

The Changing Face(s) of Facilities Management

In simpler times and in the halcyon days of cheap energy, the activities associated with maintaining a building were almost exclusively hands-on and physical. Decisions made about repair situations revolved around the immediate setting and results were obvious – if not necessarily optimum. In many cases, they didn't have to be the best solutions, just the quickest.

As building systems and equipment became more sophisticated and the maintenance and operating demands on them more complex, the role of building operators needed to evolve as well. A major function of the BOC training is to help people in the profession bridge this knowledge gap and to address these complexities. The person that may have been attracted to a maintenance position in the past because he or she enjoyed fixing things is now obliged to bring a more complete package to the job, the most important being an ability to understand how buildings operate as a whole. It is likely that those who may have been attracted to the field in the past have little interest in its new requirements, and those whose skill set makes them suited to current facilities management don't really know that they are.

Many industry observers say that this has resulted in a shortage of the "succession layer" of qualified facilities managers and will become a major issue once the current layer starts to retire. Joel Leonard, of MPACT Learning in Greensboro, NC cites industry analyst studies saying that within the next ten years, anywhere from 40% to 70% of the facilities management workforce will be retiring. The average age in the field is 48 years old, exacerbating an already critical situation.

There has always been a dearth of women in the facilities maintenance field. MPACT Learning also conducted an informal poll that suggested the field is currently made up of about 5% women. Reasons for this probably center on traditional gender roles as much as anything. But these roles have reversed themselves in other fields such as law and medicine, where school enrollments are about even. Why not facilities management?

In speaking with several BOC graduates who are women, it is apparent that at least some of the women currently in the field have come to believe it is a natural for them – and should be for other women as well.

Teresa Rodgers, Building Operations Manager: In by Default, But Staying by Design

Teresa Rodgers had been in administration for the majority of her working career and until two years ago, held the position of Assistant to the CEO at ID Biomedical's Bothell, WA location. The company was growing dramatically and it was decided to estab-



*Teresa Rodgers, Building Operations Manager,
ID Biomedical, Bothell, WA.*

lish a Facilities Engineering department to formalize building operations and keep growth manageable.

Drew Coleman joined IDB as Director of Facilities. He was supposed to hire an engineer, but in trying to assemble a working history of the facility for the Bothell site, questions about repair records or cost would consistently be answered with, "Ask Teresa." Says Coleman, "It was readily apparent that Teresa knew the inner workings of the facility and had various contacts. She liked making things happen, but had not had any facility engineering and operations training. Having trained dozens of people in engineering and science in my career, I felt that she had the potential to learn more and progress." Coleman took her into his group. He believed BOC training would be invaluable to Rodgers and encouraged her to attend.

Rodgers had previously worked in commercial real estate management on the administrative side and was somewhat

aware of the problems associated with running a building. Although previously not "hands-on" in the field, she credits a willingness to learn and take on new projects, a natural proclivity for fixing things and her strong organizational abilities as the major assets that have helped her fit into her new role.

Coming into a male-dominated field has had its moments. When she entered her Level I BOC training classes, Rodgers noticed some wariness at her presence among her all-male classmates. As classes went on, however, a noticeable change took place. Says Rodgers, "I sensed I was getting a grudging respect. It was hard-earned but, once given, rock-solid. Now I feel comfortable calling on them as a resource and have even had them call on me."

From the BOC training, Rodgers believes she gained knowledge and credibility. Never having been afraid to jump into things and try and fix them, Rodgers now says, "I look forward to getting up and going to work. There's always something to be done, some problem to be solved, and it's very satisfying."

Being a relative newcomer to the field has had its advantages as well. Rodgers believes a fresh perspective brings new approaches to processes that may not have changed for years because "that's the way it's always been done." With her training and experience, she now feels more than comfortable asking "Why?"

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This past May, Rodgers, now Building Operations Manager, successfully completed her BOC Level I training and eagerly awaits beginning Level II in the fall. "I truly believe that the qualities usually associated with women – attention to detail, a pragmatic attitude in approaching problems and projects – are qualities that this field rewards. As more women come to realize this, they will see building management as a very lucrative field for them."

**Elaine Robbins, Facility Manager:
*Pursuing an Interest and Making it Work***



Elaine Robbins, former Facility Manager at Verizon Wireless in Irvine, CA and now Facilities Manager at Pacific Sunwear, has been in the business for sixteen years. Previous to that, her field was human resources but she finally concluded she had no interest in it and realized that she just liked doing thing with her hands. Robbins has successfully completed both BOC

Level I and Level II trainings and she, too, noticed a lot of stares in classes and in her role as a facilities manager. "You get used to it. You know you're as competent as anyone in the room."

While she still enjoys some of the down-and-dirty work, nowadays her job is primarily vendor management. The industry in general has been trending to outsourcing of various maintenance tasks and having a comprehensive knowledge of building operations allows Robbins to scrutinize vendor work to ensure that the company is getting the job it's paying for. BOC training has helped fill in gaps and make the picture more complete.

"You have to look at things from every angle," says Robbins, "from the customer perspective, from the vendor perspective, from the owner's perspective. You can't have blinders on when you're trying to develop the most efficient solution to a problem. I believe women tend to look at a more complete picture."

Robbins recognizes the trend toward outsourcing and understands that this is why vendor management plays such an important part. But she sees a negative to this trend as well because each building has its own personality and in-house staff people are more likely to learn its quirks, as they would a person's.

