All players in development game need the same tool box, play book

I was recently working with a company looking to expand into Southwest Wisconsin. They were from — drum roll, please — Illinois. Thank you, thank you very much, really, no, sit down, you’re too kind.

I grabbed my economic development tool box and began my pitch. I started with my big power saw, suggesting that we could use tax incremental financing, or TIF, as we in the biz like to call it.

The community would help buy the land and invest in the infrastructure required for the project. The community would then repay this investment over the next several years using the new property taxes the company would be paying based on increased property value. I had the ability to guarantee this approach. I mentioned that with the new tax rates the company would be paying based on increased property value.

I immediately realized two things: One, Wisconsin has some work to do on both their game plan and their tool box. Second, I’m not sure it is a good idea to mix tool metaphors with sports analogies.

Wisconsin is re-creating its Commerce Department and I think this may be a good thing. I know the new coach, Paul Jadin, and I’m sure he understands both business and government needs and challenges.

Wisconsin is moving the ball. Rainey gives us a great start, but we still need to create the specific plays that will move the ball. Wisconsin is re-creating its Commerce Department and I think this may be a good thing. I know the new coach, Paul Jadin, and I’m sure he understands both business and government needs and challenges.

Ken Harwood is executive director of Lafayette Development Corp. and edits and publishes WisconsinDevelopment.com.

Contact: ken@wisconsinddevelopment.com
Web site: www.kenharwood.com

We should know the rules and exactly how much we can safely offer based on a company that if they bring jobs to Wisconsin, we can offer some very specific assistance.

We need help now, and it needs to be a no-strings-attached, give-back program. We need to be able to assure a new company that if they bring jobs to Wisconsin, we can offer some very specific assistance.

We need to talk about the drill, the ability to reduce income tax burdens based on new jobs in the state, but I couldn’t pull the trigger. I needed to call my drill guy. No gain.

I looked for a sander to smooth things over. The company needed road improvements, so I suggested a Department of Transportation grant was in order to upgrade access to the plant. How much? Not sure. I’ll have to get back to you on that. Third and nine.

They needed some specially skilled employees. I had a hammer — I was sure we could offer some training assistance. The technical colleges and UW schools in the area are outstanding. How soon? We would need lead time for a grant and program design. I’m not sure. Fourth down.

I found some TNT in the back of my tool box and decided to try a trick play. I mentioned that with the new tax rates approved by the Illinois Legislature, our corporate tax rate was now only slightly higher than the rate they would soon be paying. It worked on the practice field. Turnover.

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I recently found a great document assembled by Carl Rainey at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP). “Got Moo-La?” lists hundreds of resources available to Wisconsin businesses and demonstrates the complexity of the game and the confusion economic development professionals have to deal with every day. A link to his document and other resources is available at www.8WisconsinDevelopment.com/Toolbox.

What if we had a set of guidelines that set aside a specific amount of money for new companies based on new long-term jobs. This money could be used by a company for training, tooling or other improvements. The same rules could apply to existing companies that, instead of layoffs, agree to increase or maintain employment levels in exchange for investments. Like TIF, an agreement could be signed between the company and state to guarantee that the jobs remained in the state while the incentives were in play. We would have a detailed play book that could easily be read by all the teammates, full of plays that conformed to a set of rules and could be called on the field.

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