

## Facilitator — August/September 2013



Change Language: Choose

### What's New With You?

*Carolyn Roberts & Ann Nickolas*

We have seen a great amount of participation in several of our social media groups for RFMA. Along with RFMA's groups and discussions on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, Insite is RFMA's own online community especially for RFMA members. It is the perfect place for dialogue and discussion for both restaurant and vendor members.

One of the member groups on Insite is Females in Facilities. This group was created to allow female facilities professionals and vendor partners to network with each other and share common interests and concerns. Here, we highlight two female RFMA members who are making a difference in the industry.

Achieving success can certainly be defined as serving in a director-level position for a high-profile and admired restaurant company such as Chipotle. Built on an environmentally conscious foundation that respects its ingredients—from animals to the cilantro—the company has gained a very passionate and loyal following.

Responsible for all areas pertaining to facilities, construction and design is Carolyn Roberts, the Executive Director of Facilities, Construction, and Design at Chipotle Mexican Grill.

Roberts is proud to call herself a facilities professional. She describes her industry colleagues as a “unique breed of people who spend their time putting out fires and pulling off small miracles” in order to keep the restaurants operating efficiently and safely while successfully generating sales.

And she loves working for Chipotle because the company makes each employee feel valued.

“Chipotle has instilled in me the faith in my abilities to employ only top performers committed to carrying out this vision while showing consistent support for my expertise and efforts to sustain this type of culture within my department,” she said.

Before joining the company as a consultant in 1997, Roberts worked for a call center that serviced several restaurant chains such as Pizza Hut, Mrs. Fields Cookies, Boston Market and KFC.

“Working for the call center gave me an opportunity to be exposed to many different facets of the facilities industry,” Roberts said. “I quickly learned how much opportunity there was to learn how to troubleshoot items that could save the customers money.”

This financial aspect of facilities piqued Robert's interest, and she wanted to learn more about the equipment and the various scenarios that could most impact a restaurant's budget. Taking the initiative, she began spending time in the field with technicians, manufacturers and operations staff to understand every aspect of the equipment and what happens when equipment fails. She used what she learned to start thinking proactively instead of reactively about facilities maintenance.

As a consultant for Chipotle, she assessed the company's maintenance program's scope of work and its costs to determine if it was an effective use of money. At that time there were only a dozen locations and no official facilities department.

In 2005, when her predecessor, who served in the lead facilities role, left the company, Roberts was recommended as his replacement. She was soon approached by Chipotle to become the national facilities manager, leading a team of five, which she gladly accepted.

Roberts remembers encountering some resistance as she assumed this historically male-dominated role, but her facilities acumen soon proved her qualifications.

“A few people were hesitant to accept me being a female in this industry, but I quickly gained respect for being curious, asking questions and demanding answers, regardless of my gender, in order to support my customers.”

Roberts flourished in this position. Two years later, she was promoted to Director of Facilities. And in 2012, she assumed the Director of Construction role and was promoted to Executive Director of Facilities, Construction, Design and Sustainability in 2013.

She credits her work ethic, morals and values, which she says she inherited from her parents, as the foundation to her success. She never settles for being anything less than the best and expects the same from her employees.

“I truly believe that you get out of things what you put into them,” she said. “I always give 150 percent.”

To demonstrate this core belief, she made an exciting commitment to her team. She promised never to hire outside of the company for leadership or management roles. Instead, she committed to developing her own people to be the future leaders.

Roberts said this decision created many success stories within her department.

In the past five years, Roberts has promoted 14 people into leadership and management positions within the department.

This also garnered praise from the company's leadership because it mirrors the restaurateur culture that Chipotle strives for: to develop managers from restaurant crew members.

“Holding myself and my team to the highest standards created a career and success path to one of the top leadership roles within the company,” she said. “It allows me to change more people's lives and succeed while doing so.”

Today, 98 percent of Roberts' direct reports are male and there are zero issues. She prides herself on being honest and fair to all her employees.

“I truly feel I've earned the respect of my male and female peers on the industry.”

