



Elevating the Director of Facilities Role

As clubs have scrambled to catch up on deferred maintenance while also planning new capital projects, the responsibility for facilities management has evolved to executive-level importance.

In the last few years, the director of facilities position at clubs has been elevated dramatically. While the position has always been important to club operations, significant changes brought about by the pandemic and the events that followed have raised this role to a critical leadership position.

During the pandemic itself, a heightened focus on sanitation, ventilation systems and airflow, and continuous adaptation to new regulations required those in charge of club facilities to become more proactive, knowledgeable and well-trained. With the advent of the post-COVID-19 membership boom, clubs have invested millions of dollars in capital projects and placed more importance on capital reserve studies than ever before. While protecting the older, more enduring parts of club facilities has always been necessary, planning for, protecting and maintaining the new parts of a club campus have become increasingly important as well.

“In the evolving landscape of private club operations, the director of facilities now holds a pivotal role that goes beyond mere maintenance,” notes Carmen Mauceri, CCM, ECM, general manager/COO of The Club at

Mediterra in Naples, Fla. “They are the executives who ensure that the club’s infrastructure not only meets current needs but anticipates future demands.

“As technology rapidly develops and environmental challenges become more pressing, the director of facilities ensures that the club remains resilient and adaptive, while maintaining a highly functioning facility,” Mauceri adds. “They are the unsung heroes who not only safeguard the club’s physical assets, but also create a dynamic environment that enhances member experiences and operational efficiency.”



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Director of Facilities,
The Club at Mediterra**

Masters of Their Craft

The expertise and leadership provided by the director of facilities position is essential for ensuring operational efficiency, regulatory compliance, and the safety of members and employees. “The director of facilities is a master of his or her craft who is responsible for millions of dollars in club assets,” says Tom Wallace, partner with Kopplin Kuebler & Wallace. “These professionals must have expertise in multiple disciplines, be constantly thinking on their feet and be able to manage dozens of moving parts on any given day.”

Preventative maintenance, repairs and cleanliness are all crucial responsibilities for this role—but it also goes beyond just maintaining what the club has now. A strategic-planning aspect has also become essential to the position. Directors of facilities must be able to think through the functionality of an area or piece of equipment to ensure that a club’s facility investment is wise, appropriate, and successful.

“We’re seeing directors of facilities who push back on interior designers’ and architects’ recommendations about things that aren’t going to be sustainable in the club environment,” says Wallace. Examples include heavy, cumbersome furniture that has to be moved regularly for events, the kind of wood being used according to the humidity levels required to maintain it, and not using flat paint on the walls due to marks and stains being more visible.

“These employees are the most knowledgeable about club operations, what’s going to work and what isn’t,” Wallace says. “They should be included in planning meetings to be the advocate for the functionality of the property.”

A Bigger Seat at the Table

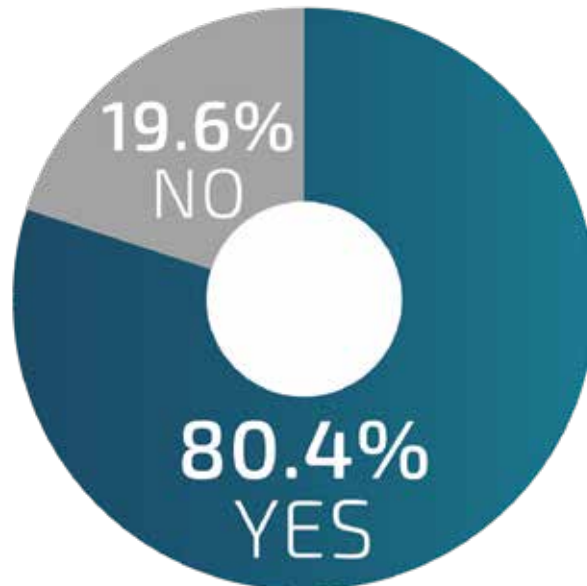
The director of facilities has a larger seat at the club-management table than in years past, and the role requires an extensive amount of knowledge, experience, and training. “I started in the club industry working in the housekeeping department and proceeded to gain valuable experience working in different roles such as cooking, serving, laundry, maintenance, security and event set-up during 10 years of service at my first club,” reflects Robert Hirst, The Club at Mediterra’s director of facilities. “Now, having 33 years of experience working at clubs, I am grateful for all of the knowledge and expertise I learned in the various positions I’ve held, because they continue to support me daily.”

