



Using APPA's Credentialing Programs for Team and Knowledge Building

By Steve Maruszewski, with Susan Bedsworth

Two of the biggest challenges within facilities management are team building and professional development. Positive growth in these areas contributes greatly to the overall effectiveness of staff members. Ironically, these are also areas that suffer the most when issues and events arise that divert our attention. This is often when they are needed most.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPAND, ENHANCE, AND SHARE SKILLS

At Penn State we have all the normal pressures of a typical large-scale university facilities operation. In the midst of the many challenges we've faced here at Penn State, an idea emerged to give our employees an opportunity to expand, enhance and share their skills while simultaneously learning about the challenges facing their coworkers.

Our size alone makes it a challenge to interact with one another enough to understand what different units do every day. The hope was that understanding would lead to empathy and empathy would lead to increased partnership and collaboration.

After I personally participated in a review session for the CEFP and took

the exam, I realized this program could potentially be the tool to help the Office of Physical Plant (OPP) achieve its goal of improving working relationships between divisions. I offered a select group of staff the opportunity to participate in a six-week review program ending with the full-day APPA-led session and the exam.

The participants made a commitment, not only to complete the weekly reading, but also to each other, and I in turn made the commitment to prepare the notes and lead the review sessions. We would work together to make sure everyone was successful.

REVIEW SESSIONS BECOME DYNAMIC SESSIONS

The group had participants from all parts of our organization representing every division. During each session, participants were encouraged to sit with employees from other work groups, as the real learning was going to be about areas outside the individual's current expertise. This resulted in dynamic sessions, effec-

tive team and knowledge building, and helped ensure everyone passed the exam.

"I originally participated in the training to gain a better understanding of the various operations here at Physical Plant," said Tom Flynn, landscape architect. "We

"IT'S HELPED ME UNDERSTAND THE BIG PICTURE. NOT JUST THE THINGS I AM DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH, BUT HOW EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED."

— Mike Jackson

all have our specialties, but I saw the class as an opportunity to learn what others within the organization are doing, and why their roles are important."

Joe Dinardo, a supervisor in the Work Control Division, echoed Flynn's sentiments. "I wanted to be a better asset to this university. Going through the training gave me a better understanding of how facilities management works for Penn State."



The feedback has been extremely positive, leading us to expand the program. With two more sessions completed, the desire to participate continues to grow. More than 70 individuals have passed the exam so far, and I have requests for another session.

"This training validates what I think we already know, that OPP comprises extremely bright, knowledgeable, and qualified professionals," said Flynn. "The credentialing demonstrates the individual's and OPP's commitment to the institution and the profession."

BUILDING RESPECT AND CAMARADERIE

Overall, both the knowledge and team building aspects have been tremendously successful. Respect for others' skill sets

"OVERALL I HAVE A BETTER APPRECIATION FOR HOW DIFFERENT AREAS OF OPP WORK."

— Madeline Cantu

and challenges have improved greatly, but so has the sense of camaraderie among the employees.

"The biggest thing I learned wasn't necessarily course content, but the six weeks we spent together over lunch learning the material together," said Beth Clark, budget analyst. "It's great that we have all been successful, but I think the best outcome was the sense of camaraderie that was built among the

people who went through it."

Ultimately, this is not the only and final answer to the challenge, but I can say without equivocation that if managed effectively, the CEFP and EFP certification can serve as an effective tool to improve team building, professional development, and overall morale. ☺

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