

A Study on

MENTOR

within APPA

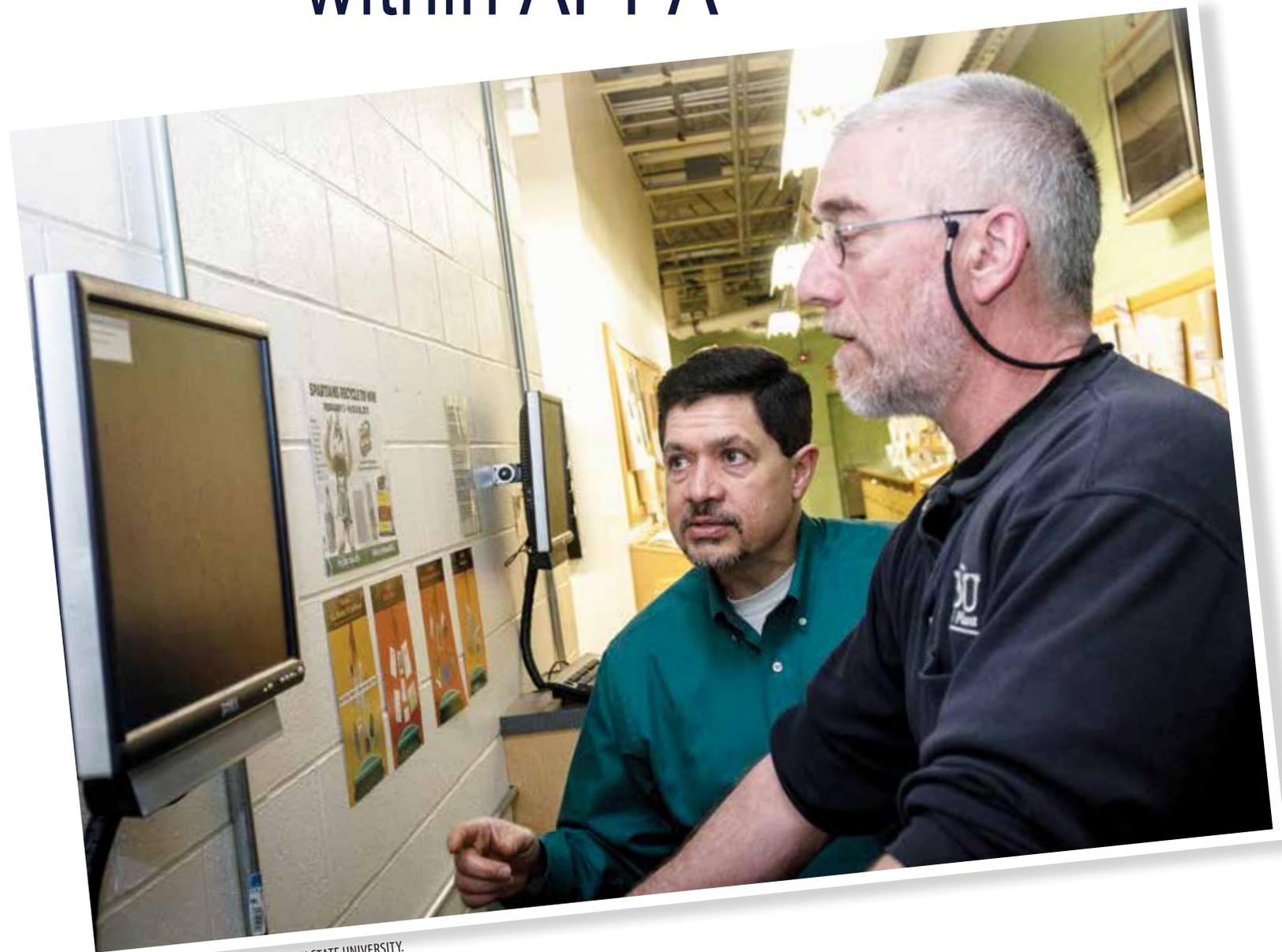


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BY JOHN P. MORRIS, P.E., CFP

MENTORING

Mentoring is not a new concept; it has its roots in ancient Greece. Homer recounted how Odysseus, before leaving home for the Trojan War, turned to his trusted friend, Mentor, to provide care and guidance in his absence for his young son, Telemachus. Thus, the word “mentor” is one that we associate with wisdom and counseling.

Throughout the millennia, mentoring or providing guidance and counsel to another individual has frequently occurred spontaneously as informal relationships: a supervisor at work who takes an interest in an emerging professional’s upward mobility, a teacher who takes extra time with a struggling or promising student, or an older family member who provides a shoulder to lean on when needed.

