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Constant Contact Key to Optimal Management Relations

By Katrina Leitner & Jenny Little / Published March 2022



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Communication can make or break any relationship. And in the always-on, ever-

evolving world of property management, rapid, responsive, and transparent relaying of information is of especially paramount importance. Taking a proactive, unbiased approach centered on open flow of communication will go a long way toward ensuring the best possible relationship between a community's board of directors and its property management team.

Aside from overseeing staffing and other day-to-day tasks essential to smooth operations, communicating resident issues to the community's board of directors is a property manager's primary responsibility. Directors can expect property management to keep them apprised of any pertinent communication with residents, the health of the property, status of projects, and any other important information related to the community's management in a timely and consistent manner. A good property manager will make residents feel comfortable coming to them first and should have their finger on the pulse of daily goings-on and necessary upcoming actions.

A positive working relationship between property management and the board of directors benefits all parties, especially the residents. The following are steps property managers can take to strengthen board relations, facilitate superior communication, and go above and beyond their job description:

- *Be the first source of information.* Management should serve as the board's eyes and ears, cultivating positive relationships with residents and remaining receptive, easily accessible, and responsive to any feedback. When issues arise, a property manager should strive to be the first to inform the board of directors. Surprises should be avoided whenever possible: The last thing anyone wants is for a board member to hear negative news first from an angry neighbor. One prudent way to stay on top of potential problems before they fester is to proactively solicit input through resident surveys.
- *Check in and follow up.* Staying in constant communication is crucial across the board. When working with board members or properties that present greater challenges or require more attention, it's important to touch base even more often. It's also imperative to maintain a sense of urgency once information is relayed. Follow up, follow through, communicate status updates, and stay organized and on top of all projects, when they can be completed, and where funds can be obtained. Essentially, don't drop the ball.
- *Stay positive.* Property management requires interacting with all kinds of personalities, juggling competing responsibilities, and helping resolve disputes. Whether navigating day-to-day interactions or significant difficulties, it is universally important that a property manager remain positive and not show frustration. Think "service with a smile." Property managers should remain adaptable—maintaining professionalism, multitasking, and fielding complaints without losing their cool. When open communication is prioritized and a manager's words and actions show that he or she cares, even the prickliest of personalities may show more patience and understanding.
- *Be impartial.* Dealings within condominium boards can get political very fast. As an impartial professional, it's a property manager's responsibility to stay above the fray and ensure that all directors are treated with equal respect. It's also essential that all board members are provided with the same information. Following a verbal conversation with one director, any important information gleaned should be recorded and shared with other board members to ensure everyone is on the same page. Information shared verbally should always be followed up in writing and recorded in management reports.
- *Customize communications.* One size does not fit all when it comes to maintaining a successful working relationship between property management and boards of directors. Property managers should be thoughtful in their approach to managing each unique relationship, always keeping in mind that board members are volunteers with personal and professional demands beyond their board duties. One director may expect weekly in-person meetings, while another may prefer formal written communications. Some may only be available during certain hours when they're less busy at work, or they

may be seasonal residents. Being respectful of their time and preferences is always the best approach.

- *Take it off site.* A change of scenery can go a long way toward strengthening any management-board relationship. Stepping out from behind a desk or meeting face-to-face facilitates a warmer, more personable connection, particularly when meeting on neutral grounds away from the property. Bringing a board member out of the community for a sit-down lunch can be helpful when building a relationship and offers the opportunity to dive into any issues in depth.
- *Bring new directors up to speed.* Setting expectations from the get-go will help cement a positive working relationship and minimize speed bumps. Arranging a status meeting with incoming board members to inform them of current projects is an ideal way to kick off communication and define expectations. It's also a prime opportunity to answer any questions they may have, fill them in on important background, and give new inductees the confidence and comfort level needed to dive into their new role. Additional avenues to assist new board members include an orientation arranged by management and a sit-down with legal counsel to go over the certification all new board members must complete within 90 days of election. Many attorneys employed by condominium boards will provide this service pro bono.

For residents of communities governed by volunteer leadership, it's in everyone's best interest to ensure the best possible relationship between the condominium board and property management. Through transparency and open flow of communication, all parties can reap the greatest benefit.



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