

Equity Office MAPs Out Unique Training Program

Have you ever applied for your dream job only to discover you lacked the relevant work experience to be considered for the position? For a number of individuals today interested in pursuing a career in the commercial management sector, this is an all too real scenario. Equity Office Properties



Trust (www.equityoffice.com), the nation's largest publicly-held owner and manager of office buildings, wants to change that. The company has created an introductory program to attract the best and the brightest employees seeking a career in real estate.

In 1998, Equity Office developed the Management Associate Program (MAP), an introductory training program that provides the skills and training necessary for individuals interested in the property management side of commercial real estate. Equity Office is currently piloting the program in Chicago. The MAP program opens a door into a new career as an assistant property manager within Equity Office's large portfolio of office buildings.

Recently, the *Journal of Property Management* had the opportunity to discuss Equity Office's unique training program with Lawrence Krema, senior vice president, Human Resources, and creator of the MAP initiative, and John Kothe, Managing Director-Property Management,

Chicago Region at Equity Office.

JPM: *What factors prompted Equity Office to invest in the development of the MAP program?*

KREMA: We place a tremendous amount of emphasis on employee development and growing talent within the organization. We try to look for the best talent with the greatest potential, and develop employees internally through flexible programs.

The MAP program was really developed in response to 2000's competitive employment market. The program is part of our comprehensive efforts to retain talent. These efforts start as soon as an employee begins working for us and continue through recognition programs, training programs and development programs.

Our goal is to identify the best talent in the marketplace and provide employees with the opportunities, the recognition and the development to grow and flourish within the Equity Office environment.

KOTHE: In the last couple of years, the property management sector has had to be much more focused on customer service. The role of the traditional property manager is changing and requiring a new skill set. We look for people with a fairly broad background who are customer service-oriented and have good people skills. As a result, many times our candidates aren't coming from the property management field. What we found was that there were good candidates with experience outside of real estate who we could train to serve at the property level.

JPM: *How does the MAP program work?*

KOTHE: Candidates apply for available associate manager positions and undergo an interview process with our selection committee. We received more than 100 applications for the two open positions within the Chicago region during our last selection process. The associate manager position is a full-time, paid position which generally lasts 12-18 months.

Equity Office develops a well-rounded training program for these candidates so they can be exposed to different management styles. Each candidate is teamed up with a general manager who acts as a mentor. The candidate is rotated through a number of properties during the course of the program.

As part of the MAP initiative, associate manager applicants fill up their Equity Office "Passport," a checklist of tasks needed to complete the program, by working closely with an Equity Office mentor.

JPM: *What kind of topic areas are covered in the training program?*

KOTHE: Our MAP participants have the opportunity to be trained in a wide variety of areas, including: specific accounting software, budgeting, contract bidding, capital projects, accounts payable, customer relations, human resources, the company's procedures and processes, and property inspections, to name a few. We deliberately provide a broad spectrum of curriculum as we anticipate that these people will continue to grow with us. We train them right off the bat in

what they need to know to be great long-term employees.

JPM: *How is the training curriculum delivered to the associate managers?*

KOTHE: Most of the training is conducted in-house but we also utilize programs provided by such organizations as IREM and BOMA. And, we make extensive use of on-line training. The ability to have the flexibility of when and how to receive on-line training is a huge benefit for people in the property management field. They don't have to schedule a day to go somewhere. They can get two hours of training at their convenience.

KREMA: The objective of our Web-based training is to offer employees the flexibility to access a broad curriculum. Because our system

is technology-based, we can identify and track the courses they take.

JPM: *How has the MAP program been received by its participants and by Equity Office?*

KOTHE: It has proven to be a very effective program. Everyone who has gone through the program has gone on to become an assistant manager. Two of the participants were internal candidates who came from an administrative background and wanted to move to the property management side. For example, one of the candidates, Damon Kagel, formerly an administrative assistant at Concourse Office Plaza joined the MAP initiative, and a year and a half later was promoted to assistant property manager at Corporate 500 Centre in Deerfield, IL. These candi-

dates are great employees who've brought in different kinds of experiences. It's a great way to bring in new talent.

It's also been a good experience for the mentors assigned to the candidates. They loved the program and helped to promote the overall Equity Office culture. Since the MAP program's inception, we've continued to refine it.

KREMA: Because the MAP participants are trained, they know Equity Office's goals and can slide into the program right away. When there is some turnover, the transition is almost transparent to the customer. When recruitment is as expensive as it is today, that's important.