

# How to Turn an Unhappy Resident Into a Raving Fan! ©

by Ernest F. Oriente, *The Coach*

This can happen when you least expect it: An unhappy resident has just arrived in your leasing office while your telephone is ringing, budgets are due in 25 minutes and six future residents are waiting to tour your wonderful apartment community. Time to panic, right? Not a chance! Read this article and use these three easy steps to handle an unhappy resident while turning them into a raving fan.

**Listening carefully:** The moment you realize you have an unhappy resident, take a deep breath and ask this person in a soft voice, if they would be kind enough to join you in your office. This gives you a few seconds to gather your thoughts and will give the two of you the privacy to have a reasonable conversation. Plus, you really do not want your current residents nor any future residents to hear this unhappy conversation. Next, ask your team to hold all your telephone calls, clear your entire desk and take out a blank sheet of paper to take notes. At this point, ask your unhappy resident to begin telling you exactly what the problem is. Take detailed notes while listening patiently, making certain not to interrupt him/her while they are speaking. Remember, your resident is not attacking you personally, so keep your cool during this entire conversation. Once your resident is finished explaining why they are unhappy, ask him/her this key question, “Is there anything else you would like to tell me?” This is a key question because it signals to your resident that their turn is now done and you are ready to address and answer their concerns.

**Tip From The Coach:** Before addressing the concerns from your resident, let’s be certain we understand what’s at stake when handling resident problems and why it’s important to handle each resident as if they were liquid gold. A typical resident pays \$700 per month or \$8,400 per year. In addition, anticipate that each of your current residents will refer two prospects a year to your apartment community, which represents another \$16,800 in new revenue and if each of these referrals send you two more referrals this year, that’s another four more new residents at \$33,600 annually. So,  $\$8,400 + \$16,800 + \$33,600 = \$58,800$  in potential new revenue, per resident, per year. Can you clearly see why we must convert unhappy residents into raving fans?

**Diffusing the situation:** Once your resident has shared with you exactly why they are unhappy, start your half of the conversation by thanking them for their comments. Next, say to your resident, “Let me see if I understand you completely.” Restate this person’s concerns as you slowly read from your notes. Reading your notes slowly does two things: 1) It gives your resident a chance to calm down; and 2) It shows that you were truly listening to what they had to say and are ready to take action. Now, apologize if you or your team made any mistakes and look for at least one or two points with which you can agree. By conceding a point or two right away, you show that you are not defensive about their concerns and that you really want to solve their problems, not duck blame or make excuses.

**Tip From The Coach:** Whenever you are interacting with a current resident or a future resident, customer service experts call this a “moment of truth”. When you are dealing with an unhappy resident, this is called the “pinnacle of performance”. SuperStars in the property management profession do not mind handling an unhappy resident because they see this as an opportunity to shine—to win this resident’s long-term loyalty.

**Converting an unhappy resident into a raving fan:** OK, now comes the easy part. Ask your unhappy resident exactly what action steps they would like to see you take. Promise your resident that you will do everything necessary to fix or handle the concerns they have shared with you and tell them exactly when and by what time, they can expect the problems to be handled. Now, look to resolve these problems as quickly as possible--well in advance of the day and time you promised your resident. Motorola calls this, “under-promise, over-perform” and they have used these magic words to create a multi-billion dollar company. Next, take the time to either call this resident or visit them in-person, to tell them the concerns they had shared with you are now fixed and resolved. In addition, take a few minutes to write a small note apologizing again for their unhappiness and thanking them for expressing their concerns. At last, your resident should be completely satisfied that you have addressed their important concerns and you have earned their respect and goodwill.

*Tip From The Coach:* Ready to convert your former-unhappy resident into a raving fan? Consider purchasing the book “Positively Outrageous Service”, written by T. Scott Gross. His book gives you a step-by-step plan for creating raving fans, and will give you lots of fun and great ideas for converting very unhappy residents into your best referral sources. I have read his book several times and highly recommend you read his pearls of wisdom. In fact, once you are done reading his book, you will realize that handling unhappy residents is really the best way to win new friends!

Want to hear more about this important topic or ask some additional questions about raving fans? **Send an E-mail to [ernest@powerhour.com](mailto:ernest@powerhour.com) and *The Coach* will fax/E-mail you a free TeleForum invitation.**

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