

Facilitator — October/November 2015



Career Development

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Invaluable Experience

RFMA restaurant directors serve up wisdom for emerging professionals

The RFMA Emerging Professionals Group was formed to encourage members to network, learn and discuss industry best practices and increase the confidence and effectiveness of its members within the organization and workplace.

As the Emerging Professionals Group Leader, I interviewed several directors about their successes and asked them to share their wisdom and experiences in facilities management, including what they wished they knew on their first day on the job. I hope this information will help you grow in facilities management and boost your career to the next level. Below are the servant leaders who dedicated their time and knowledge to help you advance.

Robert McNeill, Director of Facilities at The Starboard Group

McNeill began his restaurant facilities journey in 2010 as a Facilities Manager for Burger King, where he stayed for two years. He moved to The Starboard Group in 2012 and has been the Director of Facilities there since. McNeill has the impressively complex task of personally overseeing 20 restaurant remodels each year for the next five years. His ever-growing team currently consists of one facilities manager and 20 maintenance technicians.

Joshua Miller, Director of Construction and Facilities at ModMarket

Miller is from ModMarket, a startup company that just opened its 13th store. He originally began his career at LeDuff and Einstein Bagels and served on the vendor side of the business for five years prior to serving on the owner side for the last 12 years. His experience in construction has equipped him to run a facilities department because he has a better understanding of how a building is constructed, and it helps him identify the root of problems. I was thankful to have his many unique perspectives in our lineup.

Barbara Williamson, Director of Facilities at Paradigm Investment Group

Williamson has an impressive 30 years of construction and two years of facilities management experience under her belt. She is currently the only employee in facilities for Paradigm, so she educates her operations team through company conferences and roundtables to help maintain their 105 restaurants. That's a tall order with remodels occurring every seven years.

Wayne Brayton, Director of Facilities at Sonic Drive-In

Brayton is our longest-serving veteran, having been in the restaurant industry for the last 27 years. He also started on the vendor side in equipment sales for 10 years and then became the Director of Construction for Hardee's and Carl's Jr. He has been with Sonic as the Director of Facilities for the last nine years with his team of three and also serves on Sonic's Franchise Advisory Council.

Now that you know where the wisdom is coming from, I want to highlight key commonalities that all of our directors touched on during our conversations. The facilities industry is constantly changing, making it more difficult and more competitive for facility managers to advance. Remembering these key points will help you succeed in your career.

First, when asked what a typical day in the life was like, every response began with a chuckle. "Typical? No two days are ever alike!" was a common answer. Brayton told us that the only constant was that each day is crazy—late nights, early mornings, cars running into buildings and putting out (literal) fires. McNeill reiterated the importance of expecting the worst but keeping calm and getting all of the facts before jumping to a solution.

More commonalities popped up when we asked which skills most contributed to their success. Unwaveringly, the recipe for success had five key ingredients: good communication, trustworthiness, job ownership, organization and positivity. A lot gets thrown at the facilities support team, and generally the requests come with a big side of stress.

Let's take these one by one:

Communication

When a crisis arises, it's important to calmly and promptly respond, gather all of the necessary information and ensure the stakeholders that they're being heard. Rather than reacting too quickly, it is best to verify the facts so you can respond appropriately. Communicate with your team and arm them with the necessary tools to do what they can on their end, rather than make them completely dependent on you.

To provide her team with necessary skills and knowledge of facility management, Williamson holds regular team meetings in which they review case studies and what the appropriate response would be so that everyone will know what to do next time something similar happens. To help his team feel educated and empowered, Miller is currently streamlining the equipment in his restaurants and creating a troubleshooting manual. Learn from the best; being proactive is key! Be sure to also have strong relationships and communication channels established with your vendors so they can support your team in the event a specialist is needed to solve a problem.

Trustworthiness and Ownership

Miller put it perfectly when he said, "Surround yourself with great people. If the right people are working with you and for you, everything will be easier." Find team members and vendors who will stay dedicated until the right solution is in place.

Whether you're an impressive "one-man show" like Miller and Williamson or have a team of facility managers to help out like Brayton and McNeill, create an environment where all parties involved— facilities, operations and vendors—feel energetic about solving the problem right the first time. Encourage your vendors and your team to take ownership of the work they are completing. Holding yourself accountable to stay on top of industry trends and new technology is key to finding the best solutions for your facilities every time. Brayton was very passionate about the value his RFMA membership has provided through continuing education and networking opportunities that lead to strong vendor relationships.

Organization

In the hectic world of facilities, organization is king. It's important to use whatever method works best for you to keep track of your outstanding tasks so you can prioritize and nothing gets overlooked. Miller mentioned that his favorite tool for organization is ServiceChannel, while McNeill prefers Corrigo. Williamson prefers a method that's more traditional: just a checklist and pen. There is something undeniably satisfying about checking off completed tasks!

Using these systems helps them track the statuses and details of outstanding jobs and push them all the way through to completion without losing anything through the cracks. Facilities management is a very detailed industry, and you won't be successful unless you find a system that helps you prioritize and successfully manage the tasks at hand.

Positivity

Now that we've covered the skills and characteristics that are important to your success as a facilities manager, we should touch on what could be detrimental to one's facilities career. The No. 1 answer: negativity. Stay positive, people! Your position is all about problem-solving, and you have to be able to help others effectively to be successful.

Williamson says, "Don't take things too personally because people start pointing fingers when things don't go according to plan." Brayton reiterated that the facilities industry is constantly changing, and a positive attitude is an important factor to embracing and thriving within that change. There's no denying that being in facilities can be tough, and it takes a special breed to do what you do. Be proud of that and keep your chin up, no matter what sauce hits the fan! Don't stress about the things that you cannot control. Try to wake up each morning with a fresh, positive outlook.

I hope you were able to absorb these pearls of wisdom to help you move forward in your career as a facilities professional. The Emerging Professionals Group is certainly taking them to heart and will continue doing our best to provide insight to the RFMA organization to help us all develop into the best professionals we can be. To receive more helpful information, please join the Emerging Professionals Group on InSite.

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