The Proper Professionals can help with Business Growth

As companies grow beyond home-based enterprises into bricks and mortar businesses, the need arises for a professional who handles the facilities end of the business. In small organizations, an office manager often acts as procurement specialist, bookkeeper, human resources manager and facilities person. However at some point it becomes important to pay specific attention to each of these areas to allow them to be approached proactively. When such a moment arrives, how does one hire a facilities manager and what qualities should that person possess?

The first step is to decide whether you want a Corporate Real Estate Professional or a Facilities Manager. The former is a more senior position that is usually involved in strategic planning for a portfolio of facilities in and handles real estate issues (e.g. leases). The latter is more likely to focus on a facility or a campus and handle issues ranging from design and construction to physical plant (maintenance, landscaping, HVAC, etc.) Once you know what type of responsibilities you want your new colleague to handle, you can turn to the more intangible qualities that make someone well suited to hold this type of position.

Strong communication skills are an asset in someone responsible for facilities/real estate. One must be comfortable communicating with colleagues at all levels, from CEOs to administrative assistants. Additionally, facilities professionals function best when they interface successfully with Finance, Human Resources and Technology professionals, any of whom they might also be their direct report. The integration of facilities with these other areas ensures that all parts of a business that support employees and foster growth work holistically.

Successful professionals are those who have a clear understanding of how their senior management team views facilities. Some companies view facilities and real estate as investments that are utilized to enhance employee hiring and retention, to impress clients and to embody vision. Some companies, among them those that are more accustomed to business based on clicks than bricks, view facilities as a necessary evil that must be provided and maintained, but is not a strategic tool. Both views are common and each requires a different approach to planning and implementation of space initiatives.

Another important skill is the ability to manage expectations from the top down and from the bottom up. Virtually any experienced facilities person can talk about how they negotiate the tensions between end users who report they are bursting at the seams and senior management who have instituted a moratorium on spending. Likewise creating and implementing a set of corporate facilities standards requires one to support end users effectively without sacrificing agreed upon guidelines. Communication, problem solving and planning are all valuable tools for this part of the job.

Budgeting skills commonly come into play as a facilities professional manages the ebb and flow of expansion and consolidation in business as well as the particulars of any individual project. Negotiation skills support favorable lease terms and asset costs. The ability to prioritize and to manage multiple projects simultaneously are often crucial to success. Thus backgrounds and education in architecture, real estate and business help lay a foundation for success. Less obvious as a job requirement is the ability to exercise patience. Most facilities initiatives require substantial outlays of time and financial resources. Relocations and renovations are stressful and disruptive to employees and often feel like they take longer than they do. Competing priorities are communicated to facilities professionals with equal vehemence. Thus, patience truly is a virtue for the facilities professionals.

Last but not least, finding experienced professionals need not be difficult. Organizations such as the International Facilities Management Association (IFMA) and CoreNet are good resources for talented facilities and real estate professionals respectively. Both have local chapters in most major cities as well as job bank protocols. Additionally, project managers in real estate and architecture and design firms are good resources for referrals of professionals they’ve worked with successfully who are in the market for new opportunities.