

Facilitator — October/November 2014



CRFP Spotlight

Marlon Travis

What other restaurant companies have you worked for prior to your current position?

All of my restaurant experience prior to my current facilities position has been on the vendor side of the business as a restaurant equipment repair contractor. I started off in the air conditioning business as a HVAC service contractor and began to realize things were a bit seasonal at times, especially during the economic downturn in 2008, and especially in Las Vegas. I got into the commercial and industrial refrigeration market and began to travel the country looking for greater challenges.

One day, I stepped inside of a restaurant to do a quick service call; I didn't get out of there until the place closed. My mechanical, electrical and plumbing skills proved invaluable to the restaurant operator; as soon as I got a piece of equipment back in operation, he would give me another call to work on. That was the end of seasonal workloads.

While working inside of restaurants, I began to notice common problems that could have been avoided if the employees were well informed of the equipment manufacturer's specifications. As a vendor, my advice fell on deaf ears because I was back resolving the same issue. Experiencing these inefficiencies intrigued my passion for the interdisciplinary of business, technology and people. All of that being the core of facilities management, it was a natural fit.

After spending so much time in restaurants, do you cook? If so, what is your best dish?

My mother taught me how to cook for myself and my younger sister. I hated it and looked at it as punishment during those days. In retrospect, I'm glad she did because it really came in handy later in life. I love to cook at home for friends and family. I cook out of love. I'm by no means a chef. I cook instinctively. In other words, I don't know what the heck I'm doing, but sometimes it turns out really good. One of the most important things about food to me besides taste is presentation. It has to look good. I love flavorful, spicy meats and freshly grilled vegetables.

What was your first car?

When I was 17 years old, my first car was a white 1972 Cadillac Coupe De Ville with burgundy interior. Don't judge me! I saved \$1,500 from flipping burgers and washing dishes over the summer. I knew I needed transportation and a new career, so I spent it all on a big old Cadillac and went to HVAC and refrigeration school. When I think about it today, it was a really big car but it was dependable transportation and it served its purpose. But not without incident; it caught on fire one year and was stolen another year, but it got me through school and ran until the day I sold it. The only problem was keeping gas in the tank.

What is your all-time favorite movie?

I like Denzel Washington movies. The guy can be your hero or your worst nightmare.

I also like goofy comedies, such as "The Hangover" and "There's Something About Mary," or the suspense of "The Sixth Sense." All of that was to avoid telling you "Purple Rain" is my all-time favorite movie from childhood. My sister and cousins really annoyed our parents

repeating every part of the movie out loud—especially the soundtrack. The timing with the album and the movie made it a good watch.

What is the most challenging situation you've ever faced in a facility or on the job? How did you handle it?

The majority of my career has always been in nice, sunny climates, so natural disasters have not been an issue. But I have experienced disasters that weren't so natural. Anything can happen in a facility. I received a call saying that an A/C unit I installed fell into the pool. But that was a prank my colleagues played on me. A really good one, I might add.

Most days are challenging. In facilities, things find a way to stop working, sometimes for no apparent reason. I've had to overcome a fried chicken restaurant with every pressure fryer in the building not working, and a building with a temperature of higher than 100 degrees in the dining room with all A/C units, exhaust and makeup air running.

But I think my biggest challenge was my first week on the job. We did a remodel on our main restaurant, which opens 24 hours except a few hours for kitchen cleaning. I came right in the middle of a transitional period because employees, including the supervisor, either quit or transferred to a different department, leaving me the new guy in charge who didn't know the building very well. We were beginning to fall behind schedule, and to make matters worse, a main gas line exploded outside from underground. It sounded like we were under attack. Evacuating hundreds of people and getting everything back in order was challenging, but nevertheless, it was done.

If you weren't a restaurant facility professional, what you would be?

