Leadership training builds culture of communication

By Cassie Heeke

Once every other week, about 20 employees spend four hours of their morning developing their leadership skills.

The training program, lead by Building Services Coordinators Tom Fallwell and Randy Sutherlin, consists of guided discussion, along with guest speakers and multimedia presentations. However, the focus isn’t on drilling management techniques; it’s about communicating, experience exchanges and breaking down barriers, Fallwell said.

“Our service is a byproduct of our culture,” Fallwell said, noting the program tries to build a culture of caretaking and stewardship. Fallwell and Sutherlin became certified trainers in 2009 through APPA: Leadership in Educational Facilities. They were asked to attend by Building Services Assistant Director Greg Fichter, who is a former president of APPA’s Midwest chapter and wanted training for frontline supervisors.

Fichter said the greatest value he has seen is that it brings people into a room together and lets them ask questions. It’s an open culture where they feel comfortable talking, bringing to light issues that some may not have been aware of.

By the end, Fichter said, they feel like more of a team – they feel listened to.

Sutherlin said going through the program shows everyone, no matter what level their position, that what they do each day matters in the scheme of things. He added he learns more about the different divisions of the company, and how all the parts of it work together, with each training.

“It's really helped me more personally in how I look at leadership as a big picture,” he said.

One of the tangible benefits from the program is an expanded use of technology, Fallwell said. During a previous session with Facility Operations staff, employees shared a technique that has been useful when they need to know how to install a part or work on a machine:

using their department-issued iPads to search for videos on YouTube or Google.

“It’s a communicative culture that cares ultimately about the good of the university rather than the good of any one department,” Fallwell said.

Team members Perry Ferguson, Matt Lawrence, and Jason Higdon build with Legos at a Leadership Training session.

The VPCPF Leadership Series is seven part series that is typically held once or twice a year. It covers the topics of: Supervision, Administration, Communication, The People, Motivation & Performance, Customer Service & Leadership.
Higdon reflects on management position

Jason Higdon was promoted in October to Electronics General Supervisor, a new position that gives him responsibility over six other employees.

Building Systems Assistant Director Andrew Lowry said the job was created to deal with day-to-day issues that fall between the technicians and Electronics Assistant Manager Mike Edwards.

Higdon was a leader among his teammates, Lowry said, and many members of the staff went to him for guidance.

“I enjoy what I’m doing,” he said. “You spend a lot of time at work, so there’s no sense in being negative.”

Higdon feels his new role is running smoothly, partially due to the positive atmosphere in his department. Lowry said he has been a very valuable new member of the management team.

“He always finds a way to get the job done,” Lowry said.

Springtime exercise spotlight: Running

Why run?

If you’re looking to lose weight, no need to invest in expensive exercise equipment. All you need is a good pair of tennis shoes! Running burns about 100 calories per mile and increases your resting metabolism, which means you’ll burn more calories even when sitting down.

Also, keeping your heart rate up strengthens your heart and lessens your risk of disease, and it can even make you happier — studies have shown that running regularly can treat mild depression and make you more energetic.

Allison Dunbar, Payroll Transaction Associate: “I definitely have not reached the point of the ‘runner’s high’ as of yet, but I feel good when I can see my progress in my run times and distances ... Find a buddy! It’s so much easier to get a jog or even a fast-paced walk in when you have someone with you to keep your mind busy and make the workout go faster.”

Jeff Kaden, Director of Energy Management & Utilities: “I like to incorporate some weight training and core exercises into a routine 2 or 3 times a week. Core exercises like planks, modified pushups, seated twists with an exercise ball, etc., are good — keeping your upper body and core fit are very necessary for good running form and endurance.”

Mia Williams, University Landscape Architect: “It is the strangest combination of a mentally relaxing and physically taxing activity but it seems to work for me as a mental and physical health improver.”

Use an app:

There are many apps for Android and iOS that track your miles and speed, so you have evidence of improvement. Zombies, Run! makes running a game with 200 missions and interval training. When you hear the zombies, run faster!
Kirk Lowry completes second apprenticeship with VPCPF

Kirk Lowry has an appetite for learning new things, which is why he has spent 6 of his 10 years at Facility Operations as an apprentice. In January, he graduated from his second apprenticeship to become a Certified Elevator Technician.

As an Electrician before the apprenticeship, Lowry had a reputation as a good worker with strong troubleshooting skills. Building Systems Elevator Supervisor Brian Smith said, “I’m pretty proud to have two apprenticeships, and I’m thankful to IU for the opportunity.”

Lowry first began a four-year electric apprenticeship at IU in 2007, six months after being hired at Facility Operations. However, he was drawn to the complexity and sophistication of elevators, so when the elevator apprenticeship opened in 2013, he applied.

Given his prior electrical experience and aptitude, he was able to test out of the first two years.

