

# Promoting Strategic Value to the Institution

By E. Lander Medlin

There is huge value in the built environment to the educational enterprise. Think of it this way: If we total the dollar value of all higher education institution's endowments, and compared that number to the Current Replacement Value (CRV) of our colleges and universities' buildings and utilities infrastructure, the total value of these physical assets would be three times that of the entire endowment. And that doesn't even begin to count the same number for the K-12 built environment. It's staggering!

It is a long-term investment decision requiring your care and maintenance *daily*. Without your stewardship, it would be practically impossible for the stakeholders on your campuses/schools to do what they need to do to educate students—create the student experience—which is ultimately why we all exist. In fact, the Carnegie

recruitment and retention of students. You are strategically important to the achievement of an institution's mission. And, your ability to focus on, and take a leadership role, is critically important to creating that student experience. Goethe said, "Knowing is not enough, we must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do."

## WHAT YOU MUST DO—EVERY DAY

So what must you do as a facilities professional to promote your strategic value to the institution? Individuals from the 2011 Thought Leaders Symposium were posed this question (among others), and they had some very good advice and guidance.

- **Demonstrate competency.** Have the mindset of "K-Life" where you are actively engaged in a process of constant learning, renewal, and updating your skills and abilities throughout your lifetime.

- **Create opportunities for collaboration.** Look across the full spectrum of stakeholders (faculty, staff, students, administration, alumni, and the surrounding community).
- **Understand stakeholders' needs.** Listen intently before offering further explanation(s).
- **Don't be the problem.** Be the solution; the "go-to" person for dealing with issues and concerns.

## YOUR PERSONAL R.O.I.

This last point is particularly important, as it becomes a significant part of your role and responsibilities, and serves to mold and shape your image over time. What are some areas you should concentrate in this regard so your efforts gain the greatest return on investment?

- **Love problems.** That's right; love the problems that come your way. They demonstrate your promotability. Remember, it's not the problem but ultimately your response that makes all the difference.
- **Promote self.** If you don't promote yourself in meaningful ways, no one else is going to either.
- **Be that "go-to" resource.** This will help you gain a "seat at the table" through increased influence and credibility.
- **Educate others.** Take the time to teach and educate within your sphere of influence.
- **Be visible.** Get out of your office and visit with folks both internally in your department and externally across the entire organization/institution.

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Foundation study of 1984 and APPA's follow-on research study, *The Impact of Facilities on Student Recruitment and Retention*, both found that the quality and condition of the buildings and grounds directly impacts the decision by students and their parents to attend any given school and remain there through graduation. Therefore, the work you do directly impacts the

- **Develop a broader perspective.** Have a bigger picture perspective that looks at the whole system and the long term strategically, and not just the day-to-day tactical delivery of services.
- **Align the facilities departmental mission with the institutional mission.** Be part of the core mission, adding value all along the way.

- **Exhibit confidence.** Show confidence in your decisions and actions and ability to get the job done.
- **Build your credentials.** Engage in local, regional, and international professional development organizations (like International APPA, its regions, and state/local chapters) to augment your professional development, increase your network of colleagues, and take advantage of their best practices.
- **Have a plan.** Develop a short- and long-term plan of action that focuses on your preparedness for likely (or even unlikely) situations/scenarios and acted on them with a sense of urgency.

#### CHOOSE YOUR ATTITUDE

Doing all of this calls for a certain attitude, which isn't passive. It's a matter of choice. Your attitude not only affects your behavior and actions; it also affects everyone around you. It has been said, "Change your attitude; change your life." Some strategies to focus on are:

- **Pay attention to your perception of self.** In other words, your self-worth and your value, which sends strong messages about the value of your contribution and its importance to the organization.
- **Work within your circle of influence.** Rather than spinning your wheels in your circle of concern, focus your time and effort on issues and things you can do something about over time. It's about where you spend your energy, which directly affects the return on your investment in time spent there!
- **Build better, more effective relationships with others.** Consider how you treat others on a daily basis. Everybody's job is important. What are you doing to support others' needs? Do you understand their issues from their perspectives? Every relationship is important.

Remember, in large part, you and your department are the only department that ultimately touches every stakeholder on campus and every aspect of the cam-

pus delivery system. And, you may be the only person an individual comes in contact with on any given day. Therefore, another person's opinion or perception of the facilities department could be based on this single interaction. You play a critical role in creating the student experience (let alone that of the faculty and staff).

