

Executive Summary

Collaboration is Key

by E. Lander Medlin

In today's world of both local and global communities, collaboration has become an essential and strategically important ingredient for individual and organizational success. From my perspective, collaboration is key. So what is collaboration anyway? The simplest of definitions states that collaboration is the act of performing work or labor together in the pursuit of a common good or collective end. At its very core, collaboration is not a singular effort but a cooperative venture. So collaboration is first and foremost about relationships. Therefore, if we are going to build meaningful relationships both individually and organizationally, we must make a commitment to do so in meaningful ways. Making strong commitments to build lasting relationships takes several levels of focused effort to achieve substantial meaning and value.

Making a Connection

Choosing to get connected with and be an active part of an association is the first step toward becoming more closely related to its members and their collective purpose and values. When you choose to belong to an association through its membership, you have the opportunity to serve others by getting involved. At times, it is easier for us to sit in our offices, surf the Web, but not engage. Engagement takes time and effort. It is a give and take. However, the more you give, the more you get. It is exponential. Yet, you have to avail yourself of the



opportunities by attending educational programs and participating in discussion groups (listservs, small local gatherings, etc.) to make those important connections.

Interestingly enough, New York City is considered the loneliest city in this country even though it is the most populated. For many it feels big and impersonal and, therefore, hard to make personal connections. In order to make association experience more personal, members need to collect in small groups based on needs or degrees of similarity to themselves and the organization they represent. For instance, doctors, lawyers, and judges alike belong to a community of professionals where they not only engage in social activities but learn from each other professionally. Where do you choose to belong? What community of professionals do you most identify with? How engaged are you with its members? Will you choose to engage in its important activities to further your growth and development?

Organizationally, APPA has spent much time and effort connecting with other associations, organizations, and agencies in an effort to: provide depth and breadth to the facilities manage-

ment profession; improve the facilities management profession as an industry; maximize and further leverage our collective resources; and increase our understanding of the education arena. By combining our efforts and resources, we can achieve things collectively that we cannot accomplish individually.

Learning to Share

Frankly, it is difficult, if not impossible, to develop relationships without meeting together and sharing our experiences and perspectives. We learn more from one another than by ourselves. It is wise to learn from the experiences of other people, because you just do not have time to make all the mistakes yourself. If everything you learn in life you have to learn personally by trial and error, you are going to go through a lot of problems unnecessarily. More importantly, you do not have time to learn everything you need to know on your own. Conversely, meeting regularly and sharing your experiences, successes, and failures adds to the richness of your network immeasurably. The added benefit is that it is an excellent way to get to know one another better. The

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wealth gained for all concerned is, again, phenomenal. Think of the wealth of knowledge that exists across our institutions and how much we could learn from each other if we would just avail ourselves of the opportunity. APPA's Effective & Innovative Practices awards is a terrific example of one way to share (and potentially benefit financially) your organization's best practices. We were not meant to face our problems alone. Let us be there to encourage one another. "When you share a joy, it is doubled; when you share a problem, it is cut in half."

Doing Your Part; Partners Working Together

We each have gifts and talents that, if given back in service to others, will help everyone grow and ensure the health and vitality of the profession and the association as well. For example, taking responsibility to serve on a Facilities Management Evaluation Program (FMEP) team, working on a research project through the Center for Facilities Research (CFaR), or joining a committee or task force in your interest area are just a few ways to give back to improve the facilities management profession and the education community.

APPA's strategic alliance partners are a good example of partners working together toward mutually beneficial goals for the advancement of the profession and higher education as an industry. I cannot think of a better example than the 2006 Joint APPA, NACUBO, SCUP annual meeting titled, "The Campus of the Future: A Meeting of the Minds," to illustrate mutual benefit and collective gain.

In addition, we are forging strong partnerships with our business partners to build higher levels of understanding and involvement with them and through them. Our newest designation, Strategic Business Partner, is the culmination of a significant investment of time and energy. Its importance to all of us is priceless.


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Expressing Care and Concern for Others

You see, life is not about all your accomplishments. Ultimately these things are temporal. Life is really about relationships. They last forever. Are you genuinely interested in others—their growth, success, and friendship? Are you sincerely interested in the betterment of the facilities management profession? What decisions are you making and what actions are you taking daily to build strong bonds—lasting, meaningful relationships—with your colleagues in the profession? How devoted are you to making our campuses a better place to work and live? This is a level of "kinship" that can only be forged over time through your words, your actions, and your active engagement.

Remember, these places are not only where we work, but where we live, and they have become a significant part of our lives. There needs to be joy, happiness, reward, and satisfaction as a result. Some of the strongest bonds of friendship in my life have come from this cadre of colleagues. My life would be impoverished without them.

It is my hope that as you become more aware of the importance of relationships, you will make the commitment to engage in and take advantage of the opportunities available through membership involvement and participation. You don't need impressive credentials; you don't need huge responsibilities and budgets; you don't have to come from a large research university; and you don't need a representative or sponsor. You just need an interest in and willingness to engage in the wealth of

knowledge and opportunity available in this collaborative adventure we call APPA. 

Steps to Building Lasting Relationships

- Make the commitment to connect with an association family—either local, state, regional, national, or international.
- Share with and learn from others—you can learn from an association family of any size.
- Contribute to the profession—everyone has something to give.
- Show your colleagues how much your concern for them.

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