

How Complex Facilities Strategies Have Changed Recruitment

By Jim Lord

Facilities management plays an instrumental role in educational institutions as these organizations develop and execute strategies to maximize budgets, reduce operating costs, leverage advanced technologies, and integrate sustainability. Such initiatives infiltrate all aspects of facilities, including maintenance, capital programs, and utilities management, and while they may seem like challenges, in reality, they are opportunities to efficiently and effectively manage a campus and its real estate portfolio.

For many institutions, the most difficult questions to consider aren't "What goals do we want to achieve?" and "How can we meet our objectives?" but rather, "Do we have a facilities leader who can develop and lead strategies?" and "Do we have the staff who can execute those strategies?" Those of us involved in facilities management directly or indirectly realize there is a significant shortage of talent at all levels of the industry, from senior management to maintenance personnel, which can interfere with both the short- and long-term plans of our educational institutions. Therefore, recruitment is a key part of an effective facilities management program.

MULTIPLE AND INTANGIBLE SKILLS REQUIRED

An interesting fact about facilities recruitment today is that because of the level of talent needed to successfully perform in most facilities roles, technical skills aren't the only requirements that organizations seek. Objectives and plans now require facilities professionals who have strong financial aptitudes and business acumens, who understand how to effectively manage large capital programs and analyze life-cycle operating costs and return on investment, and who are well informed on the latest advancements in energy management and sustainability.

Capital planning and construction, a tangential

arm of facilities management, demands certain capabilities as well. With major capital program investments comes the need for executives who can oversee construction processes, institute alternative building methods, monitor budgets, and implement cost-saving measures to ensure projects are successful and have high returns on investment.

Let's not forget the intangible skills that have always been in demand—personal drive; strong communication and presentation skills; the ability to build, manage, and empower a team; and the strength to lead an organization or department through major changes. Higher education institutions also want professionals who can communicate with researchers, board members, and the community at large. These are skills that can't be obtained by taking a class or passing a certification exam. A person either has them or they don't.

RECRUITMENT AND TALENT SHORTAGE

All of this said, effective recruitment is critical to successful facilities management programs simply because of the complexities of such programs. Due to the widespread shortage of talent and the impending retirement of the majority of baby boomers, especially in the upper-tier of professionals, prospective employees have to be aggressively pursued because they're probably not looking for new career opportunities.

Over the past few years, universities and colleges have addressed the talent shortage by looking outside of the higher education sector for viable "nontraditional" candidates, meaning those professionals who are involved in a tangential industry but who have skill sets that are applicable to an institution's facilities role.

For example, attracting a professional from a corporate environment to that of higher education can bring a fresh perspective and a solid understanding of return on investment. Academic

institutions have become much more open to nontraditional candidates than they were in the early 2000s, because they've realized the value that these types of employees can offer them.

Another interesting component of facilities recruitment is that many individuals now entering the field are coming from more of a white-collar background involving property/asset management and computerized systems. Acquiring individuals with high-tech experience and partnering them with seasoned facilities professionals who are possibly nearing retirement can create tremendous opportunities for educational institutions.


A TIGHT CANDIDATE MARKET CAN MEAN A FAVORABLE JOB MARKET

Although there are many strategies to acquire facilities talent in this tight candidate market, the basics of a successful talent acquisition plan are simple. First, it's essential to know what needs to be accomplished and what an institution wants in a candidate before initiating the recruitment process. Responsibilities and objectives should be clarified and agreed upon by all parties well before recruitment ads are placed and résumés are reviewed.

Additionally, preferred qualifications and experiences should be carefully considered not only for a role's current responsibilities but its expansion and the extended value it can provide to an institution. When an institution's facilities department is clear about what it needs and wants, recruitment can be much more focused and strategic.

It should be noted that all of these circumstances have generated a favorable job market for facilities and capital programs professionals who are adept at what they do, ready to take on more responsibilities, and have the soft skills that are in high demand.

The many changes and advancements occurring in facilities management can be demanding on educational institutions, but when handled correctly they can be stimulating and inspiring. Institutions that embrace these changes and view them as opportunities to

improve their campus and portfolio management will undoubtedly create bright futures for their organizations, students, and communities. 

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