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# FROM THE GROUNDS, UP

## SELLING THE VALUE OF FACILITIES

BY JOHN RIMER

**T**here has been much deserved emphasis on getting facility management to the C-suite, which is necessary for our industry to realize success. However, all efforts expended on earning our way to the executive level can be quickly dashed if facility staff and contractors are not on board with the initiative.

Thus, it is imperative that we not only sell the value of facilities up the food chain and across the organization, but that we ensure that staff and contractors buy into this vision and help with the execution thereof.

This necessity becomes painfully obvious and potentially problematic when you consider that a facility manager is only one person. Most facility managers have a handful to a dozen building engineers reporting to them, with typically twice as many custodial and grounds personnel under their leadership — each of whom interact daily with the customer.

These interactions can quickly undermine your efforts; or they can significantly multiply them, if equipped and managed appropriately.

### **Changing the mindset**

This leads us to the painful reality that facility personnel are not typically respected for their contributions. For

example, when an item turns up missing in the office, who is the first to be blamed? Typically, the custodial team. This mindset must be changed at all levels. Why? Because often they are not valued; their jobs are viewed as menial and of little importance.

That is a misconception. These people, just like other facility staff, show up each day and work hard doing things that most would not want to do or couldn't fathom.

Some might argue that custodial, grounds and even building engineers have earned the negative reputation of their own accord. However, the counter to this is the proverbial chicken-and-egg argument: Is the negative perception caused by those who occupy that position or the value assigned to such positions?

Consider the high turnover that is typical of custodial staff. Ever stop to wonder why? Is it because custodial services is

a low-skilled, low-paying, dead-end job? Or is it because the employees fulfilling such duties do not feel respected or valued? What if we helped them to see the impact and fruits of their labor? Might they gain a sense of self-respect and purpose that would motivate them to work harder and to stick around longer? Could they not, in turn, help sell the value of their services and the facility department to the customers?

Many of you might think that this is impossible or that it sounds too utopian. But if we are going to continue the growth of our industry and earn a seat at the executive table, then we need to build and deliver that value from the "grounds" up. So where do we start?

### **Taking the first step**

The first step is for facility staff at all levels to recognize the value and impact their efforts have on the triple bottom line. This impact, however, is not just the bottom line from a cost perspective;

# TO CONTINUE THE GROWTH OF OUR INDUSTRY AND EARN A SEAT AT THE EXECUTIVE TABLE, WE NEED TO BUILD AND DELIVER VALUE FROM THE “GROUNDS” UP.

rather, it includes the larger implications of worker productivity, revenue generation and branding.

The maintenance, cleanliness and aesthetics of grounds and interior spaces have a direct effect on customer and employee perception, productivity and safety. Additionally, indoor environmental quality, such as lighting, temperature and noise, can impact workers' stress, health and productivity.

Such effects can be and have been quantified. For example, studies have shown that for every one degree Fahrenheit outside the “comfort zone,” worker productivity drops by two percent. Another study found that occupant productivity increased by nine percent after dirty HVAC air filters were changed. Changing air filters is one of the simplest maintenance tasks we can perform and yet it can have a significant effect. Other studies have shown similar correlations for noise, lighting, etc., which all have a tangible impact on the triple bottom line.

This recognized value should be embedded into the fabric of the facility management team, which requires leadership. The facility manager or director should espouse this value proposition and respect the role and contribution of each team member.

## Championing the FM team

Once facility staff and contractors understand the impact of their actions, they must learn to be their own advocates, selling themselves and the overall facility department. To do so

successfully requires adequate training and equipping.

With respect to training, a “soft skills” class can go a long way toward helping facility staff make the most of every customer interaction. Additionally, coaching and enabling staff to handle difficult customers and negative situations is often where the FM team can really shine.

Each team member should have an “elevator speech,” a roughly 10-second, carefully crafted explanation of what his or her team does that provides value to the organization. Take, for example, the role of custodians. If asked what they do, they could state that their team works hard to provide “a safe and clean working environment that keeps employees happy, healthy and productive, delivering value to the bottom line,” rather than saying that they empty trash cans, clean bathrooms, wash windows, etc.

They do not perform these tasks simply to do them — there is a purpose. With an elevator speech, team members can take advantage of any opportunity, no matter how brief, to succinctly communicate their value proposition.

Once you have your staff on board with helping to sell the value of facility services, you should evaluate ways to maximize all other touchpoints and incorporate this into a marketing plan.

For example, perhaps building occupants visit the facility intranet website to submit service requests and to see what's

on the menu in the cafeteria. This could provide a valuable opportunity for you to share the department's progress in achieving relevant goals, highlighting team accomplishments (e.g., earning certifications/credentials) and possibly shining the spotlight on a different team member each week, including his or her training, skill sets, etc. These methods can be invaluable in selling and promoting the value of the FM team.

In short, facility managers and staff must be deliberate and diligent with the continual selling of the value their department provides to the triple bottom line. It's up to each of us to make the most of every opportunity. **FMJ**

## RESOURCES

- The Effects of Indoor Air Quality on Performance and Productivity. Indoor Air 2004.
- Windows and Offices: A Study of Office Worker Performance the Indoor Environment. California Energy Commission.



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uses his breadth of knowledge and diverse expertise to provide a comprehensive perspective to his clients and students.

Rimer is very active in the facility management community and an avid proponent of education. As such, he is an IFMA Qualified Instructor and an approved Building Operator Certification instructor.