

Make Your Prospective Resident Feel Important By the Secret Shopper

Life is full of interruptions. Yet we must find a way to strike a balance so that all the URGENT things coming at us do not pull us away from the most important tasks at hand. In the property management industry, there are urgent owners' requests, resident complaints, maintenance emergencies and employee disputes; just to name a few. While all of these issues must be handled in a prompt, professional manner, the business of renting apartments must still remain a priority of the leasing office.

Since interruptions are so common in this industry, I am often asked for advice on how to handle these situations. I would like to respond by sharing the story of two entirely different shopping experiences.

First Community Call

When I placed my first call, I was just getting ready to hang up when the phone was answered on the seventh ring. The consultant spoke so quickly that I could only make out the name of community before she said, "Please hold". When she came back on the line she said, "Sorry about that, I'm working alone and the phone is ringing off the hook!" She asked me how she could help me and I inquired about apartment availability. She said there were a couple of two bedrooms open and then said, "Hang on and I'll grab my book." She set the phone down without putting me on hold and I overheard how she raised her voice to someone in the background. When she came back on the line, she apologized for the delay and immediately began to quote pricing.

She asked if I would like to come by and I agreed to meet with her in an hour. The consultant offered directions and then asked for my name and telephone number – "in case something comes up."

Second Community Call

At the second place I called, the phone was picked up on the second ring. The consultant clearly identified the community by name and introduced herself. She asked for my name early in the conversation and used it to establish a rapport with me. I could hear a telephone ringing in the background and said, "I don't mind holding if you need to get that." She replied, "Thanks, but that's what I have voice mail for." I felt like I was the reason she got out of bed that morning as she made me feel I was her most important business for the day!

She took time to inquire about my needs and then desired an apartment that would best meet my specific requirements. The consultant invited me to come by to see the apartment and let me pick a time that was most convenient for me.

First Community Visit

I arrived on time, within an hour, at the first community that I called. There was a sign on the door stating that someone would be back in approximately 10 minutes. I tried the door and it was unlocked, so I went inside and began to tour the cabana while I was waiting. The leasing consultant returned shortly and seemed surprised to see someone waiting. She did not remember our appointment until I reminded her of our recent phone contact. She apologized and offered me a set stating that there had been several

maintenance emergencies earlier that day. In fact, she was waiting for a water heater to be delivered at any moment.

The consultant did not obtain any further information from me, but recalled we had discussed a two bedroom. She pulled out a couple of floor plans to go over with me, but during this process the phone kept ringing and she repeatedly answered it. She did not excuse herself when picking up the phone and each time, I was left sitting there to wait until she finished each call.

Just as we were heading out to view the apartment, the contractor with the water heater showed up. For a moment, the consultant seemed unsure as to what she should do. She asked the contractor to “wait a second,” and then turned to me and explained that she was going to have to let this man into an apartment to replace a leaky water heater. She said, “It’ll only take a minute.” She offered me a seat in the cabana while I waited and told me there were soft drinks in the refrigerator and said I should “help myself.”

I waited for over 10 minutes and then figured that I had come at a bad time. I decided to leave and showed myself out.

Second Community Visit

At my next stop, the consultant greeted me warmly and invited me to have a seat at her desk. She pulled out a guest card she had started and handed me a packet of literature. This packet included everything from floor plans to area information. She said she had also enclosed the address and phone number of the elementary school since I had mentioned my son would be starting kindergarten.

As she began to ask more specific questions about my needs, the telephone rang several times. The consultant let voice mail pick up the calls, but then she finally reached over and turned the ringer off. She said, “I don’t know about you, but that’s really distracting for me.”

After we completed the guest card, she asked if I would like to see the clubhouse area before we headed out to take a look at the model. As we stood, a mail carrier came in with several packages and stated that they were missing apartment numbers. The leasing consultant was very kind as she explained that she was just going out to show an apartment. She invited him to come back in about 20 minutes or said he was welcomed to leave the parcels and she would look up the apartment number when we were done. As we were walking the grounds on the way to the model apartment, the consultant was approached by two maintenance workers who had questions about a problem. She was very professional as she graciously asked them to wait and prevented them from discussing the problem in front of me.

Once we reached the model apartment, the consultant gave a flawless presentation of its many unique features and advantages. She was able to relate specific features as personal benefits because she had stayed focused during the qualifying portion of our visit. She remembered and NOTED things that were most important to me. The consultant was able to make strong, confident closing attempts, since she had sought to satisfy my needs by giving me her undivided attention.

Conclusion

How do you make a prospective resident feel important when you have a multitude of urgent interruptions crying out for your attention? Are you able to focus on the

prospective resident and make their needs a priority? If not, you have probably lost the sale. It would be better to phone your appointment prior to their arrival and reschedule rather than have them come out when you know you can't give them your undivided attention.

Of course this will probably cause some "inconvenience", however, in the long run, they will appreciate your consideration and long remember your thoughtfulness. If you were looking for a new home, how would you want to be treated?

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