

APPA Young Professional (AYP) in a Supervisory Role

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If you're on the facilities management career path, you should expect that at some point in your career, you may supervise staff responsible for maintaining campus facilities. As an APPA Young Professional (AYP) in a supervisory role, I'm finding this experience invaluable in developing my skills for managing essential functions like vendor and client relationships, as well as increasing my ability to have difficult conversations and hold staff accountable.

The University of Chicago's Facilities Services provides campus services which include building maintenance, cleaning services, landscaping, and trades services, etc. As a Facilities Manager, I am responsible for maintaining the infrastructure of the residence halls and dining facilities within my assigned portfolio. One of the ways that I ensure quality execution of Facilities Services stewardship is by regularly inspecting the residence and dining halls for maintenance and cleaning needs.

I directly supervise a team of three building maintenance union staff, and indirectly I supervise a unit of 11 building maintenance workers. The staff that I supervise provide building maintenance and cleaning services for my portfolio. Collectively, the team has over 30+ years of experience in their respective trades - either within or outside of the University. The building-specific knowledge that my team has about our portfolio cannot be discounted. However, as a supervisor, I recognize that continued training and the introduction of new tasks is important to keep my staff engaged. While working together, it is important for the entire team to understand that both new information and field experience are necessary to our shared success in work completion. Because of this, in the short time that I have held this role, I have learned to value and use their experience to uphold our Facilities Services motto to "Build and Maintain Excellence."

Supervising union staff as a young professional can come with learning curves. One way that I address this is to consistently read and understand the relevant union contracts. I must continuously refer to them to verify accuracy in service level agreements (SLAs) and task assignments needed to satisfy relationships with our clients. A very real experience as a young professional with a fresh perspective can be acting as a change agent in order to substitute cultural norms with best practices that introduce new procedural expectations. Because the longevity of trade jobs normally exceeds supervisory roles like mine, I have also invested time in actively developing my position and my staff members roles to be standardized and replicable moving forward.

My advice as an AYP in a supervisory role managing maintenance and custodial staff in Facilities Services is to continue to have conversations with your direct reports regarding what they need from you to further their interests and job knowledge. Continue to strengthen your own knowledge-base of common language, tools, schedules, and repairs to show that you are aware of the intricacy of their role and to set informed expectations for completion of daily tasks. If your next role in the foreseeable future may include staff supervision in facilities, start conversations with your supervisor to identify training or experiences that will prepare you to lead. The APPA supervisor's toolkit course may help as well to further develop those supervisor skills.