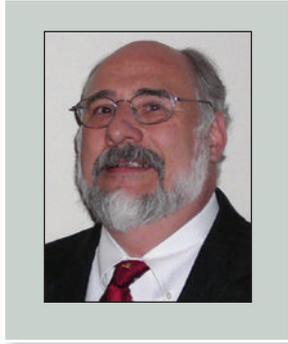


► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Bob Custard,
REHS, CP-FS

More Than the Minimum

Deciding who to hire and promote is the most important role of an environmental health manager. Talented and highly motivated professionals create exceptional environmental health programs. Lackluster employees produce mediocre or even failing programs. Without exception, top-quality programs don't exist without top-quality people.

So how, as a manager, does one distinguish between talented and highly motivated job applicants and those who will never rise above mediocrity? Some of the things I always consider are the experiences gained, training courses completed, and credentials earned *that were not required* by the applicant's current employer or academic program.

Highly motivated professionals always do more than the minimum required. They seek out training opportunities and obtain credentials that make them stand out among their peers. They look for new challenges and opportunities to gain experience in new areas of their field. They are lifelong learners and their passion for their profession is clear from their continuing dedication.

Broaden Your Experience

Environmental health is an incredibly diverse field. Most of us are highly competent in one or two subdisciplines of environmental health but often have limited knowledge in many other areas. As our careers progress, without some experiences that broaden our expertise and perspectives, we risk becoming pigeonholed in a single subdiscipline of environmental health. Ultimately this will prevent us from achieving our true potential and may become very career limiting.

Highly motivated professionals always do more than the minimum required.

One way that top-notch environmental health professionals can break out of their box is by volunteering for special projects at work that broaden their experience. Perhaps that might be development of training materials, helping build a Web site, assisting an epidemiologist with interviews of those ill with possible foodborne illness, or participating in a job exchange with a person working in another area of your department. In some cases, there are opportunities for cross training or temporary assignments in a new area of environmental health or a related field such as industrial hygiene, housing, land use planning, or sanitary engineering.

Beyond the workplace there are many opportunities to volunteer with local non-profit organizations. Even in volunteer positions that don't require environmental health skills, one often has the opportunity to develop key leadership skills.

In the professional setting, your local or state environmental health association would welcome your service as a committee member or officer. On the national level, NEHA

frequently needs volunteers to serve as peer reviewers for the *Journal of Environmental Health*, as subject-matter experts, as technical advisors to those developing the Annual Educational Conference & Exhibition, as social media contributors, or as reviewers for credential exams.

ACTION ITEM: Try volunteering for a special assignment that will broaden your experience. In doing so you will develop new skills or abilities, make new contacts, and gain new perspectives.

To volunteer with NEHA, go to www.neha.org/membership-communities/get-involved.

You can make a difference by donating just an hour or two of your time each month.

Deepen Your Knowledge

As budgets for education and training at most public and many private employers have tightened over the last few years, some environmental health specialists have found little available in the way of employee-sponsored continuing education. Meanwhile, the science that underlies our work as environmental health professionals has continued to advance.

Top-notch environmental health professionals, however, have found other ways to deepen their knowledge and sharpen their skills in response to the reduction in the amount of employee-sponsored training available. Many are attending more regional and state trainings and conferences sponsored by NEHA's state affiliates. Others are applying to attend training paid for by third parties such as the International Food Protection Training Institute's

Especially for Environmental Health Managers and Supervisors: Staff Development Is Your Responsibility

Our legacy as managers and supervisors is the quality of the professionals we have trained and mentored to follow us after we have gone. What are you doing to encourage and support your staff in obtaining the additional training, experience, and credentials that will make them ready for promotion? Here are 10 concrete suggestions:

- Give staff special assignments that will broaden their experience.
- Cross train staff in areas of environmental health outside their primary area of work.
- Continually let staff know about the training opportunities that are open to them.
- Support attendance at NEHA affiliate educational conferences through paid time to attend even if you can't pay for the travel or registration costs.
- When applying for grants, include funds in the grant budget for staff to travel to environmental health conferences to present the results of their grant project.
- When possible, allow flexible work schedules to allow staff to take college courses towards an advanced degree.
- Work to create a system of pay incentives for staff who obtain degrees or credentials beyond the minimum required.
- Purchase a set of REHS/RS study materials that can be shared among the persons in your work unit.
- Allow staff who are studying for their REHS/RS to create a study group at work that meets for one or two hours each week.
- Work with environmental health units in adjacent areas to create a free local training event each quarter that features speakers on relevant topics.