For Robbins, the learning never stops because she believes building management requires a constant renewal of skills as equipment improves and codes become more demanding. "There's a lot of pressure that comes with the job because you have a responsibility to keep people safe and healthy."

**Judy Johnson, NOW Emergency Management Coordinator:
*Where Interest and Experience Meet***



"Safe and healthy" is everything to Judy Johnson these days. Johnson is with the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. She was a Facilities Operation Manager until a year ago, but her experience made her the best candidate for the department's NOW Emergency Management Coordinator. Her task?

To write an emergency plan of action for all four hundred of the department's statewide facilities – large to small – taking into account the buildings and lots, as well as the

19,000 people at those sites. Whether the potential problem is natural or man-made, it must be considered and addressed.

Johnson was a boat builder in the 70's and in the early 80's owned her own construction company, which was geared to solar energy homes. In 1983, she became a building official in Olympia, WA. Having been a building official for eighteen years, Johnson has a comprehensive knowledge of building construction and how facilities' systems work. She understands the importance of seeing parts of a system and how they interact with the whole. Creating an emergency plan of this size requires an enormous level of experience, attention to detail and preparedness.

"Building technology is far beyond turning wrenches and edging into crawlspaces. You have to have a level of practical ability, but you also have to have fundamental knowledge," says Johnson. For this reason, in her previous position as Facilities Operation Manager, she had all her people go through the BOC Level I training.

While she strongly supports getting women into the industry, she also hopes to see more men as well, because of the absence of any succession layer for retiring workers in the field. "I don't think some people even think of building management as an occupation," observes Johnson, "but it represents a great opportunity for women and men alike."

As President of the International Facility Management Association local South Sound chapter for three years, Johnson has constantly been a resource for questions on construction-related issues. This is a great part of the work for her – fun to be a resource and satisfying to help people out.

**Christian Crowell, Facilities Manager:
*An Unexpected - but Gratifying - Path***



Christian Crowell was a numbers person by career design. Her background was as a business analyst and she did not think her MBA would lead her to anything like facilities management. Crowell started her association with facilities management at Weyerhaeuser's Federal Way, WA location in August of 2000. Facilities operations had been in-house but were to be out-

sourced. Her initial project was to develop metrics to assess the cost-effectiveness of various outsourced projects and the performance of vendors.

As a means to understanding the overall picture of what she was working with, Crowell took the BOC Level I training. She went with a colleague who was a mechanical engineer, a nuts-and-bolts guy. The classes she attended leaned toward nuts-and-bolts participants. "I'd never been too hands-on with this kind of thing, so in Level I, I needed help with my homework." But it was all vocabulary and once the "nuts and bolts" were clear, Crowell was confident in the value of her metrics data and her training in Level II reinforced that judgment. "Buildings are big mechanical structures, so you have to check efficiency in concrete terms and be able to interpret those terms to assess the structure's needs."

Crowell believes that data is an essential part in staying ahead of the ball to manage a facility to its optimum capability. "It's more about being a planner than a savior, more strategy than heroics. Everything needs to be documented – I can't stress this enough."

You've got to have data to stay ahead of the ball," says Crowell. "The biggest impact BOC had was that it wasn't just getting educated, but it put me in the mode to ask questions like, 'Why don't we try it this way?'"

Understanding the big picture is one useful tool, but your ideas still have to be substantiated and accepted. To do this requires knowledge and diplomacy. Going forward, Crowell believes that the qualities facilities managers will need includes political savvy, better communications skills, multi-tasking abilities and strong problem-solving skills. The needs have changed; the job has changed. She sees more women entering the field, mostly from the space-planning side, which may tend to distance facilities management jobs from the nuts-and-bolts side, with the latter's functions trending towards outsourcing. Crowell believes that a grasp of both sides is most advantageous, but if the trend continues, data and understanding data will play a vital role in facilities management. "The only way you can manage something from a distance is with data, an element now more critical than ever."

A Serious Need for Change

Joel Leonard of MPACT Learning, the impetus behind the informal survey citing that women comprise only about 5% of facilities maintenance personnel, has been trying to address the issues of having no succession layer and the lack of women in the field and has even written songs to attract attention to the problem of a major skill shortage facing the industry. [For the musically inclined, these can be downloaded at www.mpactlearning.com] Leonard believes that women are a huge, untapped market for the industry and his reasons for thinking it was a natural field for them were

strikingly similar to those of the BOC women: strong attention to detail, ability to look at the big picture and a greater patience when the solution might not be immediate.

Drew Coleman of ID Biomedical believes it is becoming more and more common to see women engineers. "They can do anything a man can do. All they need is a chance to work without undue bias and prejudice. Any new engineer needs training, whether in people skills or engineering."

Overcoming ingrained attitudes is always difficult. But things are changing. Interestingly, the women interviewed for this article all agreed that reactions to their jobs from other women fall into definite age categories. Generally, younger women are more excited and interested in the idea of running a building, but baby boomer women are a little more bemused at why anyone would want to. Stereotypes do die hard, but it seems they die even harder in the maintenance and repair field.

Perhaps the easier acceptance of the twenty- and thirty-something women is a good sign for the future of facilities management. It is clear that the field needs people – women **and** men. It is clear that efforts need to be made to recruit people into an occupation that, at present, does not have a high profile. One can start a little at a time though. Teresa Rodgers, the relative newcomer to the field, had this to say, "I assume that your readers are largely men. Well, I'd like to see them pass this article on to any bright, capable women that they know to let them see the possibilities. That's one way of spreading the word."

So please, pass it on!

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