



# Clean Sweep

**How well is your campus maintained, and what is housekeeping really costing? Maybe it's time to clean up custodial service operations.**

**BY NICOLE RIVARD**

**A**s the competition to attract and retain students continues to heat up, campus quality-of-life issues are more critical than ever to IHEs, and many higher ed administrators are now turning a sharp eye to custodial service operations. In fact, say insiders, for colleges and universities focused on improving recruitment, especially, few facilities issues may be as pressing as (shall we say?) immaculate perception. But perception is not the only driver behind schools' newfound need to clean up their act; there are dollars to be saved in rethinking a maintenance setup that may have long been taken for granted—dollars that can be applied directly to the bottom line.

### To Outsource or Not to Outsource?

That is the question on most minds, when it comes to rethinking cleaning operations. Matthew Kennedy, a subcontractor of Adams Consulting Group ([www.adams-grp.com](http://www.adams-grp.com)), facilities specialists, points out that often, IHEs simply have too many areas begging for a complete reengineering of cleaning operations, or they have too few resources in the present physical plant to perform in an effective and efficient manner. In such cases, says Kennedy, it makes sense to outsource. But don't base outsourcing decisions on cost, he warns, for in some cases, such as when an institution needs to bump up frequency or extent of service, costs can increase.

Still, "Contracting *may* allow a university to enjoy the cost advantage of the economies of scale that can be exploited by large contractors and specialization of labor," he says, adding that the key is to do your homework: Look carefully for the benefits and pitfalls of both outsourcing and keeping cleaning operations in-house. And look around at what other schools are doing. Administrators at **Wentworth Institute of Technology** in Boston, for instance, opted for outsourcing. Officials at **North Carolina State University**, on the other hand, took the self-operation route. Here's how both schools cleaned up their custodial operations—with bottom-line success.

#### North Carolina State: Revamping Chain of Command

Cleaning six million square feet in 170 buildings at North Carolina State University has never been an easy task, and the re-engineering of the university's housecleaning operations was no snap, either. Still, by the end of the year 2000, members of the facilities operations administration, campus customers (staff, faculty, and students), as well as the school's own housekeeping employees, all realized a significant change was needed. Productivity and operational effectiveness were glaring issues, but particularly critical to a dramatic advance in operational efficiency was an improvement in communications between housekeepers and supervisors, and between customers and supervisors.

Administrators briefly considered outsourcing to correct these ills, but decided to keep housekeeping in-house—provided a more competitive total cost of cleaning could be achieved.

"We also wanted to make sure we got our operations within industry standards," says Lawrence Bradley, assistant director of

all other supervisors in between the directors and the housekeeping staff. But Bradley was concerned: How would employees react to turning house-cleaning operations upside down? He decided to hold briefings for housekeeping employees and supervisors, before any definite decisions were made.

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—Matthew Kennedy, a subcontractor of Adams Consulting Group

Facilities Operations for University Housekeeping. "Our ratio of employees to supervisors, for example, was five to one, which was rather low. Ordinarily, one supervisor should handle several more employees."

To get in line with industry standards and improve communications among the different levels of operations, Bradley decided to reduce the levels of supervision within the department. The operational hierarchy at the time was cumbersome, with 47 supervisors among 305 housekeeping positions all-told. The academic buildings were divided among two area housekeeping administrators, and another area housekeeping administrator was responsible for housing units. The area administrators reported to the assistant director of Housekeeping and the assistant director for Facilities Operations, who then reported to the associate vice chancellor for Finance and Business or the associate vice chancellor for Facilities. Under the three area administrators were several other layers of supervisors to whom housekeepers would report.

Bradley and his fellow administrators wanted a departure from the convoluted system and eventually agreed upon a "zone" plan wherein housekeepers would report directly to zone managers, removing

"We knew the changes would have quite an impact on our operations and our employees, so we wanted to make sure everyone was well-informed about what we were doing," he says. "Obviously, by eliminating supervisor positions, it meant that some people would become housekeepers if they didn't get one of the new zone manager positions. And we wanted to address their concerns about pay and work hours."

**Zoning in.** At the beginning of reorganization, the total university housekeeping budget was \$5.6 million. Eight percent was spent on reorganizing, including the cost of housekeeping management consultants Roesel, Kent, and Associates ([www.rkafacility.com](http://www.rkafacility.com)). The consultants immediately set to work on a space inventory of the campus areas that would need servicing. They also devised a workload analysis, which led to the creation of the zone service plan that eliminated the numerous supervisor positions clogging communications.

