





# Building your professional reputation

## Overcoming challenges facing hospital facilities managers

ARTICLE BY **CAMILLE N.Y. FINK**

**T**o have strong professional reputations, health facilities managers must develop skills, build relationships, showcase value and foster employee growth both within and outside of their organizations.

But, at its core, professional reputation for health care facilities managers is about building trust — with members of a team, with peers and senior leadership within an organization, and with colleagues in the American Society for Health Care Engineering (ASHE) and the field more broadly.

Establishing that credibility is a multifaceted process that happens over time. Ultimately, strong professional reputations mean facilities managers have more influence and opportunities to effect meaningful change.

ASHE's professional reputation committee is developing the tools, resources and knowledge that members need to achieve the mission and goals of their organizations.

The committee is completing a series of action plans, each focused on a different aspect of professional reputation: leadership attributes and tools, member and peer alignment, member spotlight features, and women's networking and mentoring.

These action plans are a useful guide for exploring the various ways health care facilities management professionals can enhance their professional reputations throughout their careers.

### Developing essential skills

While technical skills and knowledge are integral in health care facilities management, they are just part of the set of tools that managers need to be successful.

"A good health care facilities manager needs to have leadership skills," says York Chan, SASHE, CHC, CHFM, recently retired vice president of facilities at Advocate Aurora Health, Downers Grove, Ill. "Knowing how to listen to people, how to motivate people, how to lead and direct

people — those are just as important as knowing the technical skills.”

These soft skills, communications in particular, enable facilities managers to work with people throughout their organizations and to bolster their professional reputations. The ability to communicate effectively, both downward and upward from front-line staff up through senior leadership, is essential. For example, knowing how to speak to C-suite managers without using technical jargon conveys an understanding of their interests and needs.

Chan says that management classes are informative, but he honed his communications skills largely on the job.

“I came into the field on the technical side, and I learned leadership skills from experience,” Chan says. “You make a mistake once, and the next time you’re not going to say that same thing to a person. Over the course of my 39 years in health care facilities management, it was always a learning process.”

Compassionate communications skills are especially important for interactions with patients and staff in other departments, says John DiGirolomo, MBA, CHFM, CHC, CHSP, CHEP, FASHE, senior vice president at St. Barnabas Hospital, New York City. At his facility, he participates in the senior leadership rounding program, where senior leaders visit different departments together to connect with staff and managers throughout the hospital.

“First and foremost, we recognize staff and thank them for the work they do,” DiGirolomo says. “And we learn about the tasks they do that we might not be familiar with.”

The first step in developing leadership skills is identifying the skills needed, but that process can be challenging.

“One of things I learned early on was having some self-awareness,” says Dean Pufahl, CHFM, CHC, director of facility services at Froedtert and The Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and ASHE immediate past president. “You need to sit back and say, ‘Maybe I don’t know everything and somebody else can help me.’ It’s about understanding what you need to know to emulate the people you admire.”

ASHE’s Career Map Self-Assessment Tool at [www.ashe.org/careemap](http://www.ashe.org/careemap) can help managers identify strengths and gaps in their skills and the specific resources they need. Mentors and sponsors are also an

invaluable resource for developing the leadership skills that then bolster professional reputation. Mentors help people navigate through their careers by being sounding boards, providing resources and helping develop skill sets (see sidebar, page 19).

Sponsors identify people who have high potential for leadership positions and help them move up the ladder. “A sponsor has a vested interest in your success and uses their influence and connections to drive your vision. They are your champion for career advancement and success,” says Renee Jacobs, CHFM, CHC, FASHE, strategic account manager at Johnson Controls, Milwaukee. In fact, Jacobs credits her own sponsor for recognizing her work with ASHE at the chapter level and recommending her to be chair of the professional reputation committee.

### Aligning and connecting

“We are a support department for all the other departments that provide direct patient care. That’s how we end up touching on so much in a facility and how we interact with different peers in our organization,” says Mike Stallbaumer, CHFM, director of plant engineering at Nemaha Valley Community Hospital, Seneca, Kan.

Stallbaumer is part of a task force working to identify facilities management peer professionals in order to strengthen alignments and minimize conflicts. The goal is to build a list of peers so that ASHE can connect with related professional organizations to identify issues and develop strategies to eliminate them.

“Often, you’re the translator between the nursing staff, the architects, the engineers and the contractors to make sure everyone’s talking the same language,” Pufahl says. “You need to be able to communicate effectively with your co-workers and peers so you can build positive relationships with them.”

The ability to work across departments bolsters a professional reputation, but a robust professional reputation within an organization also helps facilitate those relationships over the long term. “You want to get to that level where people come to you when there’s a problem

and you’re known as a resource who can help them work through their issues,” Pufahl says.

Ralph Graham, MHA, CHFM, SASHE, interim vice president of facilities at Baptist Health, Montgomery, Ala., says that working with peers and understanding their needs and challenges pays off in the long run because you have an ally the next time an issue arises.

