IN JANUARY 2018, I was hired as executive director of the Philadelphia Parking Authority (PPA). As with any new position, it takes a little time to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of an organization. Because of external factors and, of course, my own desire to learn more about the industry and the PPA specifically, the decision to seek independent and professional accreditation was not only necessary, but easy.

The idea manifested during a staff meeting during my first month with PPA. An employee mentioned the Authority was considering going through the process of accreditation with the International Parking Institute. After a quick Google search, I knew there would be substantial time commitments required by staff to assemble the necessary documents, a worthy investment considering the value of being successful. I quickly realized that the accreditation process would be the most efficient and thorough manner to identify areas where we met industry standards. More importantly, however, the process would highlight where to concentrate our efforts to improve. Despite the daunting task and short deadline, staff was enthusiastic and eager to fulfill this opportunity.

The Review
Being excited about opening our agency to a thorough review by an external and independent expert could be the equivalent of looking forward to multiple root canals, without novocaine. Fortunately, the Authority’s review was administered by a thorough and independent reviewer who not only avoided hitting nerve endings, but who also skillfully noted the areas where the Authority was flourishing, while deftly identifying the parts of our operation in need of improvement; all of this happened in a very short time frame.

As our staff embarked on the task of compiling the necessary documents, IPI’s accreditation matrix served as the ultimate guide to our success. It enabled us to organize our work product while providing clear guidance on what we needed to demonstrate. Of course being competitive, our staff was not satisfied with merely obtaining accreditation status; they wanted the coveted accreditation “with distinction.”

Fresh off the Philadelphia Eagles’ Super Bowl win, our staff’s can-do attitude was even more prevalent than normal. The task of compiling and organizing the necessary documents required the coordination of all departments within the Authority. Admittedly, this may be as expected with a task as important as accreditation at stake. However, the Philadelphia Parking Authority is a more complex agency than our name would lead you to believe, so a diverse group of departments had to pull together information, and quickly.

PPA
With a staff of more than 1,000 employees, the Authority is most commonly known for enforcing Philadelphia’s on-street parking regulations. However, we also administer the City’s Red Light Camera Program, operate all of the Philadelphia International Airport’s parking facilities, provide off-street parking in all corners of Philadelphia through parking garages and neighborhood parking lots, provide highway towing services for the Pennsylvania State Police and the Philadelphia Police Department, auction unclaimed vehicles, and regulate all taxicab, limousine, and transportation network companies (TNCs) in Philadelphia.

The Authority operates seven parking garages in Center City Philadelphia, three of which were just rated as premier...
facilities by the International Parking Institute. Through these efforts, the Authority’s net revenues are disbursed to various government agencies on an annual basis. Just last year alone, the Authority generated over $262 million in gross revenue, with 40 percent being disbursed to seven governmental entities. That’s almost unheard of from a business profit margin standpoint. My point is this: When an agency has a multitude of regulatory responsibilities and a large staff, the complexity of that agency can bring inefficiencies if not actively managed properly. Therein lies the story behind the diligence, perseverance, and relentless work ethic of the people who work together at the PPA.

As an interactive team with a rather monumental task before it, the Authority’s staff plowed ahead and rapidly prepared the necessary accreditation documents for review. This ultimately served as a test of our ability to collaborate. During this time, it became abundantly clear to me that our team is capable of completing the loftiest of challenges.

After spending several months compiling the materials for accreditation, there was a collective breath of anticipation as we submitted our application. Now our competitive staff had to play a game they dreaded: the waiting game.

APO

In the days following our submittal, we were informed that not only was the Philadelphia Parking Authority being named an Accredited Parking Organization, but the magic words “with distinction” would accompany it—the ultimate goal of our staff as we embarked on this challenge. As icing on the cake, if you will, we were also informed that three of our parking garages were rated as “premier”.

Upon learning that we were to be bestowed this honor, a sense of pride permeated throughout our headquarters and satellite locations. It was the culmination of an intense group effort to turn this challenge into a success, and I couldn’t be more proud of our staff for not only realizing this accomplishment, but most importantly what it means to be accredited. In essence, it is a sign to the groups we interact with and the customers we serve that we are acting in the best interests of the community and are capable of handling the responsibilities assigned to us. Because of the depth and breadth of the submission process, I believe accreditation is more significant than any audit.

Suffice it to say, now that we have a taste of success, our employees are even more eager to compete. We are from Philadelphia—a city where the underdogs aim to prevail in a challenging and exciting environment. It may be too soon to predict a repeat for an Eagles’ Super Bowl win, but we are confident that our successes this year will transcend as we see everyone in Anaheim, Calif., for the June 2019 IPI Conference and Expo. In the meantime, we will proudly display our placard in our lobby and on all our literature: “Philadelphia Parking Authority: Accredited Parking Organization with Distinction.”

For more information about Accredited Parking Organization certification, visit parking.org/apo.

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