In recent years, as growing numbers of people have recognized the tremendous power of mentoring, formal mentoring programs have been cropping up throughout the public and private sectors. More and more community organizations, professional organizations, businesses, and governments are launching formal mentoring initiatives. Consequently, there is a growing need for skilled mentors and effective mentoring programs that adhere to sound management and operation practices. APPA now has the unique opportunity to capitalize on its own mentorship program.

In June 2014, through the support of APPA’s Center for Facilities Research (CFaR) and with the assistance of Steve Glazner, APPA’s director of knowledge management, a survey was distributed to the APPA membership requesting their interest in having a mentorship program. This article provides a summary and related inferences based on the results of that survey.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2008, the Rocky Mountain region of APPA (RMA) began a mentoring program known as the Fourteeners Club (a.k.a. 14ers Club). The purpose of the club is to:

1. Provide a recognition program for individuals within RMA who aspire to greater heights.

2. Support RMA in its mission to elevate the leadership and influence of facilities professionals.
3. Recruit and mentor others to prepare for and fulfill leadership roles at their own institutions, within RMA and within APPA.

To become a member of the 14ers Club, RMA members must climb 14 peaks. Peaks consist of longevity, participation, and service requirements. Members of the RMA 14ers Club are expected to be committed to advancing the goals of RMA and to the promotion of hospitality, mentorship, communication, and comradeship within the region.

In 2010, the Midwest region (MAPPA) began its own mentoring program known as the M&Ms (Mentors and Mentees), and the concept expanded to the Eastern region (ERAPPA) and then to the Pacific region (PCAPPA). The M&M program offers an opportunity...

1. For members to engage with other facilities management professionals.
2. To connect young professionals with seasoned professionals.
3. To share successes and lessons learned to strengthen our profession.
4. To share professional development.
5. For guidance and information.
6. To network and engage in career prospects.
7. To have fun and build lasting relationships.

In December 2013, the four regional mentoring program coordinators began a quarterly conference call to share their successes and lessons learned.

THE SURVEY

The intent of the survey was to determine the interest of APPA’s membership in mentorship programs for educational facilities professionals. Since several APPA regions had started mentoring programs, results from the survey would help determine if there is sufficient interest to continue developing additional programs.

SURVEY RESULTS

There were 347 responses to the survey. If we assume a population of 5,000 APPA members eligible to respond to the survey, then this response provides a confidence interval of just over 5 percent with a confidence level of 95 percent. This indicates that the sample size adequately represents the opinion of the overall APPA membership. If there were more than 5,000 eligible members, then the response rate would not be sufficient to be considered a true statistical sample of the

The survey asked the following questions:

1. How many years have you been in the educational facilities business?
2. What is your region?
3. Describe your leadership role/position at your institution.
4. Identify your area of responsibility.
5. Are you aware of any existing mentorship program offered by an APPA region or chapter?
6. Does your own region or chapter have a mentoring program?
7. If you answered YES to Question #6, do you participate in a mentoring program?
 - a. Are there reasons you have chosen not to participate?
8. If you have participated in a mentoring program, did you find it beneficial?
9. If APPA, your region, or chapter had a mentoring program, would you be willing to participate as a mentor?
10. If APPA, your region, or chapter had a mentoring program, would you be willing to participate as a mentee?
11. Do you feel that a mentorship program would benefit you in your career path or APPA journey?
12. What reasons would lead you to participate in a mentorship program? Check all that apply.
 - a. Develop a professional network
 - b. Address a professional challenge or problem I am facing at work.
 - c. Learn how to deal with difficult people, or assistance with a current challenge.
 - d. To enhance my career and prepare me for the next level.
 - e. Pass forward my experience.
 - f. Learn how to become more involved with APPA, my region, or my chapter.
 - g. Assist me with my APPA journey.
 - h. Assist me with developing my leadership skills.
 - i. Share knowledge.
 - j. Help others excel in their career.
 - k. Assist others in their APPA journey.
 - l. Other.
13. Do you feel there are any specific elements of a mentoring program that should be considered during the program's development?

organization; i.e., supervisor up through the senior facilities officer (SFO), and a good mix of respondents with varying areas of responsibility across the facilities profession. These various distributions allow for reasonable inferences that the survey results represent a wide distribution of the respondents without being skewed by any one group.

Over two-thirds of the respondents indicated they have participated in some form of a mentoring program in the past and found it to be very beneficial. Many of the respondents found mentoring beneficial early in their careers and would like to share that experience with others.