My first career interest in high school was telecommunications. Seeing the advancement of wireless communications and computer programming, that would have been an excellent choice. But from the first day I was trained in HVAC and refrigeration, it has always been a part of my career. I would definitely be in the HVAC industry specializing in building automation or sustainability.

What was your very first job?

Never really thought about it until now, but my first job was in a restaurant. I was a cashier at Carl's Jr. during the summer of my sophomore year in high school. Funny thing is during that time I had no intentions on being a part of this industry. In fact, I had no idea the restaurant industry was so big. I didn't think of the organizational structure and facilities it takes to build hundreds of restaurants, operate and maintain them.

What is the best advice you ever received?

"Life is lived forward, but sometimes learned backwards." As humans, we all make mistakes that set us back. The most important thing is learning from our errors and allowing them to set opportunities to progressively move forward. My professional motto is, "Great facilities managers are resourceful professionals who meet situations effectively and imaginatively."

To what would you attribute your success in achieving your CRFP?

Let me start by saying the CRFP exam is extremely comprehensive yet practical if you've been around a restaurant when things stop working. I reached into my tool box of experiences and training in building systems and envelope, kitchen equipment, and technical instincts, as well as my other certifications and degrees earned in business, construction management and sustainability. The online prep course is a good tool to test your knowledge and can quickly bring you up to speed.

Most importantly, the CRFP helped me realize areas of improvement, and that's OK because the things we don't know are just as important. Now I'm studying other disciplines such as project management and risk management. As a facilities professional, I think you've arrived when you can share what you know and find out what you don't know.

Would you recommend attaining a CRFP to other colleagues? Why?

Yes. It prepares you for success and serves as a symbol of your contribution to the industry. When you earn the CRFP designation, it reassures you of your own capabilities and earns you a seat among the best restaurant facilities professionals in the business with a wealth of knowledge. It has worked wonders for me by helping me assess my strengths and weaknesses.

My experience obtaining my CRFP has taught me that you have to be resourceful and well-rounded in order to handle the daily challenges of maintaining restaurant facilities. Maybe you don't change refrigeration compressors, but you better know what they are and when a diagnostic makes practical sense. One day your role may be project manager on a remodel, and the next you may have to make a risk management assessment because a hurricane left a building in shambles. Technical and analytical decisions that affect business, public safety and livelihood are imminent in the life of a facilities professional. When that day comes to make those decisions, there's no time for asking questions so it would serve you best to prepare early and be ready. The CRFP online prep course and exam with its 14 competencies does a wonderful job in doing that.

What has been the most significant change in the restaurant industry, and how has it affected your job?

The most significant change is definitely technology, especially cloud storage and wireless devices. A vendor can send electronic invoices in real time, which automatically updates schedules and accounting systems for all parties. Any office task can be done remotely. Files such as equipment data, organizational procedures and office docs can be retrieved from cloud storage. These changes have improved our industry tremendously by saving time and space, and also reducing our carbon footprint by eliminating paper and emissions. These changes are especially beneficial for road warriors.

The internet has changed everything as well. Now restaurants have web pages and social media pages, giving guests an intuitive customer experience. But I'm still waiting on completely digital menus so I can see pictures of new items. I love tasting new dishes but seeing first makes a world of difference.

What do you do for fun in your spare time?

I am a fan of NFL football and championship title boxing. I enjoy traveling to resort destinations where I can relax and enjoy myself without the hassle of running around asking Google Maps for directions. Above all, I enjoy spending time with my family.

What's the one thing most people would be surprised to learn about you?

RFMA 2014 in Dallas was my first conference. I didn't know anyone in the organization, but I knew I wanted to align myself with the best facilities professionals in the industry. So instead of taking a cruise, I used my vacation time to attend the conference and funded my own stay. I had no colleagues or friends in attendance. But I met lots of intelligent professionals from all over the country who were more than willing to share their knowledge and encouragement. I can attest that RFMA is extremely supportive of all facilities professionals, providing an invaluable resource.