The plan consisted of 15 service zones—nine of which were academic, five residential, and one a "flow" zone wherein employees would clean floor surfaces only and respond to unscheduled floor maintenance. Each zone would have its own zone manager to whom housekeeping would report directly. Zone managers, in turn, would report

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to two deputy assistant directors of Facilities Operations, who would then report to Bradley. The number of supervisor positions would drop from 47 to 19.

As part of the plan, computers were purchased for all the zone managers, who also received individual offices, making them more accessible to housekeepers. (Previ-

After the zones were established, supervisory and housekeeping employees were given first, second, and third choice of zones in which they preferred to work.

**Strategy: Equipment evaluation.** It became evident during the reorganization process that certain equipment needed to be replaced for both efficiency and ease of

and increased efficiency, but from not having to fund as many positions—currently 268, down from 305. Average salary (less benefits) for a zone manager is \$26,000; \$18,000 for a housekeeper. In the 2003-2004 term alone, that savings could be more than three-quarters of a million dollars. Then, of course, there's the soft-dollar impact on student recruitment and retention, when a campus is simply a cleaner, nicer place to live. As for housekeeping staffers, Bradley reports that they feel communication is improved; they are also pleased with the ongoing training. NCSU lost less than 1 percent of its housekeeping employees in the reorganization, he adds, and faculty, staff, and student feedback about the revamped custodial operation has been good. But customer satisfaction will be formally measured via a review by Roesel, Kent and Associates, which is soon to be completed. For the review, the consultants conducted group feedback sessions with "customer" representatives from every building serviced on campus. They also conducted individualized, direct conversations with customers for more detailed feedback.

"From the standpoint of internal reorganization," says Bradley, "we were very successful. But [our custodial operations improvement] is an ongoing process."

## Wentworth Institute of Technology: Forging a Fail-Safe Vendor/Client Relationship

In April 2003, the Wentworth Institute of Technology (Boston) returned to a contract agreement with UNICCO Service Company ([www.unicco.com](http://www.unicco.com)) for overnight and daytime custodial services, after a disappointing stint with another facilities maintenance vendor. Since the time of the school's original relationship with UNICCO, both college and vendor had learned much about forging mutually successful partnerships—and that insight has been the basis of their current winning, working relationship. Wentworth administrators were especially wary after their most recent experience: The facilities management vendor they contracted suffered from management retention problems, and ultimately was un-

“The more **thorough** the contract, the less problems you’ll have afterwards.”

—Bruce Boyer, Director of Physical Plant,  
Wentworth Institute of Technology

ously, area administrators had computers in one office, in one building on campus.) The consultants also implemented additional strategies to smooth the transition:

**Strategy: Transition team.** The consultants brought together representatives from housekeeping, the previous group of supervisors, and the administration, to help make decisions instead of making them unilaterally. After such meetings, the representatives reported back to their fellow employees to keep them abreast of the decisions.

**Strategy: On-the-job training.** Roesel, Kent determined which types of on-the-job training would be necessary to improve productivity. The firm supplies software such as *Dusting Techniques* or *Routine Cleaning of Hard Surface Floors* for user-interactive, computer-based housekeeper training. Zone managers received training in basic supervisory skills and administrative procedures. To make the training experience more personal, NCSU customized the software by modifying the graphics and using visuals of their own employees.

**Strategy: Employee placement plan.** Prior to the actual implementation of the new zone service model, a new hiring system was designed that would be fair to all housekeeping employees, and would help them migrate to different posts. No one was arbitrarily placed in a new position. Any housekeeping employee could apply for a zone manager position, even if he was not previously in a supervisor position.

operation. The consultants recommended that new laborsaving equipment should be purchased to help the staff achieve productivity goals.

**Challenges.** NCSU's new zone service model has been up and running for a little over a year, and at times, says Bradley, the implementation was challenging. Reassigning the employees was the most difficult part of the reorganization, he says, because many housekeeping employees have second jobs, and children they must transport to and from school. Many had to adjust to new hours that were recommended by the consultants so that more housekeeping tasks could be performed before buildings were occupied. The staff was given several months' notice prior to switch-over, and was encouraged to discuss problems.

