



Technical to Managerial Transitioning

By Matt Adams, P.E.

The “Career Ladder” built into our organizations is one feature that helps us attract talent to the facilities department. While these ladders and their stair-stepped position descriptions are not always utilized, the opportunity needs to be there. In theory a newly hired housekeeper-in-training can one day work her way to the director of the department slot. We want our staff to reach their highest potential; even if that means one day moving onto greater challenges outside of the facilities department.

SUCCESS REQUIRES HARD WORK (FROM EVERYONE)

However, creating and encouraging this career growth takes hard work—and not just from the prospective candidates moving up to new positions. Thoughtful and intelligent position designs are required from management (and human resource representatives). The work done by management needs to receive increased emphasis and priority. Those in management for years know all too well the cliché about the person who proved to be the best master plumber the department ever had—he was promoted to plumbing supervisor and failed miserably. More than likely this would not have happened if management had done the hard work required to perfect the career ladder for



this tradesperson.

Managers within facilities departments often excel at identifying internal or external candidates by their technical skills, such as plumbing, grounds, boiler operations, and so on. However, what policies

and practices do we have in place when a skilled stationary engineer wants to become the manager of the boiler plant? From one perspective you could say that the success of a manager, supervisor, or other mid-level manager has more impact on the organization than individual staff. Thus the investment into new managers must be significant and based on winning strategies. One clear strategy is training.

CONTINUOUS THOUGHTFUL TRAINING

In any successful department there is training of all kinds taking place continually, year after year, in a planned way. Each person has a professional development plan that they are executing each year and is receiving the training that enables them to grow professionally. This same approach should be applied to potential managers. Staff members who have elected to seek managerial positions should be entered into a program of apprenticeship and training.

The sources of training, including APPA, are considerable. A schedule and menu of classes should be organized and kept current.

Candidates desiring managerial skills should complete classes to learn a wide range of skills that fall under the broad scope of management (customer service, business communications, project management, management systems, and many others.) This process

is built around an initial assessment of the candidate's strengths and weaknesses, which is critical so that good managers have the confidence to empower their staff. A common mistake of new managers coming from a skilled trade position is to misunderstand the new paradigm of job performance.

For example, as a journey-level plumber, a candidate is judged primarily by his or her individual performance. The paradigm changes dramatically when the same plumber becomes the plumbing supervisor, and is judged based on the performance of the department. This seems like an obvious distinction, but it remains one of the most repeated failures of new managers. They do not delegate or empower effectively and sometimes micromanage their direct reports into a culture of mistrust and poor morale.

MENTORING NEW LEADERS

Robyn Maynard, facilities services coordinator for the award winning Brownsburg Community School Corporation, supports the idea of mentoring new leaders. In her career she has seen the benefits of gradually increasing the candidate's exposure to actual leadership situations. This is another example of the work required of existing managers to develop new leaders. Although a carefully selected protégé would be expected to gain leadership experience by working with his or her mentor, this privilege should extend to others that have expressed interest as well.

Shadowing is one technique that provides a new perspective to management candidates. This practice can be used for any direct report or for staff from other service centers as well. A candidate that can shadow a manager from a department other than their own would be a useful perspective. In addition, small projects should be assigned to candidates, to help them become more confident leading others and delegating tasks.

As managers, we want to identify strengths and weaknesses in that candidate and adjust their apprenticeship

accordingly. However, this process may also identify some character flaws that cannot be overcome. There is no better way to identify potential new leaders within the organization than by giving them the opportunity to demonstrate their ability in actual situations over an extended period of time. It is one thing to lie or exaggerate one's skills during an interview, and another to fake those skills over the course of a year of apprenticeship.

THE DREADED INTERVIEW—A WINDOW TO THE APPLICANT

Ultimately there will always be the dreaded interview! Whether it be for only an hour or over the course of several days, little has changed during interviews within our industry over the years. As mentioned before, we are great at discerning a candidate's technical skills. We already know they have technical skills if they have mastered their technical discipline before applying for a management position. But what we really need is to identify an entirely different set of skills, character traits, and emotional intelligence.

Recently, at the APPA Leadership Academy, new leaders in our industry were asked to design questions for interviews to identify both desirable and undesirable personality traits of management candidates. One idea brought up several times was the utilization of scenario interview questions. For example, you could present the candidate with a scenario where there are multiple campus customers with service needs on a given day, and you as the supervisor are short-handed due to absenteeism and cannot complete the work. How do you manage this situation? Others suggested that candidates be given a scenario where their boss was micromanaging them. How would they address this situation or could they even identify it as micromanagement?

Some other character-based interview questions from the "Integrity Training Institute" were also useful:

- How do you reinforce behavior you

want repeated (in a non-monetary way)?

- How do you develop untapped potential in your staff?
- How do you build and maintain morale with your staff in a non-monetary way?
- What are the primary management styles? Describe each. Which is *your* predominant style? How have you applied those characteristics? What successes and shortcomings have you experienced with your management style?
- How do you demonstrate that you value people for who they are rather than for what they accomplish?
- How would you handle an employee who upsets you in front of other employees in the middle of a rush?
- How would you handle an unusual problem you never encountered before?
- When there was serious conflict within the team, how did you resolve it?
- On projects that were behind schedule, what are some of the ways you successfully got them back on track?
- How would you handle a person who has to wait for a long time?
- How would you deal with an angry customer on the phone? In person?
- What three things most likely would make you angry when dealing with customers?
- Give us an example of a difficult situation and how you handled it?
- You have learned that a fellow employee found some cash in a vacant apartment and did not turn it in. What would you do?

Our staff is the most valuable resource we have within any facilities department. Our managers are responsible for that staff. There is every reason to rethink how we develop, identify, and support our up-and-coming leaders. 💰

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