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# MANAGING TO ADVANCE YOUR CAREER IN FM

*Managing Facilities & Real Estate*, by FM consultant and Strategic Advisor principal Michel Theriault, is hot off the presses. In a Q&A with *CFM&D*, Michel, a frequent contributor to this magazine, explains why his new book is controversial and how it can help facility managers kickstart their careers...

**CFM&D:** You say that facility managers need to get out of the boiler room. What do you mean by that?

**MT:** It's a phrase I use to shift the FM's focus from the technical and tactical day-to-day issues which often consume so much of facility managers' time to focusing on leadership, management, strategy and planning. The term comes from a time when the role was very technical and had more to do with making sure the building systems were working. That was before managing facilities became recognized as an important and complex profession with a significant impact on the organization's productivity, costs and assets.

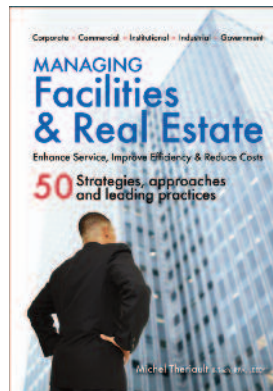
**“The reality is you can apply almost all business skills to the FM role and benefit your career. Marketing, for instance...”**

**CFM&D:** What are three relatively simple things that FMs can do to improve their management and leadership skills?

**MT:** The first thing is to recognize how important these skills are for their career and the results they deliver for their organization. Then they need to learn more of the skills, whether it's through training courses or reading. They should ask their company for training and if it isn't available, find courses at local college or universities. An even easier way is to read a few leading books on management and leadership. Even if they can't use everything they learn, applying just a few techniques can make the job easier and more rewarding.

**CFM&D:** You make the point in the chapter on getting approval with business cases that accentuating the positive isn't always the best strategy. How can telling your bosses a story illustrating the problems and failures you're trying to address in your department strengthen your argument?

**MT:** We all like to make things look better than they are – it's human nature. That's particularly true when it comes to our jobs and our reputation. Instead of letting problems



show, facility managers are very good at reacting and 'saving' problems from being visible, patching things up, etc. So when you tell your boss you need resources or funding, they don't understand why you need it, since things seem to be going well. So you should communicate things that aren't going well in addition to your successes.

Highlight problems and put them in the context of risk and cost so when you ask, they are more likely to approve your initiatives. It's counterintuitive, but if you position it properly, you will benefit.

**CFM&D:** Why do FMs frequently lack visibility into crucial aspects of their costs and activities even when FM systems have been implemented, and what can they do to improve the situation?

**MT:** Quite simply, they don't usually have the information they need. Either they don't have it or they have data but can't convert it into information. Even if they have an FM system, they are often implemented as a 'production' tool, not an information tool. Either the right kind of information isn't captured or so much irrelevant data is captured that the FM can't find useful information. In addition, a big part of the problem is getting time to actually look at it and use it productively.

**CFM&D:** You say that you need to support your outsourcing service providers. Why is this the case and what does it involve?

**MT:** Whether it's a fully integrated FM outsourcing or simply a subcontracted service, your success depends on the success of your service providers. You can't separate yourself from them – your organization won't let you blame the supplier, you are ultimately responsible. So it's to your benefit to have a successful supplier. It's the principal that drives my overall approach to suppliers, from procurement to performance management.

**CFM&D:** In the 'Managing Performance' chapter, you say that managing results is as important as measuring them. What do you mean by this?

**MT:** Conventional wisdom is to use KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and Service Levels to ensure performance, so everyone figures it's the best solution and simply implements them. The problem is, it's only half the solution and they are more likely to measure failure instead of preventing failure.

Also, the service provider and their staff start to focus all their attention on them and forget about other important priorities, especially if a penalty or reward is involved – often driving behaviours you may not want. This conventional approach becomes an easy way to ‘manage’ suppliers. The real way to do it is to put the right structure in place, meaning the contract, procurement and performance management tools, then manage the service provider like you manage employees – with goal setting, monitoring results, frequent communications to give praise or guidance and fair treatment, and an opportunity to make things right, when something doesn’t quite go right. It takes trust, more of a flexible partnership approach and a little more work, but FMs will benefit in the long run by managing performance this way.

**CFM&D:** *When it comes to providing customer service, why do FMs frequently find themselves between a rock and a hard place, and what can they do about it?*

**MT:** Facility managers are ultimately responsible to the organizations they work for when it comes to the assets and the costs of facilities. But they also have a responsibility to supporting the occupants so they can do their own jobs. As with many things within an organization, these two priorities can sometimes be in conflict. As a result, facility managers have to be very good at balancing the different requirements and using excellent negotiation, diplomacy and customer service skills to navigate the issues.

**CFM&D:** *What would you say is the most controversial argument you make in your book?*

**MT:** I think there are two. First is my strong emphasis on the strategy, management and leadership FMs need to be successful in the profession. While you should have the traditional competencies, you can’t get as much from them without those other skills. The second one is my approach to service provider procurement, performance and management. It comes from studying the issue as well as practical experience on all three sides of the equation: in-house FM, as an FM outsourcer and a janitorial supplier. You get a very different perspective on what really works once you’ve experienced all sides of the relationship.

**CFM&D:** *What do you now know that you wish you’d known earlier in your career?*

**MT:** I wish I’d known how important general business skills are and spent more time learning about them earlier in my career, even for things that don’t appear relevant, such as marketing. The reality is you can apply almost all business skills to the FM role and benefit your career. Marketing, for instance, includes understanding the audience, getting a message across and influencing others. It’s an important skill and something FMs have to do all the time. | **CFM&D**

*Managing Facilities & Real Estate* (Woodstone Press, 532 pages, 7" x 10" softcover, \$39.95 US) may be purchased at the author’s website ([www.thebuiltenvironment.ca](http://www.thebuiltenvironment.ca)) or at Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/0981337414>).