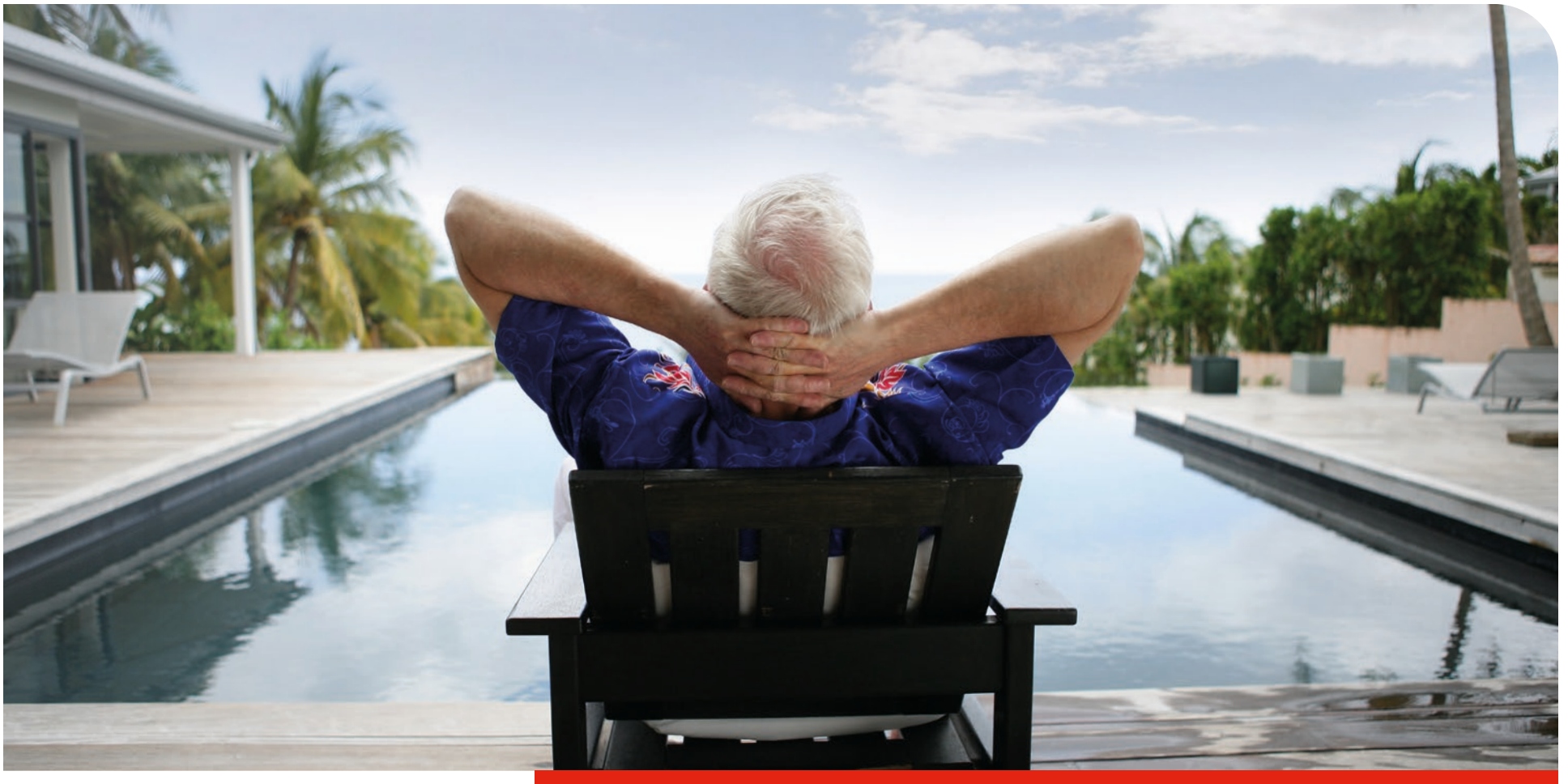


Navigating Retirements and Labor Shortages in the Facility Management Industry

Bridging Knowledge Gaps Through
Education & Technology



Introduction

The facility management industry relies heavily on deep knowledge of buildings and equipment. But with retirements and labor shortages occurring simultaneously, there's been a drain on facility knowledge which means everyone must work harder, find ways to keep innovating, continue setting goals, and be more creative with retention and recruiting.

