

The Meaningful Impact of Saying Thank You

By Timothy Carey, Ed.D.

Facilities organizations regularly deal with emergencies and calamities of one kind or another. A fierce snowstorm or hurricane; a broken pipe or sprinkler head; an uncooperative boiler at two a.m. in January—we have all been there. Like my team, I suspect that yours always rises to the occasion and returns the building or grounds to normal operation in timeframes that are oftentimes amazing. Following such incidents, there is typically an outpouring of appreciation from facilities leadership, customer cohorts, and the institution's senior leadership. Front-line staff members are acknowledged—oftentimes publicly—for their herculean efforts. And appropriately so.

My purpose in writing this piece, however, is to share my strategy to convey thanks to the facilities team at times other than those stressful, all-hands-on-deck scenarios noted above. Indeed, the most impactful thank you can occur when an employee is simply doing his or her routine task. I care about the people in my organization. They work very hard—and many hustle to a second job when their on-campus shift concludes. I also recognize that the salaries paid to some members of the team are among the lowest of all full-time employees on campus. I therefore want my team members to know that I value their hard work, dedicated service, and loyalty to our core values of supporting the recruitment and retention efforts of students as well as faculty and staff members. As I have mentioned to my team on numerous occasions, we never want a student, faculty, or staff member to not choose Ithaca College—or to leave—because of a facilities issue.



Accordingly, I have found that saying “thank you” in varied ways is both meaningful and impactful to the valued men and women who work on the facilities team. Although this may sound far from profound, I believe it becomes commonplace—unintentionally, of course—to neglect to acknowledge employee performance during times of normal operation. My sense is that a major component of the chief facility officer’s responsibilities is to ensure that our staff members feel valued in an environment where their efforts are oftentimes taken for granted. After all, good facilities performance means that staff members are largely invisible. If the classroom is clean, if the temperature is at an appropriate and comfortable level, if the lights are not flickering, if the elevator works, if the ceiling tiles are not stained, few customers notice. Said differently, a quiet day at the Facilities Help Desk typically means good performance; however, this does not mean that it should be a day without thanking and acknowledging employee performance.

Examples of the some of the ways I routinely demonstrate and/or express my thanks to facilities team members:

Saying thank you during informal walk-throughs of buildings and grounds. One of the things I truly

enjoy is something I refer to as “walk-around time.” My walking tours can occur at any time—including nights and weekends. Showing up unannounced and seeing an employee perform their task well is fulfilling to me, and is a value of the organization that I lead. Saying thank you in this environment is indeed impactful to employees.

Hand-written birthday cards for every member of the Facilities Team. I value the impact this practice has on the members of my team. A birthday card provides an opportunity to wish a staff member an enjoyable day as well as a chance to acknowledge the significant contributions they have had on the team and institution during the past year. By doing this via an actual birthday card (not an email or virtual card), the level of appreciation becomes personalized and magnified.

Life-Skills training sessions as a component of divisional meetings. Exposing facilities employees to important non-work related topics is another way that I say “thank you” to my team. In addition to budgetary updates, discussions about upcoming institutional strategic imperatives, and other important information sharing during my All-Facilities Gatherings, I also include a session on a topic that has nothing to do with being an employee within a facilities department, but, rather, will provide information and insight into a topic that could impact their personal lives. A recent example: a guest speaker who presented Retirement 101 (because I am convinced that too many facilities employees do not pay close enough attention to this topic). Said differently, I strive to ensure that staff members feel valued as persons who have lives and responsibilities outside of the academe.

Give “Props” to the facilities team during presentations around the campus—even when they are not in attendance. As the chief facilities officer, I have the distinct privilege to present updates about exciting new capital projects, deferred renewal initiatives, and plans for continued pursuit of carbon neutrality—to name a just a few topics—to trustees, senior leadership, and faculty, staff, and student governance groups. I feel compelled to always begin my remarks by saying something along the lines of: “I proudly stand before you

representing 190 hard-working facilities employees.” This is, of course another way to acknowledge and thank the folks who are truly deserving of recognition within the facilities organization.

Much of what I have written in this piece is not earth-shattering or cutting-edge to many readers. Furthermore, I suspect some of you have additional means to express informal thanks to team members. I am hopeful, however, that my written words provide all of us with a reminder that acknowledging your team in varied informal forums is beneficial to your department’s work product, to your recruitment and retention efforts, and dare I say, to your bottom line. Perhaps most importantly, however, it is the absolute right thing to do. With that, I say “thank you!” ☺

Tim Carey is the associate vice president and chief facilities officer at Ithaca College in upstate New York. He can be contacted at tcarey@ithaca.edu.

COMPREHENSIVE FACILITY EXPERTS

fm²

FACILITY MANAGEMENT METRICS

888-887-9995, ext. 201
www.adamsfm2.com • info@adamsfm2.com

The advertisement features a background image of hands reviewing architectural blueprints. The text is overlaid on this image, with the company name and logo at the top, the main service offering in large bold letters in the center, and contact details at the bottom.