

BY ALANA F. DUNOFF

Who's Next? The State of Succession Planning



For over a decade, facility managers have been listening to speakers and authors sound the alarm for pending generational shifts in our workforce. They say we are going to experience a talent gap, and filling facility management jobs will become a significant challenge.

Even the major facility service providers have talked about how important it is for the industry to create programs to attract Millennials. For years they have talked about making FM a career of choice and working

with academia to develop educational programs to train our youth. Losing a large percentage of the industry's workforce — and the applied knowledge that represents — is a major modern risk in our industry.

To prepare for this generational shift, FMs have transformed our workplaces and spaces into cool, funky-designed, unassigned, work-anywhere-in-the-building environments. Facility managers became change management agents as we helped our organizations work differently using benching, hives, phone booths and coves so that they can collaborate, scrum and innovate in a diverse and inclusive office. Many of the drivers behind these physical workplace changes were a calculated management effort to attract young professional to come work for our companies.

It is now 2019. The Baby Boomers are retiring at record speed, the Millennials are almost all in the workforce, and Generation Z will start entering the job market very soon. So, have we solved the actual problem?

What's the problem?

According to IFMA Foundation's Global Workforce Initiative (GWI), more than 50 percent of seasoned FMs are retiring within the next 5-15 years, taking their vast institutional knowledge with them. The GWI estimates there will be more than 500,000 FM job openings globally over the next five years. These staggering statistics would suggest the gap in our FM work-

force is not getting any smaller — and perhaps the schism is getting wider.

FM educators at accredited FM degree programs help emerging FM students gain the skills and confidence they need to be successful in our industry. However, all the accredited programs combined only graduate about 800 students a year, not even close to the 500,000 job openings.

The burning questions from the GWI and for all of us in FM should be: How do we fill this big talent hole? Why hasn't it been filled yet? And is it even possible?

In searching for some answers, seasoned IFMA Fellows (many of whom are now happily retired) and recent FM graduates (just starting out in their careers) were surveyed to find out their take on the state of the industry. Both groups were asked how they perceive professional growth, career advancement and success planning.

Career advancement

When it comes to opportunities for career advancement, IFMA Fellows and emerging FM leaders all found new job opportunities both internally and externally. While the Fellows spoke of career longevity within their companies (20 or 30 years or more), the emerging leaders discussed a very different reality. They expressed concerns over minimal opportunities for internal growth, lack of loyalty and companies only valuing their contributions



MAKING FM A CAREER OF CHOICE

This year, IFMA is providing free registration to 20 FM students to attend Facility Fusion and an additional 50 FM students to attend World Workplace – on top of the 25 to 40 scholarship winners normally in attendance. Approximately 90 to 100 students will attend World Workplace in Phoenix and are seeking opportunities to learn and network with industry professionals.

The IFMA Foundation created a World Workplace student experience committee dedicated to engaging future FM professionals into our organization. The committee will ensure they get the most out of the conference and can network with their peers and FM professionals. The committee is comprised of previous student scholarship winners, IFMA Fellows, IFMA chapter and council leaders, IFMA Young Professionals, IFMA Foundation Global Workforce Initiative Advisors (Sodexo and ABM) along with Foundation Trustees and staff. Their focus is to ensure that students attending World Workplace are introduced to all that IFMA has to offer to further their education and careers.

At Facility Fusion in Atlanta, World Workplace Europe in Amsterdam, and World Workplace in Phoenix, students have an opportunity to learn about the organization, interview for jobs with GWI advisors and participate in the IFMA Foundation's Ignite FM! Student Challenge. Students have three hours to solve an FM problem and then present their solutions to an audience of IFMA members. Consider supporting students and the program by contacting the IFMA Foundation for more information.

when they say they have another job offer someplace else. Some of these emerging leaders have already held two to three jobs in the last five years at strong companies where upward mobility was not obvious, available or simply denied.

In the workplace these days, it is often seen as a liability if you stay at a company too long. The expectation seems to be you gain more experience by moving around. But the byproduct of this attitude is that for years now management has not placed as much emphasis on nurturing and growing talent. Overall, they don't even have budgets or the time for training, association memberships or other programs that would help a shining star grow, rise and stay within a company.