Kirk’s father, Building Systems Assistant Director Andrew Lowry, said his decision to take on another apprenticeship was far from out of character. As a child, Kirk was known to challenge himself constantly. He’d get interested in a subject, study it, and then excel in it.

“There isn’t anything he’s done that he hasn’t succeeded at,” Andrew said.

Kirk Lowry began as an hourly worker at Facility Operations just out of high school, when he was 19 years old. He said, “I need to be active,” Lowry said.

The apprenticeship structure fit with Lowry’s preferred way of learning – actively. It includes four hours each week in class, but those hours don’t confine the apprentices to a classroom. Lowry said they often learned in the field, solving mock problems and putting their textbook to practical use.

Smith said it’s extremely rare for someone to complete two apprenticeships, and equally rare to test out of two years. He says Lowry also has a great demeanor around customers and often leaves them with a new appreciation for the trade.

Now as a journey level Elevator Mechanic, Lowry is in charge of a route of 62 elevator units, including passenger elevators, wheelchair lifts, stage lifts and escalators. He performs monthly maintenance on the machines and determines when and what they need for optimal operation.

He said he enjoys working with the broad spectrum of technology, which ranges from the 1940s relay logic to the computer-based systems of present-day. While he’s proud of having completed two apprenticeships, he said he doesn’t plan to do another one – especially now that he’s a husband and father of two kids.

“I’m happy where I’m at,” Lowry said.

Who’s new in HR?

In the last year, the Human Resources team has doubled in size through the addition of two new staff members. In late summer 2015, Safety Programs Specialist Ryan Crowe and HR Associate Mary-Kate Oreovicz joined HR & Staff Development Coordinator Bill Kersey and HR Manager Jamie Gayer.

Gayer said Crowe’s position came from a desire to make safety part of daily operations. “The opportunity to have our own Facility Operations focused full-time safety position is a huge turning point for our facility,” Gayer said.

Bill Kersey, HR & Staff Development Coordinator, said Crowe’s focus on safety programming allows him to focus directly on safety training.

Crowe works closely with Environmental Health and Safety, senior Facility Operations leadership, management, and staff to ensure compliance with university standards and that we are building a culture focused on safe practices. “I enjoy that I might be making a difference,” Crowe said.

Oreovicz is a resource for everyday issues, Gayer said. Whether you need to update a position description, know your benefits, or understand the Family and Medical Leave Act, Oreovicz is happy to have employees stop by her desk located in the Payroll office.

Oreovicz has been a critical partner in revising the VPCPF Leadership Series and the Facility Operations newsletter. “Mary-Kate brings a wealth of HR experience to our team, a positive attitude and a desire to put the ‘human’ back in Human Resources,” Gayer said.

Kirk Lowry poses next to an elevator system in the Musical Arts Center. This elevator was installed in 1968.
Robertson settles in new role as Director of Facility Operations

Sam Robertson is the new Director of Facility Operations. Sam is originally from Spanish Fork, Utah, and he earned a Bachelor’s degree in Facility Management from Brigham Young University.

In 2009, he became Associate Director of Operations and Logistics at the University of Utah, where he stayed for six years before joining IU Vice President of Capital Planning and Facilities in January.

He describes his leadership style as open and collaborative. “I like to give and hear ideas, and to discuss how to make improvements through group efforts rather than through individual efforts,” Sam said.

Sam has a wife, Jen, and four kids: Hadley, 15; Daxton, 12; Tage, age 9; Paizlie, 6. Jen graduates this month with a nursing degree. As a family, the Robertsons enjoy hiking, biking, and riding in their 4-door Jeep. They miss the mountains of Utah, Sam said, but are pleased with Indiana’s beautiful climate and rapid weather change. Sam also praised the culture of arts and education in Bloomington, where there are endless opportunities for guitar and piano lessons.

The staff at VPCPF has been open and inviting, Sam said, from helping him unload two moving trucks to giving advice on places to eat and visit.

As for his new position, Sam said he has been impressed with VPCPF’s emphasis on education for career development. He admires the company’s support of proper training and opportunities for upward growth. He is currently participating in leadership training, where he hopes to strengthen his leadership style and become more involved in the workplace culture.

“I’ve really enjoyed being here,” Sam said. “The people are great, how much ownership and pride they take in things they’re responsible for.”

At left: Wes Jones works on preserving a tree trunk that was cut down on campus and will be placed at the Service Building.

Below: Steve Sexton, Phil Nichols, Courtney Payne, Joel Stevens, Rhonda Deckard, and Paul Wesner work together as a team during a Leadership Training session.

Happy Retirement!

Join VPCPF in honoring Jeff Kaden, Director of Energy Management and Utilities. Jeff is retiring at the end of April after 28 years of service.