



Who Do You Lean On for Professional Support?

By Peter Strazdas

Every facility officer regularly has the need to reach out to peers outside your institution. You know what I am talking about. Your boss asks you for benchmark data or information about other schools in your state. How about when you were in a bind on an issue and you just need to talk to someone outside of your school (sometimes that is good therapy on bad days).

If you want to try something new, who do you call to see if the new product or process will work? Looking for a new job description? In this facility environment of constant change, we find ourselves having the need to talk to people we call mentors, peers, or a friend who is challenged with the same things we are doing.

BUILDING NETWORKS

When we started in this facility profession, we thought we had all the answers and that our team could solve every problem. I think we did that mostly because we did not have an extensive professional network or lacked experience. This is a lesson learned for the emerging professionals in our industry. As senior facility officers we must get the new professionals engaged and help them built their professional networks. They need to be connected to mentors and peers at other schools. We owe it to our staff and our profession.

So, do you remember how you were first connected to a mentor? How did you first meet or talk to a facility peer at another school? For many of us, APPA was the common denominator and the bridge to many of these connections. I don't think many of us looked in the phone book and called a stranger at another

school. APPA offers many ways to make that first connection. After that, many of these connections become professional relationships for many years to come.

APPA HAS IT

So where do I get started and what are the opportunities to start professional networking? Drive-in Workshops, Supervisor's Toolkit, and chapter or regional conferences are where many of us made the initial contact. That face-to-face discussion, mostly at social times, meals, or break times between presentations, were the best way to meet new friends. I always try to connect with a person who asked a question or looking for information after the presentation. We have something in common and we both can share our experiences or both agree that we have a common challenge and we are not alone. APPA has the emerging professionals group where they can network on their own terms. Some like to use social media or other technology to communicate and meet new friends in our profession.

APPA also has the Leadership Academy, Institute for Facilities Management, annual international conference, and the certification program that brings facility professionals together from a larger geographic region. After your initial exposure to these professional opportunities, you can expand your wings and be engaged with state, regional, and international APPA committees and leadership positions. What a great way to further expand your network.



APPA offers so many venues to expand your network. Everyone in the profession has a responsibility to build your network. Each professional in our industry must take the initiative to attend events and reach out to others you have not met. It makes it easy when senior facility officers encourage you and tell you to attend an APPA event. It is also the responsibility of regular attendees to introduce themselves to first time attendees and make them feel welcome and connect them to others that you feel are appropriate to expand their network.

APPA Regions also have formal mentor programs to connect facility veterans with emerging professionals. What a great way to sustain and move our facility profession forward. Call it paying back or paying forward, it's the right thing to do!

So who do you lean on for professional support? I hope more than those around you in your organization. Having that broader network opens so many doors and possibilities during your professional career. It also gives you that personal satisfaction, makes your job easier, you make friends for life. ☺

Peter Strazdas is associate vice president for facilities management at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI and APPA's Secretary-Treasurer. He can be reached at peter.strazdas@wmich.edu.

I'm a Believer



“BECAUSE IT’S MADE TO LAST, MY DESIGNS FOR POWERBOND NEED TO BE SOMETHING PEOPLE WILL STILL LOVE IN 15 OR 20 YEARS. IT’S A MORE SUSTAINABLE CHOICE, AND THAT INSPIRES ME.”

Jhane Barnes | Floorcovering Designer



SCAN THE AD to see Jhane's story.
Download the Digimarc app for free.
You can also visit powerbond.com.

Tandus
A Tarkett Company