

# Sharpen Your Tools

Jim Knight

## FACILITY MANAGERS WHO ROCK

How to move from roadie to rock star

In my experience, a restaurant facility manager is a lot like a band roadie. They have to be a jack of all trades, and they need to have a network of experts on everything that's critical to keeping it all up and running. And even in the face of disaster, all the vendor relationships must be strong enough to perform work under pressure to quickly restore the restaurant to working order and to minimize revenue loss.

Although they work behind the scenes, in reality, facility managers are rock stars. But they tend to be underappreciated until something goes wrong or someone needs them.

In addition to being a restaurant "MacGyver" on store visits and spotting areas where a carpenter, electrician, plumber, locksmith, landscaper or ADA-compliant champion is needed, a facility manager has to be ready at a moment's notice, move with a sense of urgency and spend little to no money—all while being positive and patient. Wow. It truly is a thankless position in many ways. For some, it's not easy showing up to work with your best self, knowing that nobody really cares until they need you to fix a problem. Then, you're the superhero. That's when the love flows and vows are renewed.

Do we have to wait until things break before we see the hero spring into action? No. Is it possible to change the perception of a reactive fixer to a proactive, irreplaceable part of the leadership team? Absolutely, yes!

Here are ways facility managers can extend their impact and influence on the business, while staying effective, positive and sane:

### Create a Culture of Preventive Maintenance

Explain the why: The time-sensitive facility manager is going to look for the quickest way to solve an issue and move on to the next item. But taking the time to explain the "why" behind the "what" to

their customers—the GMs, operations team and vendors—before something goes sideways, is often the best use of their time. Once everyone on the team understands the bigger facility picture and fully appreciates how they can affect the business proactively, true culture change can occur. As I mention in my book, “Culture That Rocks,” nobody wants to be slinging a blade and fighting the good fight on their own; it’s much easier to prevent issues and achieve great financial results when surrounded by an army of knowledgeable giants.

Quarterly Equipment Maintenance: Habits are created by doing things consistently over and over. Like the ongoing, necessary maintenance required on a car, restaurant equipment needs the same attention. By implementing a detailed checklist process on all equipment every three months, many of the issues that tend to arise in reactive businesses seemingly never rear their ugly heads. Quarterly maintenance = serenity for all.

### Get Everyone Singing Off the Same Sheet of Music

Invite yourself to the party: Unless you’re pulled away for an emergency (and not every incident is business-critical), attend the regular manager/leadership meetings. Being a visible and vocal presence allows you to help the team understand preventive needs and may also nip many future issues in the bud. This includes getting involved in the annual budget and planning process, so that big projects and available funds can be properly allocated, rather than springing up as expensive emergencies later in the year.

Establish a project calendar: Nobody on the team wants to do any preventive projects. Often the excuse is time or financial constraint or that they see the activities as low priority. But when something breaks, everyone complains. Ben Franklin said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This is the facility managers’ rally cry. And it’s so true. Mapping out equipment maintenance checks and weekly projects on a calendar helps keep the importance of the proactive needs front and center for everyone.

### Learn to Teach

Conduct preventive workshops: How many times does a facility manager need to be called to fix a kitchen flood, only to discover someone had removed the drain screen in the dishroom again to make the water recede faster, gobbling up forks, napkins and ketchup packets and causing a clot? How long will employees and managers put off dusting the ice machine condensers, causing the equipment to freeze up or develop mold buildup in the machine for guests to consume? Doing a

little up-front training and ongoing education can help make all of the leaders and staff aware of their actions.

Speaker, consultant and author Kathleen Wood shares that one of the many key tenets that she learned during her early management career with McDonald's is that you can effectively and drastically manage the business' electrical expenses. Keeping in mind the energy-uneducated manager, who might arrive in the morning and turn the lights and equipment on at once, McDonalds' trains people to methodically turn on specific equipment at certain times to avoid expensive and spiking electric bills, a practice Wood still employs today in managing costs in her family-run business.

