



Interview to:
Edward Ehlers
Owner of "Facilities Management Group"



Today we introduce Edward Ehlers, Owner of "Facilities Management Group", the largest FM related LinkedIn group. He'll be a speaker at CIFMers 2016 in Madrid and here we have a nice conversation about FM..

1. Could you tell us how your professional development led you to the Facility Management sector?

I began my career in the US Military where I served in a variety of roles that taught me about leadership, mission orientation, and people focus. These roles also taught me important skills in logistics, planning, budgeting, and resource management. When I left the service, I was fortunate enough to find a job opening that had a former military hiring manager. We had a common connection. Despite no formal training in FM, he hired me because of this connection and my demonstrated success in my previous roles. Within a few years, after applying my leadership concepts and technical skills, I succeeded him as the Director of Real Estate and Facilities.

2. In your opinion, what are the main soft skills a Facility Manager should have?

Leadership – I employ a servant leadership philosophy. My role as a leader is to provide the necessary tools and resources to help those in my organization succeed, both personally and professionally. If they succeed, the organization succeeds. As an FM, you will lead people. Whether they are direct reports or third party service providers, your presence and influence has a direct impact on the performance of their duties.

Mission or task orientation – There are many distractions in the world of FM. Have a clear, concise, precise mission and focus on attaining it. "Professional Commitment, Personal Accountability" has helped me maintain mission orientation.

People focus – As an FM, we are in the people business. We work with buildings and their components (e.g., AHU's, FTU's, chillers, elevators, etc.), but in reality we work for people. Whether it is the end user, occupant, client, or the people in your organization (the janitor, the cafeteria worker, the engineer, the mail services worker) or the third-party service provider, the FM is there to support, encourage, engage, and delight.

Mission First, People Always, Safety Above All Else

3. It's been traditionally said that the American FM was more building oriented and the European FM more people oriented; do you think this statement is still valid today?

I don't believe it is. There is a significant trend in American FM towards customer satisfaction and workplace experience. Everything from concierge services to game rooms to meditation rooms to full service gyms with saunas are being provided in American facilities. There is a realization that to attract and retain good talent, the work environment needs to uplift, not restrict, the employee. With all the technological advances of today and just on the horizon, the old ways to work are clearly outdated. I believe a challenge for FMs is to balance the customer experience with the provider experience. To be highly demanding and overbearing of the FM team and disregard their needs in favor of the end-user can create a vicious cycle the FM needs to avoid. A balance must be achieved.

4. You founded and manage the largest FM related LinkedIn group, how do you think networking helps the FM sector and the FM professionals?

Actually, I prefer to speak in terms of "connecting" instead of "networking." To me, networking does not have the right nuance. Connecting implies a deeper level of interaction. However, by being connected, you are, in fact, part of a network.

In my answer to question #1, I mention that my first FM job can be partially attributed to connecting. Both having prior military service, my first FM manager and I had a connection; we belonged to a network. This was not the only reason I was hired but it certainly contributed.

There is an old saying that "business is business." I believe "business is personal." There is a strong personal need for people to feel connected. Having shared connections, having a network, helps build the rapport necessary to good business. Of course, you are never going to be best friends with everyone you encounter but a shared experience, either at a conference or through a class or through an on-line group, will help solidify business relationships.

The other vital component to connecting is sincerity. The difference is painfully obvious between someone just trying to have the most "friends" and someone genuinely interested in building a relationship. Be sincere and allow the rapport to build naturally. Remember that solid relationships do not just happen, they mature and grow. "Today's acquaintance is tomorrow's business partner."

5. How do you think CIFMers 2016 can contribute to the FM sector?

Providing the fertile ground in which FMs can build the sincere rapport upon which strong relationships are built.

I attended a conference a few years ago and met an individual in a discipline of FM in which was of great interest to me. We met at a cocktail reception and I engaged him in conversation. After the conference, we stayed in intermittent contact. Several months later, he had informed me he was being laid off from his job. I didn't have any openings at the time but I said I would be on the lookout for positions. A few more months passed and I was approached about my interest in a particular new position. The position was not a good fit for me but I recalled my acquaintance. I made the introduction, he was hired, and he still works there today.

The experiences shared at CIFMers 2016 will connect FMs for many years to come.