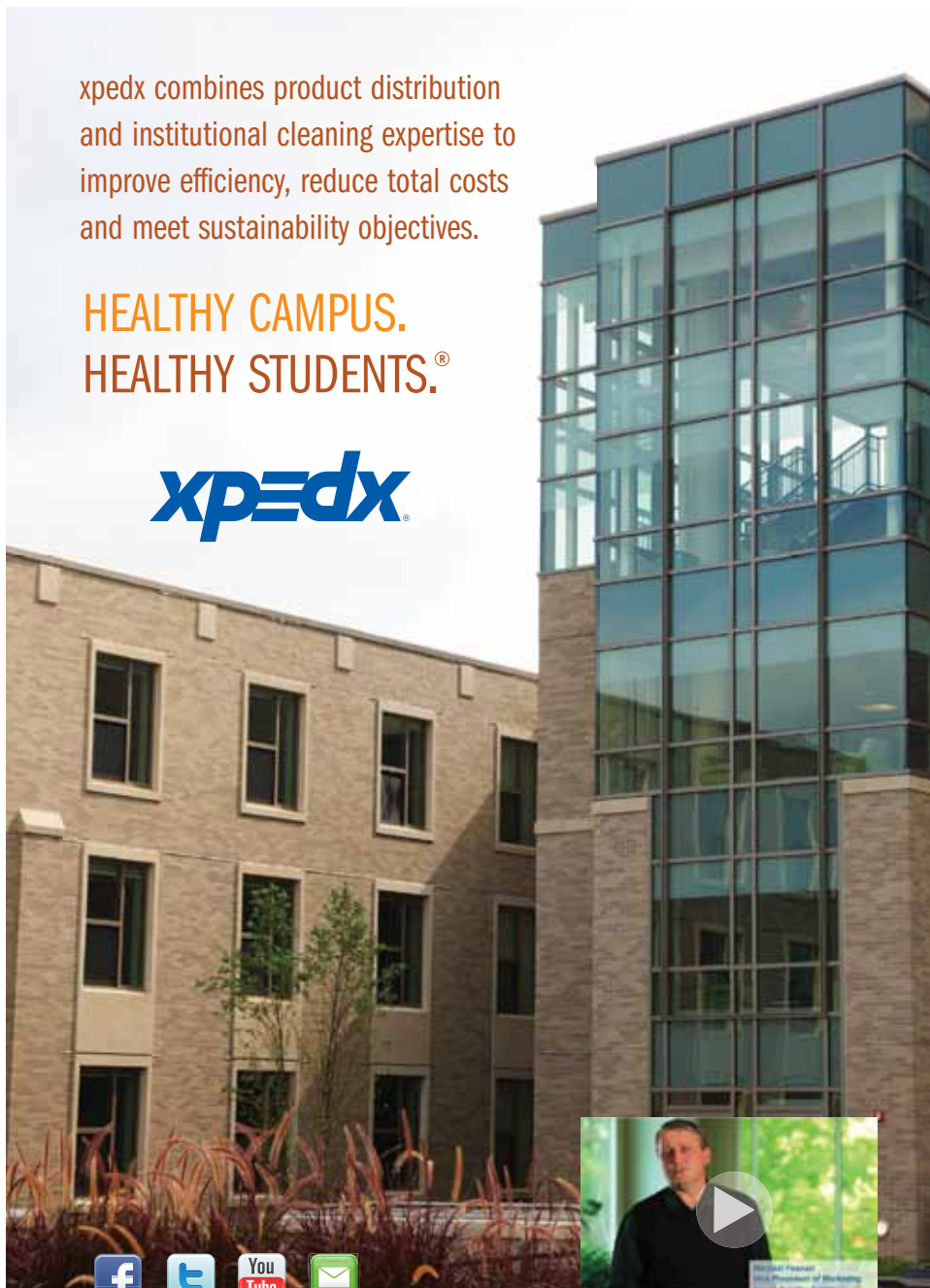
Relationships are important and you

build them one at a time, one interaction at a time. Don't just build buildings... build yourself, build your team, and build your organization by building lasting relationships. ☺

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