

Four Secrets for Easy Move-Ins

By Anne Tucker, NeoBios Consulting Group

To a property owner or manager, move-in day is a relief from stress caused by vacancy loss. To the new resident, it is a continuation of the stress of finding a new place to live. Everything you do to help limit the stress of moving day will benefit the business relationship between you and your residents.

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The leasing cycle begins when the current resident gives you notice that he or she will be moving out. That move-out date will determine when you can accurately set a move-in date for the new resident.

1. Plan with Preliminary Inspections

When a resident give notice, ask permission to do a preliminary inspection prior to move-out to check the condition of the unit. The inspection may not determine the amount of cleaning that will be needed, but it will help you decide whether major work will be needed, such as carpet replacement, Sheetrock repair, roof leak repair, landscaping enhancement, etc. Knowing that you will need major purchases allows you time to shop for sales and special prices. Those advance decisions will also help you schedule enough time to complete the makeready process.

Another question to ask your current resident is why he or she is moving. If buying a house, any change in the closing date will affect the move-in. Encourage the current resident to keep you informed about any potential changes in the move-out date to reconfirm the date and your procedures regarding the final move-out inspection and collection of the keys.

A typical makeready may take two to four days for cleaning, painting and minor repairs. Schedule your contractors in advance; move-outs scheduled near the first of the month may be during your contractor's busiest times. Get on their schedule as soon as possible. Your inspection prior to move-out should give you ample time to schedule bids and work for any of the major items that need repair or replacement.

2. Do Paperwork in Advance

Before the scheduled move-in day, contact your new resident to reconfirm the move-in day and to schedule a day to complete the paperwork. Move-in day is not the day to have the resident sign the contract and all the other resident paperwork. The new resident's scheduling idea for move-in day is to drop off a check, pick up the keys and move in all their personal belongings. Taking time to actually read the lease and paperwork will not even cross their radar of things to do!

Have the new resident meet you at your office, the new residence or even the local coffee shop to review and sign the move-in paperwork. The meeting location should be comfortable enough to allow you time to discuss any questions or items regarding the move-in. Be sure to discuss the timing of transferring the utilities into the new resident's name if that is part of your contract. This is also the time to discuss the amount and form of payment needed on move-in day. Let the new resident know what time you will meet him or her on move-in day and how long to expect the inspection process to take.

3. Move-in Day Checklist

After you have the new resident review and sign the paperwork, create a move-in packet for move-in day. Items should include:

- Copies of the lease documents
- Move-in inspection and condition form
- Appliance operating instructions
- Community policies
- Area information sheet
- Area map
- Change of address cards
- Renters insurance information
- Emergency contact information

Place the items in a file folder, pocket folder or a file envelope for your new resident on move-in day. Ideally, this should be a package that reinforces your property identity or brand, so make it professional.

Just as you will be inspecting the work done during the makeready process, you should re-inspect the residence on the day of move-in before the arrival of the new resident. Check each appliance for proper operation, check everything for cleanliness and test each key in the corresponding lock.

On move-in day the dwelling should be ready, and you should meet with the new resident at the appointed time. Present the lease documents and do the move-in inspection with the resident. A thorough inspection and completion form ensures an accurate accounting of any necessary damage charges when the resident moves out.

Creating a simple checklist to follow for the resident move-in procedure assures a stress-free move-in for both you and the new resident. Be ready to demonstrate the reset button on the garbage disposal, the operation of the HVAC thermostat, the toilet supply line and the location of the electrical breaker box. Show your new residents how to replace the air conditioning filter and tell them where to purchase additional filters. By demonstrating these items during your inspection, you can eliminate or at least decrease the number of service calls to the unit and possibly prevent property damage.

4. Going the Extra Mile

New residents always appreciate move-in gifts. Numerous vendors can supply you with gift baskets and other move-in gift ideas. The gifts do not need to be expensive or overly creative. Imagine how welcoming a few cold bottles of water would be in the refrigerator! Other necessities such as a roll of toilet paper and/or paper towels are simple but effective ideas for move-in gifts. Additional items could be a small cutting board for the kitchen or even a toilet plunger or shower curtain for the bathroom.

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Contact area vendors such as those in the local strip shopping centers for coupons. Pizza or other fast food coupons are good move-in gifts. Contacting the local vendors serves as a marketing tool to advertise your property and helps promote their services to your residents.

Follow up by phone or a visit with your new residents several days after move-in to be sure they are satisfied with their new home. They may have questions about the residence or additional items to add to the move-in inspection form. Your follow-up will show how important their satisfaction is to you and your management of the property.

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