The International Facilities Management Association (IFMA) estimates that **40% of existing facilities managers will retire by 2026**, further straining facilities teams already depleted by labor shortages. This generational shift in the facilities management workforce will trigger **labor shortages of 158,000 positions through the end of this decade.**



“The critical impact caused by retirement is knowledge transfer,” said Danielle Gathje, Vice President Hospital Operations, St. John’s Hospital. “Even if the person retiring is good at creating processes, writing down sequences of events and procedures, the experience from that person to everyone else is where we fall short. Experience is critical for understanding the why and how we respond and not just what we respond to.”

“The labor shortage causes additional issues such as the lack of ability to be proactive,” she said. “When you have a labor shortage you can only do the bare minimum to maintain, meet regulatory requirements and respond to critical issues. If you are short, you are not actively pursuing best practices, not working on process improvement measures, not working on sustainability tactics and projects.”

Below are the top 5 most critical impacts caused by retirements and labor shortages at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, provided by Bill Dunne, Director, Emergency Management and Business Continuity:

- **Ongoing stress and burnout for remaining workforce** related to working additional hours with additional responsibilities.
- **Loss of institutional knowledge, deep skill competencies, and historical context** with long term employee retirement/turnover.
- **Increased expense of hiring and training personnel** who are temporary or who rapidly move onto other organizations.
- **Need for rapidly increasing wages and benefits** to attract and retain quality personnel leading to higher expenses, narrowing or negative margins, and/or higher prices passed onto consumers (inflation of market value).
- **Creative and innovative thinking related to recruitment and training** to meet the change in workforce demographics, learning styles, and values.

According to the US Chamber of Commerce, **in 2022, more than 50 million workers quit their jobs**, many of whom were in search of an improved work-life balance and flexibility, increased compensation, and a strong company culture. Nearly three million fewer Americans are participating in the labor force today compared to February of 2020. **The number of adults 55 and older being detached from the labor force due to retirement grew from 48% in Q3 of 2019 to 50.3% in Q3 2021.**

“One big concern is recruitment and retention of both healthcare professionals and facility management professionals. It’s hard to find qualified electricians, plumbers, and HVAC technicians,” said Jonathan Westall, Vice President, Ancillary Services, Martin Luther King Jr. Community Hospital.



These two trends are being felt from all corners and all sectors of the facility management landscape.

“People aren’t necessarily getting a job with one place, staying there for 40 years, and retiring with a gold watch and a pension. That’s not the way we work anymore,” said Rebecca Lanter, Director of Plant Operations, Xavier University. **“We’ve got to focus on doing more to retain this talent and keep people engaged. I’m incredibly lucky to have a phenomenal team but many of them will retire long before I do,”** she said.

Christine Burkett, Senior Regional Facilities Maintenance Manager, Sam’s Club, has serious concerns about the impact of labor shortages and equipment maintenance.

“Where we used to have ten technicians focusing on making sure equipment is working properly, we now have five technicians,” said Burkett. **“I have two facility managers that report to me and below them are two senior coordinators, and we have a couple of temp workers that come in to supplement our day-to-day operations.”**

“Skilled trades are aging out of the system, while we’re facing a shortage of technicians,” she said. **“Maintaining equipment is tougher,”** she added.

The skills and relationships which are gained on-site, while useful, aren’t always transferable when moving from facility to facility. That’s because every facility is different, equipment ages and conditions vary, and each organization has other forces at work including budgets, expansions, and technology tools at their disposal. While outward appearances may look similar, what’s up on the roof and above the ceiling tiles are completely different.

Building a Solid Facility Management Skill Set

Facilities teams must possess a wide range of skills and competencies, as the world around us is not as simple as it used to be.

For the next generation of facility managers, acquiring knowledge is critical when dealing with more sophisticated structures, and job satisfaction. Fortunately, most everyone in the facilities management industry agrees that the work is never boring, no two days are the same, and you're surrounded with a wide variety of people from operations, security, safety, construction, and other specialty areas.

Consider the weather. Weather conditions used to be predictable. That's just not true today. Who would have predicted that California would be hit with record snowfalls and floods when the state has been in a drought for decades? Facility teams must be on alert for the impact of floods on rooftops, foundations, and other areas.

Of course, the safety of building tenants is critical. Legacy teams must continue to hone their skills, continue learning, and stay up to date with the right technology to master environmental services, building maintenance, and emergency responsiveness.

