

# Your Journey of Career Development

## Planning a career roadmap

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**B**uilding your career in health care facility management is akin a journey: There are plans to be developed, directions to be derived, provisions to be acquired, and milestones to be recognized. Regardless of the road you took to arrive at your job or the path you took to get here, appropriate career planning will help create a satisfying and fulfilling trip.

There is no magic to career growth in our field. Pick your goals, acquire your skills, build on your individual success, and develop a credible approach to your career. Let's examine the components of a successful career journey.

### CHOOSE A DESTINATION

Determining the ultimate role for you as an individual can be the most challenging task in planning a career roadmap. We speak frequently about "arriving in the C-suite" or "becoming a VP" as the culmination of a successful career in health care facilities administration. Although appropriate for many, we often see folks overshoot their niche. There exists a different dynamic in leading trades and leading board members, a fact you should be cognizant of. Before determining your ultimate career rank, it is helpful to conduct informational interviews with professionals who already have attained the roles you may aspire to reach.

In a general sense, organizational size does not necessarily dictate specific facilities roles but there are some

generalizations that can be made. Smaller, community-based providers offer a multi-hat leadership environment with less fiscal resources, staff depth, and system redundancy compared to their larger metropolitan counterparts. These institutions offer increased visibility with a smaller management team and broader range of influence. Large organizations can offer the challenges of complex properties, politically driven decisions, and cutting edge technology. And of course, there is every hospital in between!

We often speak of horizontal and vertical career paths in our field. As an example, a role focused specifically on engineering operations or planning, design, and construction management beginning in a community based institution evolving up through a large teaching hospital or system would be considered vertical growth. In other words, vertical growth relates to a defined area of accountability with growth into progressively larger organizations. Conversely, a horizontal strategy involves growth in a broader range of administrative involvement in support areas such as facilities management including environmental services, biomed, real estate, safety, security; as well as oversight of dietary, purchasing, etc.

Develop a career destination and adjust according to the experiences and insight you gain on your journey. Always have a direction while allowing course adjustments based on your observations and work experience.

### PROGRAM THE GPS

Whether you are starting your career, are in the middle, or are a seasoned professional, you owe it to yourself to ask what components of your work you enjoy and which you do not. In most cases you may find the tasks you like are the ones you excel at most and conversely, the duties you enjoy less are the ones you struggle with the most. Lesson learned: Program your career path to steer towards a position that will use your strengths and skills for success. You will find more personal satisfaction when you are professionally involved in the areas you enjoy most and with which you have the most interest.

### BE PREPARED FOR FORKS IN THE ROAD

You can't plan on the junctures you will find on your career journey. However, you can prepare to evaluate every opportunity that presents itself along the way. Many of us end up where we are professionally by departing from the planned route of career travel and seizing unexpected opportunities that present themselves.

If appropriate, learn a new skill, earn a new certification, network with new group of peers (see the *Inside ASHE* story on networking on page xx). Never pass on the assessment of a new opportunity and the effects it might have on your career objectives. Accumulating as much knowledge as you can will allow you to make informed career decisions.



### **UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONAL ROAD CONDITIONS**

Every institution, large or small, system and independent, rural or metropolitan, has a persona that provides a working environment as unique as the building structure itself. The old adage “if you’ve seen one hospital, you’ve seen one hospital” is truly accurate. Whether acquired or inherited, this working culture will define the way the organization operates in everything from communication to accountability.

Seek a smooth travel surface. If your current institution’s culture is not compatible with your approach, progress can be slow and contribute to lost productivity and frustration. Acknowledge the shortcomings of an institution’s chemistry and learning from it can be helpful as you evaluate potential compatible employers moving forward. Strive to align with an organization that understands your role as you understand it and appreciates the value of your efforts.

If you assess that you can be successful within the culture, tailor your approach to work diligently within those constraints. Build in your department those values important to you; perhaps your approach will filter the larger organization over time.

### **ASK FOR DIRECTION**

Listen to what people have to say about you. Seek feedback regarding your performance from subordinates, peers, and supervisors alike. You will find this dialogue to be productive and helpful in honing your individual management style from a frontline perspective. Consistently strive to improve yourself and the value you bring to your role and organization.

While in route, give yourself the opportunity to see and learn about career paths others have taken. Discover the needs that our field is seeking and develop knowledge of a specialty that will contribute to your professional value. Let the field dictate your career goals and drive what you need to become.

### **PROVISIONING**

What we prepare for and take along on our career road-trip is important, but it’s also important not to pack items we don’t need—there is a cost to over provisioning. Once you have determined your career destination, develop and acquire the skills and attributes, or competencies, that will help you gain the profile needed to arrive at the role you have targeted.

Competencies can be categorized into hard skills and soft skills sets (see side bar). In the case of facility engineering, examples of hard skills would be the technical knowledge we use to perform our jobs as defined. Soft competencies are defined as the style and form by which we manage.

In most cases, we obtain hard skills through schooling, training, and continuing education. Once you map out your career goals, find the gaps in your skill set and seek out training or education to learn the hard skills needed. Technical skills vary in depth and application and are dynamic in the sense they change and evolve with new technology.

Soft skills are important to our field and critical for career progression. These skills include communication, including listening, writing and speaking; negotiation; self advocacy; and team dynamics. Effective networking, leading change, delegation, and problem solving are critical soft skills as well. To improve your soft skill inventory, solicit feedback from peers and colleagues who are familiar with your style and delivery. Take note and ask for help from individuals you note to have strong demonstrated skills in the areas you may be deficient.

### **ARE WE THERE YET?**

Only you will know when you have arrived at the career destination you seek, but you can always continue to advance yourself and your skills. Health care delivery changes a rapid pace, and we need to provide the most current management practices we can. Continue to learn and grow professionally; the journey is never over.

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# 3 career development tips

## 1

### LEARN THE BUSINESS OF HEALTH CARE 101

The provision of quality health care is the main focus of health care providers, and the functions that health care facilities professionals perform are major contributors to quality outcomes. Without the support of an environment to promote healing, little can be accomplished towards the mission of the institution. Take the time and make the effort to understand the way *your* organization provides health care—beyond the facility support your work provides.



### IDENTIFY YOUR CUSTOMERS

With a broad scope of involvement, many facility management professionals need to focus on customer identification and strategies to support the needs of various customers. Patients, families, staff, caregivers, contractors, visitors, and community are all your customers, and all need different levels of support from a facility department, and these expectations need to be communicated effectively to all of your customers.



### CONSIDER YOUR LENGTH OF STAY

How long one stays in a particular job depends on a number of factors and perceptions have changed over the years. A majority of hiring institutions expect a five-year minimum commitment to the position an individual is hired for, although a 25-year career made up entirely of five-year roles is not the best overall presentation.

For those who have not stayed in a role long, remember that demonstrating accomplishments during a position term is more important than the elapsed time of employment. For those who have stayed with their organization for decades, long-term employment duration within a single organization can be justified by taking on more advanced roles and added responsibility.

## 3



## CONNECTING YOUR WORLD IN CRISIS



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## Hard and soft skill examples

### Hard skill examples

- Facilities design
- Engineering principles
- Energy management
- Regulatory compliance
- Finance and budget
- Property management

### Soft skill examples

- Communication
- Delegation
- Change management
- Time management
- Networking
- Advocacy