

Book Review Editor: Theodore J. Weidner, Ph.D., P.E., CEFP, AIA

It's budgeting time for facilities officers. What will the next fiscal year look like and how will strategic plans get implemented and coordinated with others? While the pressure to get plans ready may seem too intense to allow time for extra reading, here are two books that should be considered nevertheless. They can be used together or individually to weave through the complexities of annual and multiyear plans.

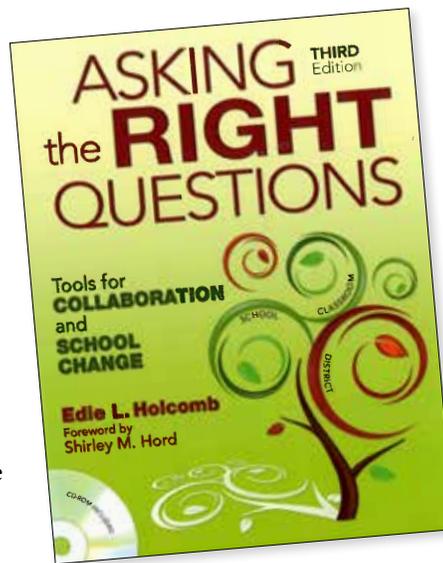
### ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS: TOOLS FOR COLLABORATION AND SCHOOL CHANGE, 3RD ED.

Corwin Press/SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA, Edie L. Holcomb, 2009, 200 pp., softcover with CD-ROM (\$38).

Facilities officers recognize that they deliver a service to the community where they work. Forward-looking facilities officers recognize they need key performance indicators (KPIs) that help them identify whether the services they deliver are moving in the right direction. However, they are challenged by customers who frequently have difficulty identifying what is important for them to receive from the facilities organization. For example, my personal experience at one campus was frustrating because the provost refused to identify which facilities should be prioritized for capital renewal. This personal experience isn't unique—tools are needed.

If there are people who would like metrics to demonstrate that the educational mission is being served by the facilities organization, but need help developing the KPIs, they can find one tool in *Asking the Right Questions*. While the book is not written specifically for facilities, it is written for the education market, to help education administrators identify areas for improvement and the measures to track them. That's what facilities officers need, a tool to develop their plans and KPIs.

The tools presented in *Asking the Right Questions* help identify areas of concern and the measures necessary for improvement; they are applicable to any



organization. Getting past the instructional focus may be difficult for some readers; but once that's done, the book provides steps that can be applied to almost any organization. As an example, when APPA gathers experts to tackle its annual Thought Leaders Series topic, one can observe similar tools being used. (Oops, the secret is out!)

Techniques such as brainstorming, prioritizing, focusing, and measuring are all aimed at answering five basic questions: 1) Where are we now? 2) Where do we want to go? 3) How will we get there? 4) How will we know

we are there? and 5) How can we keep it going? These are all important questions to ask; the questions won't change but the answers will, as dedicated people work to improve service delivery. That's the goal for forward-looking facilities officers.

The accompanying CD-ROM contains key portions of the book's text and figures plus editable forms of important figures/diagrams to be used in groups that are looking to ask the right questions. Once a person masters the process described in *Asking the Right Questions*, the tools on the CD make it possible to lead multiple teams through the process. Thus, the book with accompanying CD can become a very useful tool.

## STORYTELLING WITH DATA: A DATA VISUALIZATION GUIDE FOR BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS

Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ, 2015, 250 pp., softcover (\$21).

Despite the crush of their many activities, facilities officers work with huge amounts of data every day. Much of the data they use is condensed to KPIs or other metrics that make the flood of data manageable or measurable. While some facilities officers can look at a table filled with numbers and extract what is important at a glance, others cannot. More importantly, when it comes to explaining the data to others outside the facilities organization, the numbers are meaningless unless they are presented in an informative and meaningful fashion. But how can that be done?

Most have heard of the “elevator speech,” that 30 to 60 seconds you have to tell a compelling story or sell yourself. Colleges and universities include the elevator speech in at least one assignment on communications or leadership, because business runs at a fast pace. There’s a limited time to get your point across before the listener moves on to the next topic (or floor). With some graphical support, the elevator speech provides more information faster, especially if the graphics are effective. That’s the focus of *Storytelling with Data*.

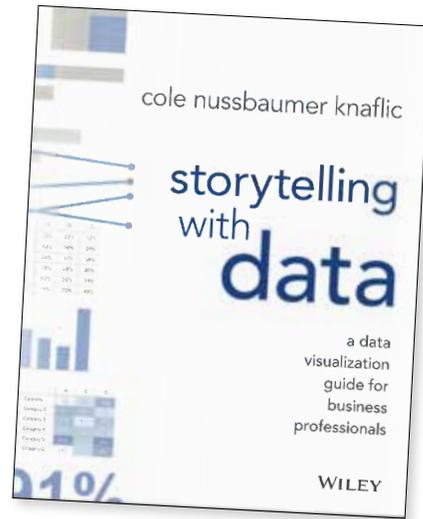
*Storytelling with Data* is written like a story (but it’s not revealed until near the end). There’s the set-up, the dilemma, and the resolution. Without picking on a software package, the author explains why fancier is not better. Just as in an elevator speech, the graphics can’t be cluttered or complicated. The human eye and brain move from point to point

and focus on things based on recognized patterns. Understanding those behaviors and connections can lead to better, more informative graphics.

To supplement the elevator speech properly, the graphics must be organized and highlighted, as one graph or picture may not tell the story without creating confusion. As we see in printed matter, presenting the reader with lots of different fonts on the page has the same effect as using too much color or line types in a graph; the reader focuses on the different elements rather than the desired message. KISS is a great principle to remember in the elevator speech and graphics.

As with most good stories, *Storytelling with Data* has a happy ending. That nasty software with all the features that create

bad graphical information can be harnessed to create good graphical information. The process is described clearly, in a step-by-step manner that will help the facilities officer present complex data in a compelling way. Paired with other tools that help generate and/or reduce the data you need, *Storytelling with Data* is an essential resource. 📖



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