

Valuing the Difference Between Then and Now

By George F. Stooks

What is your role in your state or region's APPA chapter? Do you have one? Do you know what value added it can bring to your position? Regardless of the stage of your career or your role in facilities management, being able to answer those questions positively will assist you when sooner or later you engage in that inevitable reflection, "If only I knew then what I know now."

Regardless of the efforts we put forth on our respective campuses and the seemingly minor miracles we in facilities perform, often without recognition, there is one thing that none of us possess. Neither the most sage of those among us, with 20 to 30 years of experience, nor the newest recruit, has the ability to look into the future and predict it with accuracy. If we could possess the skill of knowing how to acquire "perfect information," how easily our decisions would be made.

Alas, none of us possess that skill, so we must rely on others, including our staff and colleagues at other local and state institutions—and even further afield, members of our respective regional APPA chapters. Over the years I have encountered individuals who see absolutely no value in the association conferences or educational tracks, and yes—no value in the networking that comes with those things, and the great value it brings us. APPA membership brings value to us as individuals, and whether we realize it now or not, when the time comes to apply its benefits, it will again bring value home to our respective organizations.

THE CHALLENGE TO TEACH

Year after year in chapter and regional meetings, we hear about the graying of those involved in chapter boards of directors and committees, and of the need to recruit younger members or new blood. Our challenge is not to recruit; our challenge is to teach: to teach the value of building knowledge and the value added that will come with getting involved

and staying involved. This participation should not be reserved for "up and comers" at institutions, but must be inclusive and involve everyone possible, up to and including campus administration. Time and again we hear of institutional support, or more often the lack thereof, for what we do when involved at the chapter, regional, and national level. This involvement is seen as taking away from our "day job," when in fact it adds value.

The challenge is that there is no simple formula or calculation that can measure the value added of membership. We know that often it is facts and data that carry the day, and even these may not win the argument for support. I know now that only one demonstration will not help turn the tide to stronger institutional support. It takes many demonstrations at every opportunity to demonstrate the value of building a network of knowledge and contacts.

One might say that the cause calls for one's personality to include a little-bit of educator, spiced up with some salesmanship, and topped off with a dash of opportunist to eventually turn the tide in gaining institutional support. We must be aware of the opportunities to manage up and to teach in the process. We work at institutions of higher learning, yet we pass up prime opportunities to teach others to find this path and, at times, even to learn ourselves.



"APPA membership brings value...home to our respective organizations."

THE CHALLENGE TO GET INVOLVED

Reflect for a moment on that oft-repeated statement, "If I only knew then what I know now." Instead of looking at that phrase negatively, think about what it means: You have learned a lot since "then," and you can use all of that valuable knowledge to help others. Certainly, learning opportunities abound for you as a leader regardless of the stage you are at within your career. But more importantly, you have an opportunity to reflect on the lessons you have learned between "then" and "now," and to impart them to those who are either new to facilities management or have not yet seen the value in getting involved. Of course, it is never too late to build on that body of knowledge you have acquired. In fact, one could argue that the day we give up on learning something new as professionals, it is be time to move on.

We find ourselves in trying times in higher education, with a reduced demographic of graduating high school seniors for which we are all competing to bolster enrollment. I would argue that it is during trying

times that a strong network becomes especially valuable. When you can reach into that network—that "bag of tricks"—and move an issue forward or dislodge it from wherever it is stuck, then you have truly demonstrated the value added of APPA membership. Such times can be opportunities—opportunities not only to learn more ourselves, but to take those we lead and encourage them to become more involved in APPA. It's vital to build their network so that when they become leaders, they will value the difference between "then" and "now," and know the importance of teaching that same value to the newest generation of facilities managers. ☎

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