“Once you develop a relationship and an understanding about how you can help your peers, they become your strongest advocates,” Graham says. “There was more than once when I went to present my case for capital funds and nursing supported me. If you have a chief nursing officer say, ‘He needs that chiller because if he doesn’t get it, it’s going to affect a lot of my services,’ it makes it much easier on you.”

According to Graham and Pufahl, the broader goal is to establish relationships that will ensure facilities managers are at the decision-making table. “If your peers trust you, your senior leaders learn to trust you,” Pufahl says. “The more trust you have and the better you perform, the better chance you have of ending up in a position where leadership is going to ask you for your input.”

Developing peer relationships often means facilities managers need to step outside of their comfort zones, says Skandaverl, MBA, FASHE, CHFM, CHC, division director of facilities management at CommonSpirit Health, Omaha, Neb. “No one is going to trust or respect you if you’re in your office,” he says. “You

need to get out and work with other departments. You don’t want to compartmentalize yourself by staying in the boiler room, the chiller room and the basement.”

Skandaverl says that having broad outside networks is also fundamental to developing professional reputations within organizations. He encourages facilities managers to connect directly with

their professional peers through the ASHE online community, local chapters and the annual conference.

A network of contacts gives facilities managers quick access to a wealth of information that can help them make the


RESOURCE



American Society for Health Care Engineering (ASHE) members can download the “Health Care Facility Management Competencies” monograph by logging on to [www.ashe.org/fmcompetencies](http://www.ashe.org/fmcompetencies).

most effective and informed decisions. “You can tell your CEO, ‘I talked to 10 people, and this is the best contractor we have in this region.’ And that person will listen to you,” Skandaverl says. “If you don’t have a network, you’re in a closed box.”

### Showcasing value

Within an organization, facilities management in many ways involves work behind the scenes to ensure that hospitals run smoothly — preventing any critical breakdowns and maintaining the credentials of the facility, for example. Facilities managers need to highlight these substantial contributions in order to develop their professional reputations and demonstrate to the leadership that they are essential to their organizations.

“One thing that facilities managers are not good at is tooting their own horns,” Chan says. “But we should not be a silo inside of a hospital. It’s very important that we communicate our successes.”

He stresses the need to challenge the perception that facilities people are in the basement waiting for something to break down so they can fix it. Taking steps to change the overall image of health care facilities management has benefits at the organizational level up through the field as a whole (see sidebar, page 20). At his organization, Chan started giving in-depth tours of the facility to the leadership, which later became mandatory for all newly hired vice presidents.

“We would walk through the boiler room,” Chan says. “I would take them through a machine room on the roof, and we would crawl through one of the numerous air handlers at the hospital. I would show them the equipment that produces medical air, the medical vacuum, the emergency generators. They were always amazed. Once they understood the complexities of all the different systems, they appreciated us that much more.”

Chan also organized a regular event called “Coffee with the Crew” to bring together the leadership and facilities staff. “Your staff are usually so proud of what they do, and they’ll share that,” he says. “They’ll tell the leadership, ‘We fixed this in-house instead of calling in an outside contractor and saved \$10,000.’ They’re the first ones to tout their own successes. It’s a very good way of promoting communications between line staff and senior management.”

## Finding mentors along the professional reputation pathway

**M**entors have always played an important role in the career of Ryan Ollie, CEM, PE, CHFM, manager of facilities operations at Advocate Condell Medical Center, Libertyville, Ill. He says that one of his mentors, York Chan, SASHE, CHC, CHFM, recently retired vice president of facilities at Advocate Aurora Health, Downers Grove, Ill., was instrumental in helping him develop both his professional skills and his long-term career plans.

Ollie says he first connected with Chan to tap into his vast pool of advanced technical knowledge. “I love learning, and I would always try to be as much of a sponge as I could when I would meet with him,” Ollie says. “He was constantly teaching me about something or opening my eyes to something I’d never seen before.”

Chan was always wanting to help the next generation of people in the health care facilities management field, Ollie says. With Chan’s guidance, Ollie set a goal to move into a managerial role in the future. Together, they created a development plan for Ollie that identified next steps and outlined what he needed to do to become a facilities manager at a hospital.

Ollie says that he also learned important leadership and soft skills from Chan, just from watching him on the job. Chan treated everyone with respect, regardless of a person’s title, position or rank, and Ollie models that example today in his role as a manager.

“I learned about working outside of your title from York Chan and doing more for your team than for yourself,” Ollie says. “He would just roll up his sleeves when things needed to be done. At my work recently, there was an emergency, and I just had to jump in and ask how I could help and what I could do to make it easier for my team to get through a hard time.”

Ollie encourages people to be proactive about seeking out potential mentors. “You have to put yourself out there,” he says. “Approach someone who is impactful to you and ask them if they’d be willing to mentor you. It could be in a formal way where you ask if they will be your mentor. Or you could ask if they’re willing to talk with you on a regular basis because you have questions and you’d appreciate their guidance.” ■

Facilities managers can highlight organizational gains such as improved patient care and safety, operations upgrades and energy savings, along with staff accomplishments, certifications and degrees, through a number of channels. They can share details directly with the leadership, through newsletters and by partnering with their public relations departments.

