

# elevate

## Elevating Your Facility Career

Elevate, a new intimate facility leadership summit connects executives for networking and learning opportunities

*By Dave Lubach, Executive Editor*



*Building Operating Management* magazine hosted its first Elevate event for facility executives in September in Chicago.

Elevate is a networking and learning opportunity for facility executives to participate in panels, listen to keynote presentations and engage in active roundtables with fellow facility leaders from across the country. A diverse cross-section of industries was represented at Elevate, ranging from healthcare to municipal governments, nonprofits, pro sports, K-12 school districts and universities and colleges. Attendees also were invited to attend an exclusive tour of the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry to kick off the two-day event.

Attendees also had opportunities to engage with vendors about the latest developments in products and technologies influencing the facilities management industry.

The event was supported by marquee sponsors 3M, Honeywell and Amazon Business as well as gold sponsors FMX, Yardi and CPower Energy.

Make plans to attend Elevate in 2025. Look for updates about the event on [FacilitiesNet.com](https://www.facilitiesnet.com). For a sample of the information presented at this year's Elevate, read on.





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## Facility Condition Assessments: ‘Build a Story to Show Why It’s So Important’

Ask any facility executive what the biggest challenges are in their jobs, and taking bites out of the rising mountains of deferred maintenance typically ranks at or very near the top of the list.

During a long career in facilities management, Clarence Carson has seen this drill far too many times. CEOs and other C-Suite types know deferred maintenance is a serious issue for their facilities. But often, they can’t help themselves when shiny, new objects present themselves.

A facility condition assessment (FCA) is a great way for facility executives to help solve deferred maintenance challenges. An FCA can also help fellow executives not familiar with facilities better understand the importance of maintaining a building’s guts – areas the public doesn’t typically see. Still, for some reason, many overlook these assessments.

“Many organizations don’t value an FCA enough still,” says Carson, president of CCRS Group and the former chief facilities officer at Chicago Public Schools. “They see the results, and see the deferred maintenance plan, but then they do some other aesthetic project, and the money gets kicked down the road to a more high-profile project.”



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Carson was part of a panel discussing FCAs and was joined by John D'Angelo, assistant vice president, facilities operations for the University of Chicago, and Scott Wollenzien, senior director of facilities construction, at Northwestern Mutual in Milwaukee. Dan Weltin, editor-in-chief, facility market, which includes *Building Operating Management* magazine, was the panel moderator.

The panel discussed FCAs and how facility executives can better use their voice to convince other organization leaders to spend dollars on critical items like boilers, lighting systems or structural improvements to ensure safety for occupants and achieve the best quality of life in the buildings they manage.

Wollenzien says Northwestern Mutual does internal FCAs and will incorporate a third-party assessment to follow up on the internal findings. Using a third party helps leaders who are writing out the checks gain a more neutral view of potential issues that a building might face.

“Build a story for leadership about risks and what risks need to be taken,” Wollenzien says. “Identify and categorize risks and help build a story to show why it’s so important.”

Selling a story for critical projects and upgrades has never been more important as funds aren’t always flowing. Those same leaders are not always familiar with the importance of funding facility upgrades.

When selling the story, D'Angelo advises facility executives to get others in their organization to rally behind their cause.

“As good as you are at telling your story, you won’t be as good as other people telling your story – everybody else around you saying it is more effective,” D'Angelo says. “Bringing other stakeholders into the process – the chief nursing manager, site manager – engage the leadership with your data. How you can build the stories can be the difference.”

Wollenzien agrees: “Have a consistent answer and make sure everyone is speaking the same language. Make sure that your own leadership is also telling the same story.”



## GSA Director Encourages Leaders to 'Shake Things Up'

Part of the job for facilities executives is constantly looking forward to the next challenge or the next energy-saving opportunity. It's that part of the job that Levron Schuchalter embraces with the General Services Administration (GSA).

Schuchalter delivered the morning keynote address at Elevate. He is deputy director of facilities management and services programs for the National Capital Region of the GSA. His region includes about 600 owned and leased GSA buildings and 92 million square feet in an area that includes Washington D.C., and parts of Maryland and Virginia. The buildings under his purview include the White House and buildings that house the Environmental Protection Agency, Internal Revenue Service and the Department of Energy.

