

## **“Make No Assumptions.”**

### ***Facility Management, Operations and Maintenance Planning***

YMCAs focus on youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Our volunteers and advocates unite with open minds and cooperative spirits as a force for positive social change. *“Make no assumptions”* challenges us to shed our preconceptions, limited understandings and skewed expectations, even our dreadful certainties. We invite ourselves and our fellows to question everything. We free ourselves to “celebrate ignorance” and become open to others’ experience and wisdom, capable of reckoning and grasping larger visions.

In facility management, operations and maintenance, “assume nothing” impacts the most routine daily activities and has dynamic consequences for property assets and the personal well-being of YMCA volunteers and members. “No assumptions” is a valuable guideline in three respects:

#### **Stakeholder Expectations**

From the property committee to the facility director to a greenhorn custodian, facilities associates make Y facilities safe, reliable and attractive. They know and respond to members’ needs and expectations to the best of their understanding. So we hope. Hopefully, members always tell us their needs. Our customer satisfaction surveys show we’re on the mark. Here’s hopin’.

The fact is, facility stakeholders are expert in almost everything but facilities, and they assume the facilities team is setting due standards and priorities and applying best practices. Though they aren’t shy to air their preferences and peeves, they are exempt from direct responsibility. Surveys may rate performance, but provide skinny input for improvement. Ultimately, an under-informed property committee or board may rely on an overloaded, unsophisticated facilities team to drive objectives, standards, risks and strategies. Before everyone can be on the same page, we must first frame the narrative. No assumptions about the use and care of physical property; we have a plan.

#### **Work Standards and Proficiency**

Surely, when it comes to the actual, day-to-day work, our Y facilities staff is capable, reliable and dedicated. They’ve “been there, done that” and are proficient in every aspect of our maintenance, custodial, grounds and service operations. They know what needs doing and how to do it. We apply best practices and are adopting green energy and environmental systems. We even report on accepted industry performance metrics. We’re good, aren’t we!

Not to be cynical, but facilities is an arena in which there are scores of “best” practices for every activity. Optimization is often measured against standards that are themselves disputable. If the model of excellence is subjective, then self-congratulation follows. What sets the framework for operations, for decisions about scope, standards and processes, and for planning, equipping, training, monitoring the status of management and supervisory systems? No assumptions about the facilities operation and organization; we have a plan. We continuously improve it.

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## **Crises**

On May 25, the CBS Evening News ran a story about the Joplin Missouri Y's crucial role in providing a haven to families devastated by the tornadoes. The YMCA's focus on youth development, healthy living and social responsibility aligned under these tragic conditions. The events prove that YMCA's operational continuity plans must be up to any challenge so that they can play their designated role in the community-wide and regional disaster and emergency response plans. No assumptions as to readiness, resources and redundancies that assure continuity; we have a plan.

The antidote to assuming is listening. The answer isn't the answer; the answer is, "what is the question?" Within YMCA's community, we frame and present creative and challenging questions, listen for our mutual experience and judgment and develop plans for mutual stewardship. No assumptions; we have a plan.

*The second in a series of articles on Five Principles of Facility Management based on the writings of Miguel Ruiz, whose writings pose "agreements" that reconcile us to ourselves, to others and to God. The agreements are:*

*Be impeccable with your word.*

*Don't make assumptions.*

*Don't take anything personally.*

*Always do your best.*

*Be skeptical, but learn to listen*

Don Miguel Ruiz