At Mediterra, Hirst says, his primary duty is simply making sure all club facilities are perfect. This means ensuring pristine cleanliness, including that every piece of laundry is spotless, keeping all repairs current, and seeing to it that



PULSE SURVEY INSIGHTS

Does Your Club Have a Full-Time Facilities Manager Position?



Source: McMahon Group Facilities Pulse Survey, May 2024

every piece of equipment is functioning perfectly 24 hours a day, seven days per week, all while staying on budget. “Not all members know my name, unless something is dirty, broken, or stained—and that’s the way it should be,” Hirst notes.

The director of facilities role touches every department at the club and must be able to work with every member of the team. “I’m the problem solver, regardless of which department the problem is in,” Hirst explains. “Sometimes you have to pull your team together to make the impossible possible. This role directly impacts member interactions and experiences.”

The director of facilities position has become integral to a club’s smooth functioning and overall success, because even if the club is run like a well-oiled machine, having a piece of equipment break down can crush the operation. “[A facilities director] has to have ‘MacGyver-like’ capabilities, to be knowledgeable and

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creative and able to come up with solutions fast,” says Three Carpenter, general manager of Edina (Minn.) Country Club. “When the A/C goes down at the club at 5:00 p.m. on a Saturday night when it’s 100 degrees outside and 200 guests will arrive for a wedding reception in one hour, everyone looks at the director of facilities to solve the problem.”

Watching Costs and Codes

As if managing and maintaining millions of dollars in equipment and facilities isn’t challenging enough, directors of facilities often face budgetary constraints. Budgeting for the big, unforeseen breakdowns can be difficult, even without considering the environmental factors such as storms, power outages, mold, wildlife and pests that are nearly impossible to anticipate.

In addition to budget challenges, the scheduling and timing of annual inspections (back-flow systems, elevator inspections, etc.) to stay code-compliant is complicated to manage. Overseeing worker safety and evolving safety protocols are also cumbersome and require regular attention. With the job literally 24/7, with most clubs open seven days a week, the role continues to take on more demands and importance that has elevated the skill set and characteristics needed to excel in the position (see sidebar at right). “Large or small, new or old—the size and age of the club doesn’t really matter, because the complexity and importance levels are the same,” notes Wallace.

“I believe having an onsite facilities manager as an employee is a better alternative than hiring a third-party contractor,” he adds. “Someone who operates on site is part of the team and will take more ownership and pride in their work. They will also be more knowledgeable about the club, its facilities, and its equipment because they are on property consistently, whereas a third-party vendor may send a different technician out each time.”

With the growth and elevation of the position, it has also become more important for club managers to build the credibility and necessity of their facilities directors with their teams, boards and members at large. Too often, these employees still work in the shadows and behind the scenes with little to no recognition, support or resources. As these key

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More clubs now realize that having an onsite facilities manager is critical for what has become a 24/7 responsibility.

individuals continue to become more critical to the club operation and have a greater and more direct impact on the day-to-day member and employee experience, the need for adaptable, resilient, experienced, and solution-based facility managers has become even more vital for operating a successful and thriving club. ■

How to Find, and Keep, an Effective Facilities Director

When it comes to the necessary skills and traits today’s club facilities directors must have, the list continues to lengthen in step with the responsibilities of the job.

Dependable, trustworthy, good attitude, flexible, hardworking, knowledgeable, team player, organized, patient, and a good communicator are some of the most important traits. In addition to vast, well-rounded experience, education is a critical element. Many facility managers require certifications in plumbing, electricity, HVAC, acquisitions, and more. Ongoing development is also necessary, so these professionals can keep up with trends, new tools and equipment, and evolving technology.

Clubs can also promote the elevation and successful performance of their director of facilities position by:

- Investing in ongoing education, trade certifications and specialties.
- Building out relevant staff and ensuring succession-planning measures are in place.
- Investing in added support staff for this role, to ensure a knowledgeable and experienced crew can keep this department functioning at high levels around the clock.
- Focusing on retaining critical historical knowledge by nurturing talent.
- Educating board and committee members about the position and its key responsibilities.