

## **Bridging the Gap**

*By Joseph Westwright, University of Miami*

I began working for the Facilities Management Department in 2015 as a Facilities Operation Control Representative. The following year I was promoted to Project Coordinator for Business Operations. While I had a background in data analysis, project management, and multiple years of supervisory experience I was relatively new to the Facilities Management field. Being only 24 years old at the time presented its own unique set of challenges. The Profiles 2011 Salary and Demographics Report showed a mere nine percent of employee in the Facilities Management field were under the age of 34, while that number has grown there is still a steep age gap in most workplaces.

In an attempt to cultivate and prepare our internal staff (those who were new to leadership roles, or would one day be likely to assume a leadership role) our Senior Manager for Business Operations organized an APPA Supervisor's Toolkit training. The training included young professionals new to administrative roles, such as myself, all the way to 30+ year veterans of the industry with extensive mechanical backgrounds. At first it was easy to feel out of place, and from pure maintenance knowledge stand-point, inadequate as a professional compared to peers attending. APPA's training though, by the second day had completely changed my outlook, as there is so much more to our profession than just operations and maintenance.

Every member of our operation is working towards a common goal: to serve our community and ensure that every individual, from start to finish, has a positive experience with the physical environment. To achieve this task is no easy feat in a single building, let alone over 130 of them. The APPA supervisor's toolkit training taught me that there are other components to ensuring a positive customer experience, and that by empowering our teams through a shared vision, our goal is not only realistic, but achievable. Since the training, I have taken to heart that each of my peers has a unique set of experiences that shape their worldview and those experiences provide them distinct and valuable knowledge. Every individual has a special and valuable knowledge that is in some way unique to him or her. To that end, I have been able to leverage my knowledge of emergent technologies to provide efficiencies to field teams, and they have in turn been receptive to sharing their experiences, feedback, and mechanical knowledge.

I highly recommend to all young professionals, participate in the APPA Supervisor's toolkit training. In the last few years I feel that the age gap and concerns I initially faced in my role have be traded for partnerships to freely exchange information in order to help one another meet our University's Common Purpose: "To transform lives, through teaching, research, and service."