Hard Rock Cafe had a similar energy-consumption reduction initiative with their visual "Power Up/Power Down" poster displayed in their kitchens. The initiative aligned with the brand's Save the Planet motto and globally saved \$100,000 on utilities in the first six months of the program. Awareness and training works.

Create recovery collateral: One way to assist the team, especially when the facility manager is absent, is to have easy-to-read recovery materials available when equipment fails. This is not a substitute for expert help, nor is it designed to produce experts, but having visual and intuitive recovery steps stored in a binder or an intranet could be exactly what was needed at the time. This also helps extend the facility manager's long-term influence.

#### Plan to Learn

Budget for continuing education: Fight for some travel and development dollars as part of the annual budget to be able to attend skill-specific, industry conferences and to receive certifications. The critical role of the facility manager needs to be up-to-speed on as many of the expected tasks as possible.

Become a student: The rise of kiosks and AI/robotics is going to make the facility manager's job a lot harder. So, the never-ending skill building has to continue. The good news: It makes the position that much more indispensable. Look for little-to-no-cost online education opportunities to keep up with critical skills, best practices and new technology.

#### Brand Your Work

Act like a marketer: Mimic the rigorous approach of the marketing department to entice potential guests to visit the business. Apply the exact brand fonts, logos, color palette, vernacular and product quality to all of the facility department's collateral and initiatives. Brands like Smokey Bones, Tijuana Flats and the Bellagio hotel in Las Vegas take this approach with their internal materials and employee-only areas. Believe me, the internal approach goes a long way in cultivating pride, commitment and interest.

Create a character: During my time at Hard Rock, the facilities team created a character named Electra, who became the branded personality representative for facilities. Electra was everywhere. She was on the cover of facility binders, maintenance posters and safety signage in every property. Led by the character's creator, Lisa Necrason, the team even designed an employee award pin—collectible pins are a huge part of the Hard Rock's culture—which business leaders distributed to the team of winning cafes that had the greatest utility cost reductions. Putting a fun face on a behind-the-scenes function was an ingenious way to get eyeballs on the importance of preventive maintenance and garner interest in developing safe practices as part of the company's culture. You rock, Electra!

### Work Differently

Plan for distanced-based communication: In an era when a facility manager has to take on more responsibilities and seemingly endless tasks, there is the stark reality that he or she cannot always be onsite. They have to think and act differently to solve problems. Part of the role is becoming patiently adept at troubleshooting on the phone to laymen. Luckily, FaceTime and Skype can assist in effective, distanced-based solutions between the operations team and the facility expert.

Build solid relationships: It sounds so simple, yet this practice tends to take a back seat when it comes to everything on a facility manager's plate and the time required to do it. When facility leaders foster better relationships with general managers, members of the operations team and vendors will go a long way when the proverbial fan gets hit. Stress and conflict will be drastically minimized. Even better, some issues can be avoided altogether by embracing preventive maintenance, another by-product of harmonious relationship building. This may take a little extra time, and perhaps even be uncomfortable for a non-social facility manager, but the results will be so rewarding.

Being part of the band, even in a tough, invisible and sometimes thankless role, can be rewarding, but every honest roadie will tell you that they long for the rock star lifestyle. While the desired

lifestyle doesn't necessarily have to be in the spotlight, they want to be included in conversations, have their voices heard and be given the opportunity to influence leadership decisions. With these needs met, the performance of the band—or the brand—will truly rock.

Jim Knight is a business culture catalyst, a former Hard Rock International executive and the author of "Culture That Rocks!" A training and development veteran of 30+ years, Knight facilitates on a variety of interactive topics, including organizational culture, world-class service, building rockstar teams, hiring and retaining "rock stars," employee branding, performance management, philanthropy and facilitation training. Knight cut his teeth in the training field through the hospitality industry, starting out in the snack bar at Gatorland Zoo. He eventually became the head of the School of Hard Rocks, running point on all learning and development functions for Hard Rock International. Knight will be the Keynote Speaker at RFMA 2019 in Austin.