Why APPA?

By E. Lander Medlin and Glenn Smith

At its core, APPA is about education and professional development, whether delivered through face-to-face conferences and institutes, online learning seminars and credentialing programs, from committee and leadership opportunities, or information and research available at your time and place of choice. Given the difference in what membership means to each generation and the expected return it provides, APPA clearly offers an array of programs, products, and services to meet those differences head on. The opportunities abound! APPA has impacted careers, influenced thinking, advanced research, and supported individuals and their institutions fulfill their educational mission.

It’s hard to imagine the sheer numbers of people APPA has touched over the past 100 years. Yet that number pales to the number we can possibly reach in the near future through the newly implemented Integrated Institutional Membership model. Ultimately, we are transforming individual facilities professionals into higher performing managers and leaders who, in turn, transform their institutions into more inviting and supportive learning environments, thereby elevating the recognition and value of educational facilities, and their direct impact on the recruitment and retention of students, faculty, and staff.

That’s “what” we do—our focus and direction, products and services—but “why” do we, collectively, do this? Without APPA and its associated regions and chapters, how well would we be able to deal with the mandates that confront us all?

JUST THINK BACK…

There was a time when we were just physical plant administrators—the blue-collar steam plant operators that provided heat in the winter, A/C in the summer, and electricity year-round....but that has become an outdated perception. Today, we actively manage the investment of more money every year (if not every day) than any other department on campus. That demands we be recognized and treated as professionals—leaders in education, not just buildings and grounds.

NOW, FAST FORWARD TO TODAY’S NEEDS…

How do we recruit and successfully hire and retain the very best? How do we stay on top of our game—knowledgeable of the latest tools, techniques, and technology? How do we continue to boost productivity in the face of dwindling resources? How do we get senior administrators and trustees to take our concerns seriously? How do we create a professional work environment where our people are intrinsically motivated, enjoy their work, take pride in their daily contributions, and feel like others notice and appreciate their efforts? Answers to these questions and more get us to the heart of “Why APPA?”

SO, “WHY APPA?”

What moves you? What draws you in? Is it because:

• You want and need to be perceived and recognized as a professional? Seems practically impossible without some form of validation of the profession by a larger body of professionals, a richer network beyond ourselves and our institutions alone.

• You want and need to have a seat at the decision-making table; hence, real influence? We need to convey the message that we do not reside strictly on the expenditure side of the ledger. Truly effective educational facilities professionals are in the cost avoidance business. Institutions will live with the decisions they make regarding the built environment for decades.

• You recognize that “deferred professional development” is a plight more dangerous than “deferred maintenance?” Deferred professional development looks like a frustrated workforce that exhibits low morale, low self-esteem, and a loss of respect, is full of cynicism, and uses ineffective tools, techniques, and practices. Yet, an investment in professional development can ward off and prevent these toxic workplace conditions. It can recharge and reenergize, instill hope through exposure to new ideas, techniques, tools, and provide a supporting structure in the form of networked relationships. Remember, “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.” Where else but International APPA, its regions and chapters, would you amass...
the types of programs, products, and services to raise the professional stature of your staff?

- You want and need to have the tools to measure how you’re doing and where you’re headed? What is your mission? What are your goals? What are your specific objectives? How well are you doing? How do you stack up against your peers? What are you measuring? Remember, you can’t manage what you don’t measure. Surveys have shown that only 15 percent of employees can state any of the top three goals of their organization, and only 12 percent of them can tell you how well they’re doing on their top goals. Frankly, that’s deplorable. We have a lot of room for improvement. Where else but International APPA, its regions, and chapters would you go to get credible comparatives, benchmarks, and credentials?

- You recognize that this is NO time to be spinning or reinventing the proverbial wheel? Do you feel alone in the challenges you face? Are you just combatting the same old issues over and over? Do you get the feeling that nobody is listening? We are not alone in the challenges we face. By networking, connecting, and sharing best practices, we can learn from each other and we can all collectively do better. We gain great value from the synergistic strength between International APPA, its six regions, and associated state/local chapters.

- You must actively create the future, not just react? Do you feel like the forces of change are bouncing you this way and that? Do you find yourself blindsided each day by something you failed to anticipate? Do you feel like you have no control over what will impact you next? “The future is won by those creating the future, not by those maintaining the status quo.” Engaging emerging professionals, our colleagues in Mexico and the international community at large, in furthering the field of facilities management and its professional development is critical to our collective future success.

Studies have shown over and over that the most effective and productive employees are those who enjoy their work, find personal satisfaction in the contributions they make each day and look forward to what each new day brings. All the APPA tools, programs, and services are geared to create a work environment where your people can enjoy and take pride in what they do. True joy and happiness is found in the journey.

What does your APPA journey look like? Does it include:

- Chapter, state, regional, and international gatherings?
- Volunteering to serve?
- Getting involved?
- Attending our 100-year anniversary celebration in San Diego this July?

Ultimately, it’s not what we do but why we do it that compels each and every one of you to engage in APPA or simply to remain a member or become one. And now, APPA’s streamlined membership model allows more individuals … EVERY individual … to be exposed to a wealth of resources just by choosing to become an associate member.

You too can become a member of this rich network. Go to the APPA website… you are just a few clicks away from your exciting journey.

Lander Medlin is APPA’s executive vice president; she can be reached at lander@appa.org. Glenn Smith is APPA President and director of facilities at Bryn Mawr College in Bryn Mawr, PA. He can be reached at gsmith@brynmawr.edu.