Having broken through the gender ceiling, Roberts believes professional women's networking groups, such as RFMA's Females in Facilities, can help the next-generation of female facility leaders.

"I think these groups are important for women who may be striving to reach certain levels," she said. "They can interact and learn from women who have done it, which shows them it is possible, as well as capitalize on the opportunities of female networking."

To women in facilities, Roberts' advice is to be yourself, be the best facilities professional you can be and make gender a nonissue.

"If you speak to your peers as your equals and share your successes without insecurity, others in the industry will respect you regardless of gender."

Throughout Ann Nickolas' 30-year career, she has been a champion of women and women's networking groups.

Early in her career, a senior executive at Coca-Cola brought Nickolas to a women's networking group that changed her life and showed her how far she can go.

"Carla Cooper was the senior most woman in my division, and she took me to a women's network meeting; it was transformational," Nickolas said. "For the first time in my career, I saw other people who looked like me and had the same struggles."

"It's important to have an executive in your life who takes interest in you and is willing to advocate for you. Carla is still someone I turn to and is supportive of me and has my best interest at heart."

Over the years, Nickolas has applied what she has learned from experience and various role models—men and women—and has built a career that anyone in any industry can be inspired by.

When Cintas was forming its food-service vertical, Nickolas was hired as a director. Eighteen months later, a senior director position was posted for another group. To the surprise of many people in the company, she applied for the position. She was promoted into a senior role within her current division and was thrilled to be able to stay in foodservice and build a new business.

"I felt successful just making it further in the interview process than expected and to meet the COO and the chief people officer and allow them to get to know me better," she said. "Being promoted was a wonderful bonus!"

She credits her quick rise to senior leadership to being a risk taker and networking within the company.

"I took a risk and put myself out there, and I was able to get the job that I had really wanted much more quickly," she said.

"And I wasn't afraid to meet people. I met with everyone in cross-functional areas that were important to my team's success. I got on their calendars; I didn't sit back and wait for people to call me."

She also encourages women to apply for jobs that are slightly outside of their skill set.

"Women feel like they have to be 85- to 90-percent qualified before they apply for a job; men feel like they only have to be 50-percent qualified," she said. "I believe more in that 50-percent rule. If you apply for a job where you know everything about it, you're not going to be challenged. You're better served by applying for a job slightly before you're ready for it."

Today, as the Senior Director of Food Service at Cintas, Nickolas feels a personal responsibility to hire and elevate more women in a male-dominated industry, and she has put her belief into action. Her team of account managers is comprised of four women and three men, and Nickolas mentors 12 women at Cintas.

"I would never consider looking at a slate of candidates without having women in the mix," she said. "I can't look people in the eye and say I support diversity and inclusion and then have a team that doesn't represent that."

She also challenges her male colleagues to do the same.

"Don't tell me you can't find women who are willing to travel, are tough minded and have the business acumen, because I've found them and I've hired them," she tells them.

In her division, there are six senior directors; Nickolas is the only woman at that level. This is why she wants to encourage more women to enter director roles.

She also understands it's not easy.

Travel is required at the director level, which may not be conducive to raising children. Nickolas believes this is why it's less appealing for some women to transition from manager to director positions. However, she feels strongly that mentoring women who have the potential to be a director can change that perception. Mentoring enables Nickolas to support these women and help them feel confident they can successfully balance work and family.

After all, Nickolas, who has raised two children, has been a road warrior for the past 25 years.

"I've traveled since they were six weeks old," she said. "It's not easy, but I have a great support system."

Her kids, now grown, have always understood that work is very important to her, yet they have never felt second.

Cintas recently launched a women's networking group whose leadership team consists of men and women. Nickolas serves as the Board Advisor and says great ideas and fascinating discussions happen within the group.

The network is an asset to the employees as well as the company. It has already helped Cintas understand female customer demographics better, in order to market products differently to women.

Even though Nickolas is at the top of her game, she still relies on the support of some very strong women in the restaurant industry who are always willing to take a call or answer an email.

"They are people who I look up to and invoke and ask 'How would they think; what would they do?' for various situations," she said. "Networking and mentoring is invigorating and something I thoroughly enjoy."