Formal evaluation

These days formal evaluation processes are common in most organizations. In many organizations, it is a time to set SMART goals or STRETCH goals and to talk about future professional opportunities. These evaluations are performed rather mechanically with more focus on getting them done rather than on the value they are intended to provide.

The feedback received seems to suggest that even with a formal HR process, the key to true advancement is not annual performance reviews. As Chris Rios, an emerging leader and a facilities coordinator said, "I wouldn't give credit to any processes in my organization ... but rather to my manager who realizes my potential and capabilities."

The key to advancement is having a great manager, not a great process.

Succession planning

We all talk about how important succession planning is, but it doesn't seem like it is a common practice or a high priority anymore. Most organizations don't have a step-by-step guide to climbing the corporate ladder. And most of us don't spend a lot of time thinking about what the next rung is, let alone how to get there.

When the Fellows became managers

themselves, they all seemed to understand the value of succession planning by growing talent internally, identifying those who wanted more opportunities and mentoring them, creating cross-training programs, and encouraging staff to learn by enhancing their skills, getting certifications and actively engaging in associations like IFMA.

From the emerging leader's perspective, succession planning is almost non-existent. There appear to be few clear internal processes for making their way up the food chain. When we used to have corner offices, it seemed that there was often a path to get there. Now we don't even have offices, let alone any direction for how a young professional can become a leader in their organization.

Khadija Qurbanzada, a Temple Facility Management alumnus, had a position as an assistant facility manager. She expressed her desire for more responsibility and pay, but the opportunities weren't there. She says, "I need a chance to prove what I'm capable of," but with limited internal options the easiest thing for her to do was to move on to a new company.

Reframing the problem

All these insights — from our legacy and our future — have shown we need to re-think the problem we have been trying to solve.

Yes, there is a gap in the workforce, but it can't just be about "building a cool space and they will come." If we want to fill our FM workforce gap, we need to actively, and aggressively, be mentoring and providing real succession planning for our emerging FM leaders. We have been calling them leaders, but we are not giving them the opportunity or teaching them how to lead. We are driving them out of our organizations by not providing them a path for upward growth.

Generation X to the rescue

IFMA is quickly coming up on its 40th birthday, and according to the GWI, the average age of the FM practitioner is 49 years old.

That means that there are a whole lot of Generation Xers, in their 40s and 50s, who are currently working as mid-level managers. These are the managers who are going to feel the impact of trying to fill the workforce talent gap.

For decades, Gen Xers have been overshadowed by their older and over-populated Baby Boomer predecessors. Then the Millennials jumped in to grab all the attention. Gen Xers have been quietly doing their jobs and perhaps finally getting good promotions now that the Baby Boomers are retiring. To all FM Generation Xers: It is now your turn to do something monumental!

We cannot wait for the gap to be filled by Generation Z entering the work force in a few years. The gap needs to be filled by strengthening the talent we already have so they stay and grow within our companies. This might be a big shock to our organizations, but part of the reason they are losing talent is not because the Millennials get bored and need to move around. It is because they have been neglected. Our organizations need to reinvest in good old fashion succession planning — identify the talent, plant the seeds, water them and watch them flourish.

It is our responsibility as FM leaders to make the time and the find resources to mentor, coach and teach the next generation to be true emerging FM leaders. And we may have to take a stand to remind our senior management that these fundamental processes need to be revitalized for future success.

We need to remember that our own successes came from a mixture of our own determination and great leadership. It is time for all of us to pay it forward. FMJ

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If we are going to close the divide of a 500,000 jobs in the next five years, then first and foremost we need to become great managers and leaders.

We all need to train our staff, be active mentors, show our young workforce loyalty and reward them for great work.

We need to find the internal financial resources and then encourage our staff to achieve their credentials, attend conferences and go to local FM programs and events.

We need to take real time to develop succession planning pathways for our staff and then nurture them along the way.

We all need to hire students coming out of accredited FM degree programs and create FM internship programs as an inexpensive way to help enrich their learning experiences as they transition from academia to the real world.

We must be a profession that actively seeks out and takes on the responsibility of nourishing the minds of future FM leaders.