



Gerald (Jerry) Ford is a well-known in Canada as a supply chain professional and currently works as the Chief Visionary Officer of Cambridge Solutions Inc., which he founded in 1993.

Making a difference

in public and private procurement

by Stephen Bauld

JERRY STARTED OFF HIS CAREER as a shipper/receiver for a small manufacturing company after graduating from the University of Western Ontario with a degree in History. A thirst for knowledge and a willingness to help the procurement professionals he worked with enabled him to quickly start to advance. Working as a buyer with the University of Waterloo and then as the Director of Purchasing and Inventory for the City of Cambridge allowed Jerry the opportunity to experience the wonderful world of public procurement. He went on to work for IBM Canada and was on the National Board of Directors for the Purchasing Management Association of Canada (PMAC).

Always outgoing, Jerry was quick to establish a huge number of contacts that have always been there to help him whenever

required. It didn't hurt that Jerry was a sought after instructor with Conestoga College where he taught for 16 years. He was recognized as a team leader for the Ontario Institute of PMAC where he specialized in delivering seminars on contracts, outsourcing and technology.

His contacts have continued to grow as he became involved in several other organizations including Ontario Institute of PMAC (president), Grand Valley HR (board member) and APICS Grand Valley (marketing director) as well as many other established procurement fields of expertise, both in the public and private sectors.

In his own company, Cambridge Solutions, Jerry has never tried to restrict what he and his company work on. In fact every

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job description has a line that states “other duties as assigned.” If you were to get to know Jerry and his staff well, you would understand he has always strived to be the expert “other” in “other duties.” Jerry, with help from his friends and a wide range of skills and tools, has been involved in ERP implementations, contract formation and negotiations and HR special projects. In each case technology had a strong role to play.

After working for over 60 different companies in both the public and private sector, Jerry is creating a new vision and organization. This entity is where resources and knowledge are shared, youth are given an opportunity to work, recently retired professionals can continue to practice their craft and individuals who are between assignments get some assistance in their job search. Jerry is truly leading by example and showing great leadership and innovation in helping people, through the concept of this unique venture.

Jerry has been working over the last year to create a new business model that combines the exuberance of youth with a talent pool of senior and executive experience that have now been defined as the “csolutions group”. Blending talented individuals from several fields and industries, this group can now offer a full service organization that best suits the needs of the ever growing procurement field.

New partnering initiatives are being developed on a weekly basis. Jerry started his quest for something meaningful by solidifying his working relationship with the Laurier Group who specializes in Infor ERP systems. He then continued to expand by signing an agreement in February to become the Canadian value-added reseller for a software solution from epaCUBE that allows companies to maximize their margins.

What followed were letters of understanding with leading companies in their field including Purchasing Consultants International (Supply Chain) and Parker Management (Education). Jerry uses social media including LinkedIn to stay in touch with the entire csolutions group and to help everyone stay connected.

This networking and partnership building is now starting to pay huge dividends and there are over 80 people and companies involved with this new “group” who share the same vision. Contracts and requests for proposals are being developed and work groups are being assigned.

So what comes next for Jerry’s continued quest to add value to the supply chain profession and the companies they work for, as well as the consulting organizations he has joint ventures with?

Jerry is working with the APICS Grand Valley Chapter, the Ontario Public Buyers Association, Conestoga College, Junior Achievement, the Canadian Supply Chain Sector Council and other groups in order to help attract talent to the profession. Forging new relationships and working to find new synergies, Jerry is driven to help make a difference, on a constant basis, with the people he works with.

Jerry noted the looming demographic crisis and the urgent need for action. Current statistics indicate that approximately 50 percent of the supply chain professionals in the public sector will have the option to retire in less than five years. At the recent APICS Grand Valley Chapter’s Regional conference Tom Kingston the assistant general manager at Toyota Motor Manufacturing commented to the group that he was challenged to hire individuals for his department (Supply Chain). He indicated that this trend would continue to get worse over the next five years as the retirements at Toyota continue to grow and the shortage of qualified individuals to replace retirees also grows. He mentioned that this latest recession has only slowed down the retirement process. This mass exodus of knowledge and experience needs to be acknowledged and responded to. Jerry and his group decided to take action.

Over time Jerry hopes to continue to solidify the relationships that he has built and to continue to help when and where required. New solutions by his group are being developed which address market needs. Some, like a new online Visual Performance Management system, will be offered at no charge to organizations within the broader public sector who continue to face ever increasing workloads and public scrutiny. Other resources are being finalized which will help organizations increase their efficiencies and streamline their processes. Jerry has always been able to abide by his motto of “work and have fun” and he looks forward to making this a reality for a lot of other people.

I have worked, and personally enjoyed knowing Jerry for many years, and find him to be a hardworking and honest man that truly wants to see the purchasing profession constantly and consistently improve, and wish him all the success on his future endeavors. For more information on Jerry see his website www.csolutions.org. 

Stephen Bauld spent many years as purchasing manager at the City of Hamilton, served as the vice president of the Ontario General Contractors Association, is the publisher of Summit magazine and the president of Purchasing Consultants International, Inc.