

ABSTRACT FOR THE STC REGION 5 CONFERENCE
Austin, TX – October 2003

“Contractor Employment—A Comparison of Government/Private Sector and Cost-Plus/Fixed-Cost Environments, and What It Means To the Employee”

Reaching the first milestone into the adult working world—attaining the college degree—is a stimulating adventure. After graduation, my first job was as a technical writer with Martin Marietta, which was not only a major player in the technology field but also held a prime contract for the Department of Defense. But as is inherent with contract work, I was looking for another job only 17 months later when Martin lost the contract to a competitor during a rebid.

Fortunately, another major corporation was in the neighborhood. Boeing held the esteemed position of Management and Operating contractor for a Department of Energy contract. This job lasted over 6 years before Boeing gave it up to another bidder. Consequently, I’ve worked primarily for companies that contracted in some manner, from the American Heart Association (which contracted the management of five peer-reviewed scientific publications) to other DoD military contractors.

In my 15 years working as a “permanent” contract employee, I’ve come to notice a trend in two different areas: the difference between Government contractors and private sector companies, and even differences in the way business is conducted today as opposed to nearly 2 decades ago—that is, cost plus versus fixed cost contracts. At other conferences, I’ve noticed a lack of information as well as understanding on what to expect in such a dynamic environment where “at-will employment” is commonplace, i.e., an employee (managers, supervisors, and staff) is hired at-will and that employment can be terminated at the will of either party—a practice recognized in all states except Montana. In this session, I’ll convey some of my observations and realizations for those wishing to enter the field of corporate (civilian) Federal Government contractor employment.

Keep in mind that the contracting to which this session refers is not from third party employers (affectionately known as headhunters) nor from employment as a temporary or even part-time independent contractor. The focus is on “full-time, permanent employment” with a contract company.

Some of the topics to be addressed are as follows:

- Leave Time
- Salary
- Bonuses
- Employment Security
- Contract/Contractor Changeover
- Promotion Potential
- Work Environment
- Type of Equipment
- Type of Work
- Overtime Requirements
- Chain of Command
- Bureaucracy vs. Politics
- Budget Control
- Professional Development
- Tuition Reimbursement