



Start Small. Just Start Writing.

By Jenna Elmer, SPHR

That is what I had to tell myself about a month after I was asked to author a chapter for APPA's Body of Knowledge (BOK). I was so intimidated by the idea of writing for such an important publication that I couldn't think of a beginning to the chapter, much less a middle or an end.



Are you interested in writing (or simply updating) a chapter to the APPA BOK? Do you know of an area of facilities that you'd like to see covered in a new BOK chapter? Here's where your expertise could help others in the facilities profession—and get you noticed by your peers. Authorship in a BOK chapter has many rewards—and all you need to get started is a willingness to share your knowledge, and a simple e-mail expressing your interest to Anita Dosik at anita@appa.org.

UP TO THE TASK

Deciding to write for APPA's BOK started with an e-mail request from Jack Hug, the content coordinator for the General Administration and Management section. To say I was flattered would be an understatement. Being asked to author a chapter for the BOK was a proud moment in my career, but I have to be honest—my overwhelming reaction was fear. I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to do it, or worse, that I wouldn't like what I wrote, or worst of all, that no one else would like what I wrote.

Even though I have more than 20 years of experience in my field, have worked for both small and large organizations, and have a passion for helping organizations build great teams, I was still unsure if I was up to the task. My self-doubt made it difficult to know what to write. I e-mailed Jack, telling him that I was overwhelmed by the amount of material I had to select from and couldn't focus on what was really important.

MIND SHIFT

Jack Hug was always there with a word of encouragement, a helpful comment, and a willingness to review even the roughest of drafts. The day I sent the first e-mail acknowledging my fears, Jack responded with some thought-provoking questions. His last question was the one that

got me moving: "So, Jenna, if I were leading your facilities organization, I would say to you: How are we going to do this?"

When I read that, I knew that I knew the answer. It was as simple as that. I may not have been sure how to write it out just yet, but I knew what I would tell a manager if they were asking me how to build a great team. I have a passion for building amazing teams. I love helping leaders get the right pieces in place so they can create awesome cultures. I needed to stop asking, "How do I write a chapter for the BOK?" and start asking, "How can I help people build great teams?"

So I started writing to you, the reader. I didn't know how to write a chapter for a book, but I did know how to talk to managers about the subject matter—so I just started writing. I wrote as if I were writing to a new manager who needed a guidebook in one of my areas of expertise. I wrote as if I were telling you some of the lessons I've learned about building great teams. I started with concise thoughts and short paragraphs. I just started writing.

THE PROCESS

The whole process took several months. In the beginning, I set aside a few hours a week to write brief paragraphs. As those paragraphs turned into pages, I dedicated a day or two to really immerse myself and ensure that my

disjointed ramblings came together to form a coherent story. As I wrote, I found that I really *did* know a lot about the subject matter. I also had friends in the industry who had written on the subject whose work I could reference. And I had some examples from my own experiences to share. As the chapter began to take shape, I felt more confident in my ability to finish the task.

And so I wrote—and wrote, and wrote. I also had great help. My staff was always willing to listen as I bounced ideas off them or to comment on my latest draft. My supervisor was always supportive, ensuring that I had time to tackle the project, and would weigh in with thoughts for the chapter. Jack Hug, my content coordinator and mentor, guided me with great words of encouragement and thought-provoking questions. And I also had a great editor—my awesome, high-school English teacher mother!

THE POINT: SHARING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

When the chapter was finally written, I felt an enormous sense of pride. I discovered that I really enjoyed the process of writing. I found that by focusing on the reader, writing became easier. I enjoyed sharing my knowledge with you. Because that is the point of the BOK, isn't it? We are all in APPA as experts in our own little (or big) areas, and we all have something we can share.

I hope there are managers out there who now know a little more about how to build an effective team because they came to the BOK for answers. I hope that I have been able to help a leader on their journey to greatness. I hope that employees will benefit from the great cultures that our facilities leaders are able to build, because those leaders have been given a few new tips, tools, and tricks for building an effective workforce.

And I hope that you will think about

sharing your own knowledge. Have a conversation with a BOK author or the content coordinators. Do you have something that you can contribute? Can you write a chapter for APPA's BOK? I'll bet you can. And I'll bet that there's a lot I can learn from you.

So, start small. Just start writing. ☺

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