



# Seize the Day!

By E. Lander Medlin

As President Obama stated in his inaugural address: “The challenges are real, many, and serious . . . we are in it for the long-haul and it is *not* for the faint-hearted. It will take risk-takers, doers, and makers of things. We must be productive and inventive, imaginative, and courageous.” This is a chaotic time flush with economic uncertainty. Yet, it is in this chaotic, tumultuous economic environment that we live in and must do our best work.

I am reminded of the Chinese symbols for the word “chaos.” The written symbols actually consist of two sets of characters connoting two words that mean when literally translated: Risk **and** Opportunity! Certainly there are innumerable risks we must be aware of as we traverse this uncharted territory. However, the greatest risk is not recognizing the potential opportunities. Although we should proceed with due caution to avoid as many of these risks as possible, it is equally important to recognize the opportunities as they emerge.

## AREAS OF EXPERTISE

For example, the U.S. federal stimulus package focuses on restoring science to its rightful place in society; dealing with rising healthcare costs; moving to energy independence; ensuring a sustainable planet; and transforming our schools and colleges. Facilities professionals possess important knowledge and expertise in at least four of these five targeted areas. Many hard choices will need to be made. We have the capacity to meet them head on. We cannot afford indifference. The work has changed, and so must we.

Our attitude toward these problems and our approach to problems in general cannot be underestimated. A positive attitude and positive perspective makes a difference in how you approach issues and problems,

your capacity to face such challenges, and your effectiveness in building relationships that count over time. Your attitude serves as a powerful foundation for determining the choices you make and the actions you take. But attitude is *not* everything. You must couple your experience and expertise with competency, determination, and the capacity to take the actions necessary to solve problems efficiently and effectively. Your value and worth as a leader will be realized in the quality of your recommendations and the substance of your daily actions.

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## LOVE YOUR PROBLEMS

In fact, we must learn to love problems. Employers want staff who can solve problems, not create them. Problems actually define us. They ultimately shape us. They make us invaluable. Ultimately, it is not about the problems, it is about the solutions, and that is where our attitude can make such a huge difference.

Take the ancient Chinese Emperor who asked his wife to determine what was causing damage to their mulberry trees. Upon further inspection, she found that the brown spots on the leaves were caused by a moth. The moth laid its eggs, which produced a caterpillar that spun a cocoon, which, in turn, caused damage to the tree. Being of inquisitive mind, she dropped the cocoon in water and lo and behold there appeared a tiny thread that when unraveled stretched a half a mile long. Silk was discovered and became more valuable than gold at the time!

Therefore, what could have been considered just another mundane, innocuous problem became an incredible opportunity for a new and valuable product for centuries to come.

Our problems may not seem to have quite the same potential for import, but you never know. Many an industry has been spawned by the spark of a new and innovative idea generated from the solution to a problem that was inventive, creative, and imaginative.

In Steve Thweatt’s recent article titled “The Price of Paralysis” [January/February 2009 *Facilities Manager*], Steve discussed the price we pay for indecisiveness. He emphasized that inaction is really action. The fear of making a wrong decision can actually bring

more disastrous results, far-reaching and unintended consequences, and expose our leadership weaknesses. The greater weakness lies in not being part of the solution or providing your important perspective.

Through the pressure of adversity, real leaders will emerge. A positive attitude and a healthy perspective coupled with information about the current reality, will allow educational facilities professionals to assess alternatives, present the best recommendations, and make good decisions on behalf of their organizations. It is these defining moments that build one’s character and provide the confidence and tenacity to withstand the resultant pressure.

## FUTURE GROWTH

When asked about the role of chance in scientific research and discovery, Louis Pasteur said, “Chance favors the prepared mind.” We, too, need to be prepared since

the potential for future growth resides in education, healthcare, renewable energy, and the governmental industry sectors. Certainly increases in the Pell Grant will allow greater access for students to enter our colleges and universities. We will ultimately benefit from this enrollment growth. And, although the final version of the stimulus package did not include a separate pot of monies for facilities infrastructure projects, we must still be prepared with “shovel-ready” projects. These types of projects are allowable in the State’s Fiscal Stabilization Fund and within the various federal research agencies’ allocations (visit our website [www.appa.org/recovery](http://www.appa.org/recovery) for more details).

