting point. They are not how-to books, and they were not meant to be read through, cover to cover. They were meant to be studied, one topical section at a time.


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OTHER BOOKS ABOUT GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING


CONTRACT PRICING

The supreme subject. Here are four very useful books about the cost-based pricing world of Government contracting.

Bodenheimer, David Z., Robert Theodore Ebert, and Kent R. Morrison. *Defective Pricing in Government Contracts.* Washington, DC: Federal Publications Seminars, Inc. 2003. [This is an excellent introduction to an important and astonishingly complex topic: the Truth in Negotiations Act, as implemented by Federal Acquisition Regulation, Subpart 15.4, which requires contracting officers to obtain “cost or pricing data” from contractors under specified conditions. This is a seminar text and Fed Pubs does not sell it separately, but if you’re any kind of negotiator, you might be able to talk them into sending it to you.]


Now that the Government is buying more commercial items, it is essential that contracting personnel learn how commercial sellers set the prices of their products and services. Price-setting is a lot more complicated than some people realize. Here are six good books about product and service pricing.


Recommended Books for Contracting Professionals


**BOOKS ABOUT QUALITY ASSURANCE**

A topic second only to pricing in importance, but much neglected by contracting personnel, who cannot afford to be ignorant about it.

Grant, Eugene L. and Richard S. Leavenworth. *Statistical Quality Control, 7th Ed.* Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1996. [If you use the terms acceptable quality level (AQL) and random sampling in a contract, make sure that you know what they mean and that you are using them properly.]


**BOOKS ABOUT LAW**

No contracting professional should try to be his or her own lawyer, but every contracting professional should understand how American law works, especially administrative and contract law.


Llewellyn, Karl N. *The Case Law System in America.* Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1989. (out of print) [Federal Acquisition Regulation §§ 1.102(d) and 1.102-4(e) tell acquisition personnel to be aware of “case law.” What is “case law”? Karl Llewellyn went to Leipzig in 1928 to explain that to German law students. This little book is an expanded version of his lectures.]

———. *The Common Law Tradition: Deciding Appeals.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960. (out of print) [Although dated, it is nevertheless a good discussion of the workings of the American appellate courts, such as the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, which hears Government contract appeals.]
Recommended Books for Contracting Professionals


**BOOKS ABOUT BUSINESS HISTORY, PRACTICE, AND THEORY**


Clifton, Rita, John Simmons, et al. *Brands and Branding.* New York: Bloomberg Press (2004). [Okay, we’re not supposed to specify brand names. But what is a brand, and what is its function? We should know more about this all-important business practice.]

Leenders, Michiel, P. Fraser Johnson, Anna Flynn, and Harold E. Fearon. *Purchasing and Supply Management.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005. [Leenders and Fearon have authored several books about commercial purchasing and supply operations. This is their latest.]


**BOOKS ABOUT THINKING, DECIDING, AND NEGOTIATING**

Contracting officers must reason well, make sound judgments and decisions, and argue persuasively. Here are four books that will help you learn how to do those things well, but they require study and some hard thinking. *The journey to enlightenment is not easy, Grasshopper.*


**BOOKS ABOUT WRITING**

There is no getting around it, contracting personnel must write — analyses, clauses, determinations, decisions, and instructions — and they should be able to write well, which means clearly, succinctly, and persuasively. But good writing is hard to find in contract files. These books can help you to improve your writing. (You will find that improving your writing improves your thinking.)
Recommended Books for Contracting Professionals


Orwell, George. *ESSAYS.* New York: Everyman’s Library, 2002. ["[The English language] becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.” The best way to learn how to write good prose is to read and imitate good prose. Read the essays once for pleasure, read them again to study Orwell’s style, then imitate him. If you don’t read anything else, read “Politics and the English Language.”]


GENERAL REFERENCE WORKS

Berring, Robert C. and Elizabeth A. Edinger, *FINDING THE LAW, 11TH ED.* St. Paul, MN: West Group, 1999. [Not just about finding the law, but also about how the law is organized.]


Garner, Bryan A. *A DICTIONARY OF MODERN LEGAL USAGE, 2ND ED.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. [Very handy and interesting. Read the entry about words of authority for a fascinating discussion of shall, will, may, and must.]


BOOKS OF CURRENT INTEREST

If you sometimes think that Government acquisition policy is driven by fad and fashion, you’re right. Think: incentives, teams, TQM, performance-based acquisition, and earned value management, to name just a few. Here are some books to give to your local policymaker.


Recommended Books for Contracting Professionals

**A MISCELLANY**

Here are some books readings that bear on contracting and that you might enjoy.


Lambright, W. Henry. *Powering Apollo: James E. Webb of NASA*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. [The late James E. Webb created the NASA that took us to the moon and back. He was one of the greatest American public administrators of the 20th Century. Every civil servant should study his achievement. Where is he, now that our need for him is greatest?]


Radin, Beryl A. *Challenging the Performance Movement: Accountability, Complexity, and Democratic Values*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006. [For those of you who question the emphasis on measurable performance standards.]

Sapolsky, Harvey M. *The Polaris System Development: Bureaucratic and Programmatic Success in Government*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972. (out of print) [One of the best books ever written about the politics of large programs. The Polaris program invented PERT and other project management devices. It was completed on time and within budget and all technical goals were met. How did they do it? Was it PERT? If you work in a program environment, you must read this.]


Tufte, Edward R. *The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within, 2nd Ed*. Cheshire, CN: Graphics Press LLC, 2006. [“PowerPoint allows speakers to pretend that they are giving a real talk, and audiences to pretend that they are listening.”]


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*VERNON J. EDWARDS* teaches Government contracting and is the author of books and many articles about contracting. He is a regular contributor to *The Nash & Cibinic Report*, published by Thomson/West, and the leader of The FAR Bootcamp (www.thefarbootcamp.com). You can write to him at vernedwards@thefarbootcamp.com.