Especially for Students: More Than the Minimum Qualifications = Employment

Students need to know that a degree in environmental health or biology will usually meet the minimum qualifications for an entry-level job in environmental health, but seldom, by itself, will it land them a job. In order to stand out among 20 or more qualified applicants, they need something more. Experience, training, and credentials move resumes to the top of the pile.

About half of those who are hired into entry-level environmental health positions have left the profession within five years. The turnover is lower, however, among those who have had some previous relevant career experience and know that environmental health is a good career fit for them. For this reason, hiring managers look for applicants with experience that applies the applicant's scientific knowledge in a setting that requires a lot of interaction with the public.

Relevant experience may be a summer job working in a restaurant where one learns food safety basics and gains customer service experience. It may be a part-time job lifeguarding at a swimming pool where one learns basic pool health and safety and gains experience working with the public and enforcing rules. Better yet would be an internship at a local health department or with the U.S. Public Health Service or volunteer experience with the local Medical Reserve Corps.

If a job applicant's experience is combined with relevant training and certification, the application is even stronger. An applicant who had the initiative to obtain training and certification as a food protection manager or as a pool operator has a much stronger application than the applicant who just worked as a restaurant cook or as a pool lifeguard.

Typically these certifications can be obtained with about 16 hours of training at a cost of less than \$200 each.

The strongest applicants among recent graduates are those who take the Certified Professional-Food Safety (CP-FS) exam or the Registered Environmental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS) exam and pass it immediately after graduation from an accredited environmental health academic program. In some states, an REHS/RS is required for all environmental health professionals working independently in the field. Hiring an REHS/RS assures a manager that the new employee will be able to work independently in the field immediately following their initial training.

(IFPTI's) Fellowship in Food Protection Program or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Environmental Health Training in Emergency Response Operations (EHTER Ops) course. Still others are joining groups like Toastmasters International to polish their speaking skills.

Many environmental health professionals are accessing the rapidly increasing number of free webinars and online training courses. For those working in food safety, the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) Office of Regulatory Affairs University (ORAU) offers dozens of training courses through their ORAU train-

ing portal for environmental health professionals working in local, state, and tribal governments. Others are using CDC's e-learning portal to take the Environmental Assessment of Foodborne Illness Outbreaks course. For those preparing for their Registered Environ-

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Did You Know?

You can find information on credentials, certifications, education and training, e-Learning, and careers under the professional development tab of NEHA's Web site at www.neha.org/professional-development.

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mental Health Specialist/Registered Sanitarian (REHS/RS) exam, there are 15 Environmental Public Health Online Courses totaling over 45 hours of training on the South Central Public Health Partnership Web site. For NEHA members there are now more than 300 hours of courses and presentations available online through NEHA e-Learning.

ACTION ITEM: Seek out a new training opportunity to deepen your knowledge or sharpen your skills. Below are links to some of the training opportunities described above.

- IFPTI Fellowship in Food Protection Program: www.ifpti.org/fellowship
- CDC EHTER Ops Course: <https://cdp.dhs.gov/training/program/hh>
- Toastmasters International: www.toastmasters.org
- FDA ORAU: www.fda.gov/Training/ForStateLocalTribalRegulators/ucm119016.htm

- Environmental Assessment of Foodborne Illness Outbreaks: www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/eLearn/EA_FIO/index.htm
- Environmental Public Health Online Courses: www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/eLearn/EPHOC.htm
- NEHA e-Learning: www.nehacert.org

Build Your Credentials

Top-notch professionals know that credentials give them credibility with the people they work with. NEHA offers several environmental health credentials including the REHS/RS, the Healthy Homes Specialist (HHS), the Certified Professional-Food Safety (CP-FS), and the new Certified in Comprehensive Food Safety (CCFS) credential.

Every environmental health professional working independently in the field should hold the REHS/RS credential. It reflects demonstrated knowledge of the full range of environmental health issues that one might encounter in the course of one's career. Even in states where an REHS/RS is not required to practice, it is the recognized standard for our profession.

Additional credentials beyond the REHS/RS are important to demonstrate in-depth knowledge of particular areas of practice. In states that require an REHS/RS to practice, these credentials identify one as someone who is motivated to do more than the minimum that is required of them.

ACTION ITEM: Earn a new credential.

Credentials are evidence of demonstrated knowledge of a particular area of environmental health and one's commitment to excellence.

For information on NEHA credentials, go to www.neha.org/professional-development/credentials.

Seneca, a first-century Roman philosopher, famously said, "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." What are you doing to prepare for your next career opportunity? 🐼

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