As a GSA leader, Schuchalter finds himself on the cutting edge of technological developments impacting the facilities industry worldwide. He's constantly forward-thinking, managing some of the highest profile buildings in the country. In his view, if facility executives are not looking ahead, they're falling behind.



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“Ten years from now, we should not be operating buildings the way we operated buildings 10 years ago,” was one of his messages.

One of Schuchalter’s pet projects for GSA was a modernization of facilities that has significantly changed the way the agency looks at operating buildings. With the upgrades, the GSA has emphasized digitalization for managing buildings, finding other efficiencies and changing the contracting process.

“Not necessarily finding the cheapest solution, but the best value,” he says.

As Schuchalter described the assignment, he was given the task of “to take risks, shake things up.”

One of the results of the project was the creation of the National Capital Region’s Regional Operations Center (ROC), a virtual and regional platform where data can be viewed and controlled via the web. ROC can be used to integrate and incorporate new technologies.

Since implementing the system, the GSA reports a savings of \$8.2 million in energy costs or the equivalent of powering 6,600 homes for a year.

The success of ROC has allowed GSA to expand the program nationally in other regions and assist in training for building management programs. It also allows GSA to continue onboarding more employees who have experience working with smart buildings.

Like facilities executives across other industries, one major hurdle at GSA is the need to find the next generation of facility employees and executives.

While money is a clear motivator for most employees to change jobs, that isn’t always an easy sell for the government that sometimes can’t compete with private firms in the salary department. Instead, Schuchalter leans on the other advantages of working for the federal government – advantages that helped him take his GSA opportunity many years ago.

“Emphasize that you can make a difference,” he says.





## McDonald's Leader: 'Focus on Value but Look at Things to do Right'

With more than 14,000 restaurants in the United States, Lionel Sussman can't be expected to know every singular detail about every McDonald's site across the country.

"If you think about anything that works in one restaurant, think about scale and consistency," says Sussman, the senior director design and construction for McDonald's Corp. "We need to emphasize the design features that makes the location unique, but the food core never changes."

Sussman participated in a fireside chat with Dan Weltin, editor-in-chief, facility market. McDonald's restaurants will always have Big Macs, but they may not all feature drive-up windows or self-ordering kiosks. It's up to Sussman and his team to determine what works best for each franchise in the country.

Since it is impossible to be at every location, Sussman's leadership approach with the individual sites involves a lot of reliance on the franchise owners who as contracted, must have the McDonald's franchises they own as their primary business.

"I manage my teams by putting myself in their shoes," Sussman says. "They've been there and done that in their work, so I know it takes a little bit of work."



Many of the topics that facility executives are dealing with these days are the same kinds of issues that McDonald's restaurants are concerned with, such as:

- **Renovations:** Sussman says McDonald's sites typically have a lifespan of 40 to 50 years. Franchisees must consider facility questions such as: What do the costs entail (franchisees and corporation share in some instances) and when do we remodel or rebrand to keep customers coming through the doors?
- **Municipal code:** Staying on top of any local government regulations that are involved when there are renovations or upgrades required for restaurants.
- **Going green:** McDonald's has sustainability goals to achieve by 2030 and 2050 with regards to electrification, reducing water use and carbon footprint of its restaurants.
- **DEI:** McDonald's is focused on bringing in minority franchise owners and continuing to work with minority vendors and suppliers.
- **ADA compliance:** Franchisees need to keep a

close eye on the Americans with Disabilities Act developments for providing services for visually or verbally impaired customers and making non-gender bathrooms available for customers.

Depending on the franchisee and their views on these topics, corporate mandates aren't always well-received. One of Sussman's responsibilities is to soothe his clients and assure them that upgrades will be money well spent.

"One of the things we do is show them the numbers and show why it's better to invest," Sussman says. "Story telling is how you sell something to franchisees."

*Dave Lubach is the executive editor for the facility market. He has more than nine years of experience writing about facility management and maintenance issues.*

