While personal skills aren't usually at the top of the list of qualifications for property professionals, our interpersonal skills are in fact a key to our success. Can we do it better?

One of the advantages of having been involved in the profession of property management for an extended period of time, and with a number of different organizations, is some perspective regarding what actions a property manager can take that will make a real difference, and lead to success both personally and for an organization.

Technical knowledge, understanding of regulations, mastering the jargon, etc., are the requisite tools, most provided or facilitated by the NPMA, that we need to effectively do our jobs. But we all know that having the tools and knowing the answer are very different than accomplishing the mission. The challenge is how to successfully implement what we've learned and make a difference for our organizations.

And, of course, organizations are people. Getting things done means gaining some insight into people, and how they work together in your the organization. So, in response to Mike Hay's invitation (actually, a stronger, more Texan term was used), here are some insights from one property professional, or...

**Ten lessons learned from dealing with people as a Property Professional**

**Seek and cultivate management support.**

"This is a high-visibility job" are the words you want to hear - because if it's not, you're in trouble. For most of us, property management is not the end product of our organizations, and is therefore an administrative rather than a technical function. In performing an administrative function, we can become a victim of our own success. If we make property management a "non-problem," then we can become invisible as management focuses on more pressing issues. Support may dwindle, resulting in negative events, such as lost property, audit failure, or tax problems. Then visibility returns quickly, with the inevitable, "How did you let this happen?"

The path to avoiding this syndrome is to seek and cultivate management support. Find property management in organizational goals and communicate the connection to management. Master the one viewgraphone-viewgraph presentation and the elevator speech. Keep your message simple and crisp - it's what management will hear. Finally, one of the first lessons I learned in property management is still one of my favorites: never ask a question you don't want to hear the answer to!

**Presenting the problem isn’t enough – suggest answers or alternatives.**

In a recent issue of The Property Professional in an excellent (and related) article titled "Overcoming the Occupational Hazards of Property Management," author Ronald Hawkins references a quote from Albert Einstein: "The price of criticism is a constructive alternative." One of my first NPMA presentations was at a NOVA Chapter meeting. I was pretty proud of my "rant," pointing out some problem or other. After the meeting, the chapter President, George Beddoe, kindly took me aside, and offered his version of Einstein's words: "Presenting the problem isn’t enough - suggest answers or alternatives." It's a challenge I've tried to remember.

**Change how you think about property, your job, and your profession.**

ASTM Standard E 2135 defines property as “Something or a number of things in which one has the rights and interests subject to ownership.” So if property is really about ownership, property management is really about...
people. Or, as I like to say (in simple, elevator-speech style), “People have stuff.” And they hire us to manage it for them! Or do they? We call it property management, but how many of us actually make decisions about how property is used? Or even where it is located? So maybe we are actually “Property System Managers” or “Property Control System Professionals.” As property professionals, are we comfortable with ambiguity? With change? With looking at things from different perspectives?

Pareto’s Law – the 80/20 Rule.

Pareto’s Law is very applicable to many facets of property management. For example, based on my experience and observation, 20% of the people will follow even the worst system. So you’re left chasing 80% of the people (and their “stuff”!). On the other hand, 80% of the people will follow a logical, consistent system. Then you only have to chase after that last 20%!

Understand and utilize the latest management techniques.

You know it isn’t the answer to all the world’s problems (though others may act as if it is), but it is the language management and other employees are tuned into. So, whether it’s TQ, TQM, Reengineering, ISO 9000, Six Sigma, or the latest source of Dilbertisms, there is always something to be learned – by what is stressed, and perhaps more subtly, by what is ignored. Yes, this is a circular reference to Lesson Number 1 – speak the jargon management understands.

Manage your job.

Work smarter, not harder. If you work in an organization that equates long hours with valuable contribution, my sympathies. Hopefully, your organization has a more enlightened view so that you get to spend more time at home. But then you also probably understand the pressure and responsibility of effectively identifying and meeting objectives. Remember, “system manager,” don’t even think that you can do it all yourself! Use the latest technology that makes sense – but don’t believe it’s a panacea. Stay abreast of the latest innovations and current issues in the profession. And perhaps most importantly, if you don’t know that your job is important, no one else will either.

Accept responsibility.

Make commitments you can keep – and keep them. If it doesn’t get done, if you don’t pass the audit,... ultimately it is your responsibility. Of course it helps if you’ve warned management ahead of time! (And never delete an email!)

Understand the perspective of the folks you deal with.

Property professionals deal with the entire organization - from the leader of the organization to entry-level personnel. And people across that spectrum are responsible for the success of your organization’s property management system. Why is property management important to them? How does it fit into their day – and interface with their other responsibilities? Build strong personal relationships, especially with folks whose job is to judge you - (e.g., management, auditors, analysts). Understand their perspective on the organization and the property management function. This understanding can only come through communication, and everything you do or say is a communication. As Margaret Keys has so aptly stated, “The only communication that counts is the message received.” What messages are you sending?

Learn everything you can about dealing with and managing people.

Few property professionals have large staffs, and many have no staff at all! More typical are dotted line relationships, program or department-level property coordinators report to local managers, with a dotted line to a central property organization. In such matrixed organizations, management training is critical. Management is more motivational and political than directorial. The better your management skills, the more successful you will be. And of course the property coordinators are dealing with the same issue, motivating employees to follow procedures, report movement of property, etc. Whatever level you are working at, property professionals are dealing with people. You can’t be successful without their support.

In property management, your reputation is more important than your job.

Even in tough times, with a good reputation you can find a job. But in the community of property management, a reputation of deception or purposeful misleading can end a career. Hopefully, none of us work for organizations that would encourage or allow such behavior – but if you do, proceed with caution, or find a better job! Honesty, trust, and integrity are irreplaceable. And the best way to enhance your reputation is through success, and by helping others to succeed. Encourage and mentor others, promote learning and advancement, and share your insights.

In the end, your professional and personal success and happiness are up to you! And how you deal with people will be a major factor.