To reach a wider audience, managers can pass along success stories through related industry groups, local and community news sources, and partner organizations, such as the ENERGY STAR® program, which provides communications tools and resources to participants.

The professional reputation committee has also developed recommendations for a member spotlight feature to share success stories throughout the ASHE network. The goal of the feature is to recognize members who have made important contributions, worked on significant

projects within and outside of their organizations, and achieved notable goals.

### Fostering women’s growth

Another focus of the professional reputation committee has been programs and initiatives centered on women in health care facilities management, particularly around mentoring and networking. Anne Guglielmo, CFPS, CHFM, CHSP, LEED AP, project manager at Code Consultants Inc., St. Louis, says the idea came about from her own experience at an annual conference when she realized the need for resources for women.

The first project was to start a women’s networking group on the [my.ASHE.org](http://my.ASHE.org) site, a forum where women can ask questions, share information and reach out to other women across the country.

Next, the committee planned two in-person events at the 2019 ASHE Annual Conference where women could

## Reshaping the facilities manager's reputation over the long term

**D**ean Pufahl, CHFM, CHC, director of facility services at Froedtert and The Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, and immediate past president of the American Society for Health Care Engineering, believes that the field of health care facilities management has an image issue, and it is affecting professional reputation in broad and far-reaching ways.

"You ask high school kids what they think of plant operations or maintenance and the image that's conjured up in their minds is of the high school janitor, cleaning up the showers or fixing the bleachers in the gym," Pufahl says.

But facilities management has moved well beyond plungers and lightbulbs and into the high-tech arena, requiring a range of specialized and technical knowledge. The perception, however, that these jobs are dirty and low skilled with little long-term career potential means young people are less likely to pursue careers in the field.

In addition, health care facilities staff, particularly front-line employees, may not understand how to chart career paths and advance in their organizations and the field. "It's hard to sit down and talk with people about the next steps and developing their professional reputations. They don't even know what their reputation is at this point," Pufahl says.

Nolan Harp, CHFM, recently retired vice president of facilities operations integration at Advocate Aurora Health, Milwaukee, agrees that changing the image of the field is an important part of professional reputation and one that extends far beyond a particular department or facility.

"You can be highly respected within your organization. But, if you're highly respected in a number of organizations or within the community, it's much easier to sustain your professional reputation," Harp says.

Pufahl and Harp say that reshaping the field's image should start with outreach to young people promoting opportunities in health care facilities and showcasing the achievements and careers of successful professionals. This shift in perception will then encourage them to pursue careers and, as more people move into the field, ensure that this rebranding is sustained over the long term.

"People just don't understand the complexity, the challenges and the rewards that these kinds of frontline positions offer. You need very effective, focused, local outreach programs that keep people aware of the value of these careers," Harp says.

Pufahl stresses that this change will not happen overnight, and it will involve ongoing strategic planning well into the future. "It's a long road and building that career image is going to take years. So, we need to figure out how to accelerate that process," he says. ■

network and discuss issues pertinent to them. "On the first day of the conference, the Women's Networking Reception gave women a place to go and meet each other before we went out into the masses," Guglielmo says. A separate panel discussion covered career development, networking strategies and other issues women face in the health care facilities management field.

Finally, a women's networking and mentoring task force convened to put together a strategic plan that it presented to the ASHE steering committee at the end of last year. Guglielmo says the goal

was to start by developing networking and mentoring resources for women that could then become part of a broader ASHE diversity program.

Because health care facilities management has traditionally been a male-dominated field, women have faced difficulties moving into what, until fairly recently, were considered nontraditional roles.

While the demographics are changing, Guglielmo says that establishing credibility and getting people to understand that women are knowledgeable and good at what they do can sometimes be challenging.

"Anytime you have a change in the norm of what the role looked like, it's a matter of overcoming that and getting people to recognize that women can do their jobs and do them well and that they can be successful," she says.

Guglielmo also encourages women to take the initiative to find mentors and gain as much practical insight as they can. "We have a large number of really skilled people who are getting ready to retire and move on," she says. "So, any chance that younger women can take to work with those skilled people, be mentored by them as they are planning their retirement and pick up on the things that have made them successful is something we should be trying to do."

She also urges women to recognize the creativity, insight and problem-solving skills that they bring to their jobs. "It can be difficult to challenge the status quo, and sometimes when you introduce new ways of doing things, it can get shut down," Guglielmo says. "But, if we can identify opportunities to change and improve processes in our organizations, we need to be confident in making a case and moving that up the right channels."

### Be proactive

When health care facilities managers establish their professional reputations, they gain the legitimacy that allows them to excel at their jobs and advance the field.

But the process has different facets, and it is an ongoing one that involves developing leadership skills, strengthening peer relationships, promoting accomplishments and value, and recognizing employee needs. ASHE's professional reputation committee is creating tools and resources to help facilities managers foster this trust.

Additionally, Graham encourages facilities managers to be proactive about developing their professional reputations throughout their careers. "From the beginning of your career to the end of your career, you have to identify ways to be relevant," he says. "You have the most influence when you have the most relevance in your organization." **HFM**



Camille N.Y. Fink is a freelance writer based in Oak Park, Ill.