Necessary measures were also taken to protect the wages of those employees who used to be supervisors but found themselves again in housekeeping positions. The administration sought approval (from state personnel via the university's Human Resources Department) to freeze the salaries of those employees who would be reduced in rank from supervisor to housekeeper; those salaries were preserved, but redlined until state increase awards for housekeepers caught up to the former supervisory salaries.

**ROI.** Hard-dollar savings will come, says Bradley, not just from improved operations

# What Should You Ask a Prospective Facilities Services Provider?

Here are smart questions to ask—*before* you sign—from UNICCO's VP of Business Development, Randy Ledbetter

## **Does the vendor have a formalized, benchmarking process to evaluate its cost effectiveness and best practices?**

*Facilities services providers should benchmark their performance across industry lines on a regular basis, and develop formal reports and action plans based on the information analyzed. They should also have formal continuous improvement programs that include road maps of how to drive quality of service (QoS) strategies throughout their organization—from management to every service provider on staff. You should search for ways to prove that their dedication to measurement and quality is more than lip service.*

## **What are the key performance indicators that are measured on a regular basis?**

*Related to the first question, what are their specific measurements? Do they look at cost per square foot? Response time? Productivity? Customer satisfaction? Do they measure specific financial and performance metrics that give an accurate picture of account performance? Understand what they measure; then ask if they are willing to share their findings with you, the customer, in order to determine if the metrics they measure are the ones that are important to you.*

## **What are the vendor's current continuous quality initiatives? How is the company taking its operation to the next level, to drive down costs and improve quality?**

*Here again, this is a way to determine the vendor's true level of commitment to continuous quality improvement, and thus move the conversation from rhetoric to results. Continuous quality improvement (CQI) initiatives could be related to implementing new technology or more efficient work processes. CQI initiatives could also include providing added value through certain tangential services not included in the core program. The prospective vendor should be able to give you specific programs that have been, or are being, implemented for other customers. True, the company may not be able to share information tied to a named account, but it should be able to give you hard data from blind accounts. After all, you don't want the vendor to learn how to do it on your dime!*

## **What internal tools does the vendor use to measure performance?**

*The vendor should have a well-defined set of tools to measure performance, such as a Balanced Scorecard management ap-*

*proach (for more on the Balanced Scorecard method, head to [www.balancedscorecard.org/basics/bsc1.html](http://www.balancedscorecard.org/basics/bsc1.html)). Does the vendor utilize technology? Ask if the contractor is able to implement a computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) and a formal, automated inspection system to keep on top of quality issues in real time and generate actionable reports. If the contractor utilizes such systems, you should be able to see how it trains its management in these techniques. Make sure you come away with a comfortable feeling that each manager—including management who will be working on your account—is fully steeped in and comfortable with the continuous quality improvement.*

## **How is employee morale, and how does the contractor measure employee satisfaction on a regular basis?**

*One of the major advantages of turning to an outsource provider for facilities services is that it is probably a good deal better at recruiting, training and retaining facilities maintenance employees than your own institution. Look at the contractor's employee programs. Look at the technical training it provides, as well as the career tracks and motivational programs it offers its employees. Your chosen vendor's employees are the people who will be interacting with your staff. You want to have motivated, trained and happy employees working for your outsource facilities services vendor. Take a look at the vendor's supervisory training, as well. Do you think that the overall personnel approach is up to your standards?*

## **How happy are the vendor's customers, and what is the account retention record? How does the vendor measure customer satisfaction?**

*Look at customer satisfaction and, most telling, check customer retention figures for organizations that are similar to yours; make sure that the fit is right for you. Look specifically at what types of formal customer interaction programs the vendor has in place for your institution. What reports will you receive? What kinds of meetings will you have and with whom? Will there be a formal account review process? How will vendor management, supervisors, and staff interact with administrative staff, and at what levels? Outsourcing facilities services demands an intense relationship between you and the vendor. Make sure you'll be comfortable with your decision every day.*

able to meet the institution's expectations.

Now, during the client/vendor interview process, Wentworth officials are quick to ask how long employees have been with a vendor. And according to Bruce Boyer, Wentworth's director of Physical Plant, most reputable vendors will, with their

proposals, include pamphlets that provide information about the company, such as who the senior managers are, what their references are, and how long they have been with the company.