There is a strong willingness of respondents to participate as a mentor (81 percent). Willingness to be a mentor was evident for all levels of experience and years in the industry. As might be expected, the percentage of willingness to be a mentor for those with 0 to 5 years of experience was lower than those with greater than 15 to 20 years.

There is also a strong desire to participate as a mentee (75 percent). Those newer to the industry were more likely to want to be mentored, although there was still a high percentage (55 percent) of those with greater than 20 years in the industry that indicated they would benefit from having a mentor.

A high percentage of the respondents (85 percent) felt that a mentoring program would benefit them in their APPA journey. The 15 percent who felt otherwise tended to be retirees and longtime members of the organization. However, several of the more senior respondents felt that a mentoring program would

be a great opportunity for retirees and emeritus members to continue to contribute.

One observation that appeared contradictory is that 81 and 75 percent of respondents respectively answered "yes" to questions 9 and 10, asking if they would be willing to participate as a mentor or mentee, and 85 percent answered "yes" to question 11, asking if they felt that a mentoring program would benefit them. However, 51 percent of respondents answered "no" to question 7, asking if they participated in an existing program in their region if they were aware of it. Further investigation is necessary to determine why members do not participate despite

available population. But in this case the responses do provide enough information to make some reasonable observations and inferences. Thus, it was assumed throughout the study that the sample population adequately represents the opinions of the larger APPA membership.

The APPA overall results had a reasonable representation across all of the APPA regions ranging from 9 percent in PCAPPA to 25 percent in the Rocky Mountain region, a fairly good distribution of responses from those new to the industry through those with longer-term experience. There was a good mix of respondents throughout various leadership levels in the

the overall results indicating that they would be willing to and would find it beneficial. Mentoring may not be desirable for everyone, but there appears to be enough interest from others that a program would be beneficial.

A common concern from those who answered “no” to question 7—“Do you participate in a mentoring program?”—is the perception that it would be too time consuming. It is important for program administrators to stress that it can help save time.

For example, if a mentee is struggling with an issue, then having a mentor to talk with would save time compared to trying to solve the problem on their own. For the mentor, it may seem like it is taking more of their time to help another individual, but it may give the mentor some additional insight that helps to improve the mentor’s existing programs. Contact between mentors and mentees can be as little as one hour a month and still be productive.

Some individuals were concerned that if they were required to have face-to-face meetings, then location would be a deterrent. However, face-to-face meetings can happen at the annual regional conferences, and electronic tools such as e-mail and social media can be useful ways to stay in touch. Scheduling a regular time for a phone call (5 to 10 minutes a month) or as needed can also be effective.

When asked what specific elements of a mentoring program should be considered during the program’s development, the most common responses were:

1. Good matching and pairing of the mentor and mentee.
2. Time concerns—some were concerned that it would take too much time, especially if regular face-to-face meetings were expected.
3. Developing leadership skills.
4. Location—some felt close proximity was important, although others felt that cross-institutional matching was best in order to provide a broader perspective and network base.
5. Developing clear objectives for programs.
6. Easy access in order to reduce the time commitments and to help with pairings that may not be in the immediate location.

7. A good program review to ensure those who are participating are getting the most out of the experience.
8. Ensuring commitment by those who participate.

The most common reasons for wanting to participate in a mentoring program include sharing knowledge, passing forward experience to others, developing a professional network, helping others excel, and developing leadership skills. A high number

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Mentorship is....the 20+ year friendship and professional relationship between Lander Medlin and Doug Christensen. Each would say mentoring works in both directions.

of respondents felt that a mentoring program could help with succession planning within their organization. Over 40 percent of the respondents would like to participate to learn more, the regional governance indicating there is a market for potential future board members if the regions can help these individuals meet their goals.

CONCLUSION

There is an interest for a mentoring program within APPA, and APPA should consider endorsing the concept. All regions, with the support of APPA, should consider starting or expanding a program within their region. Those regions with existing programs should continue reviewing their programs to ensure they are meeting the expectations of the participants and continue to promote their programs.

One option to consider is for APPA to help develop the general guidelines for an APPA mentoring program and then work with each region to tailor it to their specific needs and desires. Representatives from the SFOs and the emerging professionals could assist with or provide review during the program development. It may be desirable to merge the existing programs (the RMA14ers, MAPPa, and ERAPPa)

into one mentoring program under APPA. This option may be easier for the mentorship overall and could help with explaining the program. Each region could still have certain aspects tailored to their region, but from a consistency standpoint, one program may have its advantages.

The survey responses included numerous comments that training on how to be an effective mentor would be useful. Thus, APPA may want to consider developing a mentor training program. Training could then be delivered at the regional levels, similar to training provided by the Supervisor's Toolkit. 

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