

Facilitator — August/September 2015



From the Inside Out

Jeff Dover

Always Adapt

Being flexible to change is one key to success in a dynamic industry

During the years I spent in restaurant facility management, the main constant I noticed was change. The company you work for and the restaurant industry is constantly changing. You have to adjust to new menu items, POS and accounting systems, leadership roles, store designs, performance reviews, etc. It never ends, which is both exciting and a challenge.

In the past, most facility professionals were tasked with protecting company assets through proper preventive maintenance contracts, repair and maintenance and capital projects. Today's facility professionals also must have knowledge in numerous additional areas. To survive in today's rapidly changing restaurant environment, you must embrace change and make yourself a valuable asset to your organization. In a lot of cases, this means elevating your position and roles within your company.

Today's facility professionals need to be involved and lead in many different areas. We are all aware that in the new restaurant model a majority of stores are run by a franchise organization. Large chains are selling off big chunks of company stores to franchisees. This means big facility departments may not be in high demand in the future, but stores have to be protected and maintained no matter who owns them. This is another reason why it is very important to grow professionally in your field and become an important asset for whomever you work for.

Since every company is different, this article will cover basic initiatives in which the facility manager or director should be actively involved.

Company P&Ls

Do you currently receive your organization's profit and loss statements (P&Ls)? If not, I highly recommend you request and review these to get baseline data for current repair and maintenance and utility costs, along with costs in your department and overall sales, labor and food charges. It's important to follow costs versus budget to anticipate future potential changes in the spending of the accounts you have control over.

Fiscal responsibility is a must in today's environment. Besides your personal budget, the most important line item is probably repairs and maintenance. This account should have sub-accounts for the various charges that hit it. If sub-accounts are not included, work with your supervisor and accounting personnel in adding such items as plumbing, HVAC/R, cooking equipment, janitorial, preventive maintenance, electrical/signage, floors, trash/waste, fire suppression, etc. These need to be broken out so costs can be isolated and tracked accordingly. In this way, you can concentrate on the high-priority accounts that are usually the largest spend.

In this manner, you can react to any budget discrepancies quickly and decisively before you receive the inevitable message from your supervisor or senior leader inquiring why a certain account is tracking over budget. It would also be good to have preventive maintenance broken out separately, as these costs should be fairly consistent throughout the year and afford you the opportunity for possible savings through good contract management such as volume buying and analyzing services.

Sustainability

Sustainability is everyone's responsibility, and our industry is beginning to fully embrace it. Sustainability covers everything from energy/ waste management to building design and materials, and today it is an important area for all facility professionals to be involved in. Most restaurant companies are actively engaged, but there are always additional areas of improvement.

If your company is just entering the push toward sustainability, take the lead. There are several easy opportunities to save money and/or natural resources. Initially, you need to establish benchmarking data. What does your company spend on utilities and trash? Long-term planning is next in establishing a goal—for example, you might aim to reduce energy and trash by 20 percent—and then short-term actions are implemented to get you there.

The easiest area for savings is in energy management. Programmable thermostats and all-LED lighting will provide an ROI of less than one year. Utilize low-flow aerators in all faucets. Install low-flow toilets and urinals. Discuss these plans with your supervisor and finance department. Get engaged.

The next area with the greatest impact is in the waste/recycling/ composting areas. Most facility professionals deal with the trash removal contracts, but there are so many other avenues to pursue. Talk with your food purchasing department about requesting that your food product suppliers move to recyclable packaging materials. Use paper products from recycled materials, and use multipurpose cleaners rather than job-specific ones. These are just a few examples to investigate.

Education

The facility professional's role continues to evolve, with everincreasing responsibilities in many different areas. Continuing education in these new areas will be beneficial in elevating your status within your organization.

RFMA provides great educational information for its members. We offer a free online Certified Restaurant Facility Professional (CRFP) prep course with 14 lessons that cover all areas of facility maintenance, from kitchen equipment to energy management. This is a wonderful tool to expand your facility knowledge. I highly recommend going through these modules and taking the CRFP exam to become certified. This is another example of elevating your status within your company.

Reach out to your vendors for education in their areas. After all, they are experts in their field. Other areas for education can be found online and at the RFMA annual conference. Our next conference, RFMA 2016 in Nashville, will even include a leadership track within the educational sessions that will help you to grow as a leader. While you are at RFMA 2016, network and communicate with your industry peers; they are facing the same challenges as you.

In summary, the restaurant industry is a very competitive market. Every management position must be continually justified for the expenses incurred by the organization. All facility professionals need to elevate their expertise to contribute in many new areas.

Facilities continues to play a key role in protecting expensive company assets. Their actions can contribute directly to an organization's bottom line. Take the lead. Get engaged. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone to address important issues. Your future depends on it.

I'm always looking for feedback. Feel free to contact me at jeff@rfmaonline.com or call at (972) 805-0905, x3.

Dover and out!

Jeff Dover's facilities career started in 1985. He has been employed by several major chains (Ponderosa, Steak & Ale, Bennigan's, TGI Friday's, Fuddrucker's and recently Five Guys Burgers and Fries). His technical education enabled him to take the lead as Energy Manager, Facilities Manager and Director of Facilities at the various brands.