This situation is just as real for APPA where our overall strategy is to streamline services and reinvent our delivery system. We must do so to ensure we continue to meet your needs at your time and place of choice. Organizationally we are positioned well to seize future opportunities. Why can I say this? After exhaustive surveys of the membership in late 2005, APPA embarked on an aggressive strategic business plan to ensure a targeted and focused investment to support the future needs of the educational facilities profession. In just three short years we have completed much of our work on the 7 Key Strategies by accomplishing:

- **The BRAND Identity** revamped our look and feel and approach.
- **The Website/ Database** was successfully re-launched.
- **The “On-line” Membership Directory** was delivered this past fall, which cut costs and reduced our carbon footprint.
- **The Research** effort has been especially fruitful given our latest Thought Leaders Series monograph entitled *The Challenges to Campus Facilities of Demographic Changes and Accountability* sponsored by Jacobs, and the *Practical Guide to Reducing the Campus Carbon Footprint*, which was graciously sponsored by Affiliated Engineers, Inc. (AEI).
- **The Collaborations** have focused on various projects with AGB (Association of Governing Boards); NACUBO (National Association of College & University Business Officers); ASHRAE (American

Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air-Conditioning Engineers); CSHEMA (Campus Safety Health and Environmental Managers Association); and AASHE (Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education).

- **The Virtual Connections** are engaging young facilities professionals through our new appearance on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Wikipedia.

- **The Webinars & Quality Educational Programming** are having a significant impact on facilities managers growth and development across the entire professional development career continuum from supervisor to senior facility officer.
- **The Certifications** have now been completely developed with our *EFP* (*Educational Facilities Professional*) for the younger, mid-career professional,

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and the *CEFP (Certified Educational Facilities Professional)* for the more experienced facilities professional. They are now being delivered across the country in dozens of drive-in locations which we call "Certification Exam Day."

The playing field has changed dramatically . . . another growth opportunity for all of us. The challenges of:

- A weakened economy overall
  - Shrinking private sector
  - Facilities department budget cuts/slashed
  - Massive travel restrictions
  - State of fear & uncertainty, creating paralysis
  - Perceptions of value
- Will require a perspective of:
- Renewed energy & commitment for the work
  - Embrace the situation as an opportunity
  - Recognize you have an impact
  - People need our services more than ever
  - Unprecedented opportunity to expand/reinvent ourselves

• Must harness the winds of change by making course corrections  
As a fine Navy admiral once said, "We may not be able to change the wind, but we can always adjust the sails." To address these challenges and apply the required perspective, APPA is taking the following actions:

- **VIRTUAL, VIRTUAL, VIRTUAL!** – Utilizing online delivery methods such as webinars, teleseminars, and podcasts to a much greater degree.
- **LOCAL, LOCAL, LOCAL!** – Institutional, regional, and local delivery of the Leadership Academy tracks I and III; selected Institute courses; and Supervisor's Toolkit.
- **SPONSORS, SPONSORS, SPONSORS!** – "Bundle" opportunities to increase exposure and visibility by our members for our business partners' products and services and build these relationships personally and for the long term.

Our accomplishments to date and the actions we are now pursuing will put

us on the critical path to maintain our competitive edge. We recognize the magnitude of the weakened economy. Yet we believe, organizationally, that we are well-positioned to seize future opportunities and reinvent APPA's delivery system. Accomplishment of the 7 Key Strategies now places APPA in a strong strategic position capable of seizing different delivery opportunities and positioned to collaborate with the best of the best. We plan to thrive, not just survive!

In the movie *Dead Poets' Society*, Robin Williams was speaking to the boys of that small preparatory school as they looked at the wall of pictures of their forbear's and he emphasized the perspective they should embrace immediately and well into the future stating, "Carpe Diem - Seize the Day, boys; Seize the Day!" Indeed, we must all Seize the Day! ☛

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