**An airtight RFP.** But a successful relationship begins *prior* to the interview

process, with the request for proposal (RFP), says Adams Consulting's Kennedy. A thorough internal analysis of existing custodial operations is needed to properly prepare a comprehensive RFP that first defines the services currently being provided by custodial operations, he explains. *(Cont'd.)*

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"Services can range from basic cleaning to many other services—and even non-custodial activities—that the Physical Plant (PHPL) provides to the end user, and which happen to fall under the housekeeping department. Many times, in contract-ing-out services, such items are over-looked; and many times, this is what


the number of times they are to be cleaned, and exactly what the cleaning should en-tail. Other things that must be up front, he advises, include an hourly rate for extra hours of work that are required to handle student activities or campus events.

"If you don't determine the rate up front, the contractor is free to charge you

consultants recommend building incentives into client/vendor contractual agreements, in order to encourage exemplary service.

As for guaranties of service, a "Quality Standard for Routine Cleaning" within the contract must be the basis for determining if the services contracted are being performed within the industry standard, says Kennedy. In conjunction with the standards, a "Custodial Evaluation Scoring System" should be developed, he advises. The scoring system should be divided into five categories, ranging from excellent to unacceptable. Each category should be assigned a score range and criteria to be used to award the score. Evaluation sheets should then be developed for each building or category of building, based upon the areas to be cleaned within the buildings, and the service, or tasks, to be provided within each area.

**Contract Administrator.** Standards of acceptable service assist the contract administrator (CA), who is employed by the institution and who plays a critical role in maintaining a successful client/vendor relationship: It is up to the CA to ensure that the contractor is in compliance with the services contract. This individual also assists both parties in coordinating the housekeeping departments effectively, and sets up an audit trail for each key service activity. The audit trail can then be used to effectively resolve any issues pertaining to the conduct of the contract.

At Wentworth, the CA prevented the school's previously disappointing client/vendor relationship from going from bad to even worse. "The lapse in services was picked up immediately," Boyer says, adding, "I would much rather have *my* people see a problem, than get phone calls from other employees or [customers] on the campus." Wentworth's CA walks the campus with the contractor's site supervisor on a weekly basis; monthly, with middle management; and quarterly, with upper management. Boyer stresses the importance of post-contract follow-up via inspections and regular meetings, in order to ensure the contract is being met. "It's the only fair way to measure the performance of the contractor and keep the company on top of your expectations." 

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—Bruce Boyer

causes friction between the contractor and university." Kennedy points out that building custodial operations may be responsible for the following services:

- Daily cleaning of all campus building common areas, public spaces, rest-rooms, classrooms, labs, vending areas, library, conference rooms, lecture halls, auditoriums, student and office areas, residence halls, athletic areas and facilities, and auxiliary service areas
- "Policing" of public areas such as entrances and lobbies
- Weekend cleaning coverage
- Re-lamping of lighting fixtures
- Periodic floor care
- Snow and ice removal around building entrances and steps
- Support for campus special events and set-ups
- Furniture and equipment moves
- Regularly scheduled painting
- Pest control (as required)
- Stadium cleaning
- Other services: making coffee, delivering mail or newspapers, transporting boxes or parcels for faculty

"The more thorough the contract, the fewer problems you'll have afterwards," agrees Boyer. Because of this, he adds, "When vendors bid with us, we are comparing apples to apples." Contracts, he explains, spec out every square foot of the buildings that are supposed to be cleaned,

whatever it wants, afterwards," he says. "In our contracts, we try to include as many of those activities as possible, so that there are no surprises at the end of the year. We include things like the extra help needed during commencement and during move-in weekends." In addition, he includes in the paperwork the potential for emergencies or disasters.

"You need to know what extra available staff the contractor has, in case of an emergency and/or disaster, where you will need all the help you can get," Boyer says. "We've had a couple of floods here, and UNICCO was able to handle supplying us with all the extra help we needed—*without* taking away from the regular daily service."

**Building-in protection.** But service stipulations may still not be enough, say higher ed maintenance experts. A school should build protections and guaranties of service into a contract with any service provider. Wentworth's contract, for instance, states that if either party does not meet the requirements of the contract, the other party can back out with 30 days' notice. But UNNICO's Randy Ledbetter, VP of Business Development, cautions against creating a "we" versus "they" atmosphere with too many such clauses.

"You want to create more of a team approach," he says. "If there are going to be penalties, there should also be upside potential." In fact, many service and support



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