Resources for a Lifetime of Learning

- ✓ The facility management industry has several excellent **trade associations**, including IFMA, APPA, ASHE, the Society of Women Engineers, the Association of Energy Engineers, and the Society for College and University Planning. Participants socialize and learn from colleagues and those outside their industries about best practices, vendor recommendations, and trends which impact daily operations and future planning.
- ✓ **Facility management certifications** are offered by IFMA, including the Facility Management Professional (FMP), Sustainability Facility Professional (SFP), Certified Facility Manager (CFM) and the Certified Facility Management Professionals (CFMP). The Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), offers the Real Property Administrator (RPA) certification, which focuses on property management and facility operations.
- ✓ **Online learning for technology** and webinars and events for learning include the IFMA Academy, which provides online learning about cybersecurity, data analytics, smart buildings and more. LinkedIn offers courses about building information modeling, the Internet of Things (IoT), and facility management software. Facility Executive Live! is an annual event organized by Facility Executive Magazine. This event features educational sessions, keynote presentations, and networking opportunities. ARC Facilities conducts webinars on a wide range of facility management topics and has created [a library of on-demand webinars](#).

Facility teams must be life-long learners to keep ahead and stay ahead of both internal and external changes, which is a tough thing to balance given staffing changes.

Consider the number of people responsible for a 600,000 square foot facility, spread out over many acres and multiple locations. Sounds like a job for maybe 50 technicians. But that's not the case.

So many facilities are running short-staffed that it's become the norm rather than the exception.

The Road Ahead

“We need to reach out to younger generations to get them interested in careers in engineering, building and facility management. There’s a lot of depth into what goes into running a building – more than just the aesthetic of the space,” said Abby Lipperman, Manager Engineering Infrastructure at Children’s Health.



Apprenticeship programs and tapping into talent at community colleges and even high schools are currently trending and have proven successful for fostering the facility managers of the future.

While some recent retirees are willing to do some consulting for their former employers, that’s hardly a reliable resource, as facilities continue to evolve and change at a rapid pace. It’s easy to forget the details when you’re not at a facility every day.

So how do we bring new people into the workforce? How we fill the gaps when finding skilled labor is a challenge.



“If you look at the University of Virginia, they probably have the greatest internal apprentice program I’ve ever seen,” said Lisa Belokur, Associate Vice President of Facilities & Residential Services, Georgetown University. “At Cornell, we had a very well-established apprentice program with the local trade unions. Here, we’re building it up and I’m excited to see how our program develops.”

Changes in the labor market are difficult to gauge, but in the meantime, the facility management industry can do more to attract new talent to the industry by offering incentives such as shift flexibility, technology designed to aid in productivity, and ongoing education.

On the plus side, facility management positions pay well, positions are in demand, and there’s never a dull day when you work in facilities. Positions in the trades have many benefits, including diversity of types of positions, from electricians to HVAC specialists. There’s the satisfaction of working with your hands, and excellent job security whether you work directly with an organization or as a contractor. Even apprentices often get to work immediately on projects, so there’s a feeling of contribution and usefulness from the get-go.

The FM Pipeline Team, Inc. and its SkillsUSA Facilithon program serve as the nation’s first and only successful secondary and post-secondary-level FM talent program. Operating in the SkillsUSA ecosystem, the Facilithon program has grown from 1 city to 14 and Canada in March 2023, having awarded 74 scholarships, engaged over 10,000 forward-thinking student candidates, and has energized hundreds of secondary-level participants toward becoming facility professionals.





Buildings, technology, best practices, and people are rapidly changing. There's more technology in buildings. Buildings are constantly being repurposed, recycled, reimagined and in the process their care, upkeep, and maintenance keep changing.

Whether you're new in your career, or you've reached a plateau and you want to explore options, there's tremendous value in education – to improve your skill set, elevate your service to people, and help team members in the field.

We must be aware and conscious of bringing the generations together as one group moves on to retirement and another group moves in from trade schools, apprenticeships, community colleges, and other starting points. Both can effectively learn from another, so it's possible

to learn and stay vital even when departures are on the horizon. Technology can be the link to learning and keeping the work of facilities teams fun and fulfilling.

Educating and elevating the next generation of FM's will take encouragement, enthusiasm, and expertise from those in the profession today who can serve as mentors. Let's give these types of programs our full support in the coming years as we continue to do the very best to alleviate the strain of retirements and labor shortages.



To find out how ARC Facilities can help you ease the transition to the next generation of facilities management, request a demo today.

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