



What Happens When the Right People Are in the Wrong Places?

By Matt Adams, P.E.

One of the many benefits of working for a nonprofit institution like a university or school district is the feeling of security. Most institutions will honor their commitment to the staff in virtually all financial circumstances. This makes working for nonprofit institutions very attractive. However, this benefit creates an organizational challenge to the management of the facilities departments.

Over time, the makeup of the staff and the head count within each of the service centers changes. Sometimes one person retires and the next year we lose ten. In economic boom years we lose staff to local businesses. There are a variety of reasons why the roles change. Couple this reality with the fact that our physical plants and service responsibilities change simultaneously.

Finally, there is the issue of recruit-

ment and hiring of new staff. For some institutions it can take months. The result is that at any given time we find ourselves with a great pool of plant staff members, but not necessarily in the right positions. What can we do about a circumstance that all of our peers find themselves in from time to time?

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

Upon review of the makeup of the plant management department changes are often required. For example, the department might be staffed with four electricians and one painter. However, the workload for the plant clearly requires at least four painters and only two electricians. While the staff is qualified and devoted to the institution, the makeup of these two departments is incorrect.

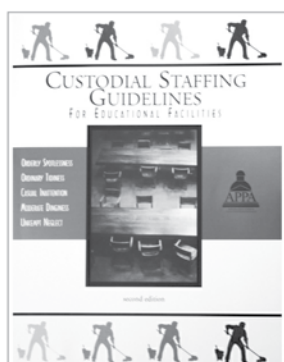
At this point the workload and the staff makeup are not compatible and one department is likely to be underutilized while the other is deferring work. Without change, this mismatch will affect the department in a variety of negative ways and more importantly, the plant will not be maintained properly.

In some institutions the fear of labor disputes or morale damage freezes management, preventing them from finding a remedy to the problem. In fact, there are two issues:

- 1) how to change the makeup of the mismatched service centers, and
- 2) how to execute the workload of the two departments during a reallocation process.

Given the potential sensitivity of such issues, the manager of this reallocation is required to provide as much transparency as possible. In addition, there cannot be too much communication of every form with the affected staff and the department during such a process. There must be a start and end to this change, and that is the best place to

Get All the Good Stuff At a Cost You can Justify



**Bundled with
the Guidelines**

Your cleaning costs are tied to your facility size and now your software costs work the same way. No matter what the size of your facility, our entire suite of features is affordable since we price by the square foot, with prices starting at just \$500, including our PDA based inspection software, everyone can have the best professional tools on the market.

Bundled with APPA's Custodial Staffing Guidelines and pre-loaded with all the area types you need, try out the software for 60 days via download from our website.

Learn more at: www.managewize.com

Software available from JohnsonDiversey's Johnson Wax, Butcher's, and Ramsey brands, as well as select, independent consultants in the industry.



60 Kensico Rd. STE 26, Thornwood, NY 10594
email: info@managewize.net

start. A clear and concise project definition is published that states the current makeup, and desired makeup, and the straightforward and factual reason for the change. This same document must clearly delineate a set of business rules that will guide the process, and that process cannot be deviated from.

In addition to the acknowledgment that the service centers should have the number of positions changed from x to y, there should be the most emphatic announcement of business rule # 1: "Nobody is going to get hurt." This is the first fear of many, and it is best dealt with up front. The leadership of the department cannot over-communicate this point and must stick to it from beginning to end. In fact, since we know what the service centers look like now, and how they need to look in the future, a variety of actions can be taken to effect the required change and not hurt the

A CLEAR AND CONCISE PROJECT DEFINITION IS PUBLISHED THAT STATES THE CURRENT MAKEUP, AND DESIRED MAKEUP, AND THE STRAIGHTFORWARD AND FACTUAL REASON FOR THE CHANGE.

existing staff. Given this opportunity to achieve the goal and not traumatize the staff, why not communicate the facts openly and frequently?

THE SHORT-TERM FIX

The immediate goal is to prevent the deferral of maintenance work due to any shortages of staff for one or more service centers. Hopefully, the work is generally planned and scheduled. From this defined workload the short department can be augmented with helpers. Virtually all plant staff is able to make up some work backlog with an assistant while waiting for a normal skilled staff member. And

any time spent by the helpers in the service center is valuable training for them as well. In addition, the use of outside contractors is a possibility.

Given the sensitivity of using contractors to make up work from short staff, the contractors should work at the discretion of the short department. In addition, the workload and duration should be clearly defined so as not to create the fear that the contractors are permanent replacements. These tactics will not make up for a short-staffed department and, as always, there may not be enough funds for much discretionary contracted work. However, with

G
I
L
S
U
L
A
T
E

5
0
0
X
R



Gilsulate has insulated and protected underground pipes and tanks for over 60 years. This federally approved, patented system is economical, thermally efficient and hydrophobic. Gilsulate®500XR is load-bearing and provides a dry, stable environment for the long-term reliability of underground piping systems operating between 35° and 800° F. Examples of its many applications include steam, condensate, hot and chilled water.

Thermal Insulation and Protection System for Underground Pipes and Tanks

Gilsulate International, Inc. • P.O. Box 802650 • Santa Clarita, Ca 91380 • 1-800-833-3881 • www.gilsulate.com

prioritization of the “must complete” maintenance activities, a compelling case can be made to provide budget for this transitional resource.


LONG-TERM TRANSITIONS

The longer term transition plan requires some basic planning, reasonable assumptions, and implementation

of the predefined business rules. The whole process may take up to five years, perhaps more. Given our commitment not to traumatize our staff or the department, we will need time to correct what might have taken 20 years to create. The change management planning process is not unlike other basic project management techniques.

Taking a five-year planning template the department can plot the estimated roles of the department based on averages for basic human resource occurrences. No names are used, and the assumptions always have an accuracy defined by plus or minus, in month or years. This same process is ideal for future planning to prevent the mismatches of the present. So as one likely retirement in one department is anticipated, this position is transferred to the short department.

Given historical records, we can expect one person to leave for personal reasons each year at a rate of 1 per 30 employees. These facts are all plugged into our plan and the resulting roles for the service centers are the yearly baseline. Taking advantage of any luck that may help deficits, the remaining shortages are gradually offset using employee-friendly strategies. These include: financial incentives for retraining; early retirement buyouts; creation of or acceleration of an apprenticeship program; cross-training; and redefinition of position descriptions.

Some tactics are viewed as implausible for many institutions. For example, “early buyout” of an employment contract is often viewed as taboo by many. However, if a department is overstaffed or another is desperately understaffed, a simple mathematical return on investment can often justify a transfer of one position between service centers. In other words, if 30 percent of the work in the paint shop is being deferred while we have an extra position in another shop that is underutilized, paying a person a year or more for optional early retirement might be easily justified based on the losses created by the current situation. 

Matt Adams is president of Adams FM², Atlanta, GA. He can be reached at matt@adamsfm2.com.



PUT 'EM TO WORK!

Available in Gray or Brown
30" Wide in 4', 5', 6' & 8' Length
Conference Tables & Benches
18" Wide in 6' & 8' Length
and 5' & 6' Round

Commercialite®

Folding Tables and Benches

TESTED TO OVER 3500 LBS!



McCourt Manufacturing

We build 'em better

Contact Rudy - 800-333-2687 x 201



Series 5
Stackable
Folding
Chairs



Pedestal
Tables



Custom Plywood
Folding Tables



Superb
Seating
Chairs

Fort Smith, Arkansas USA • www.mccourtmg.com APRACLO9