

12 Rules for Good Tenant Relations

By Lou Hager

Having a good relationship and communication with the residents of an apartment community is critical. Without good relations you can expect problems. Since apartment residents desire a carefree lifestyle, which includes no responsibility for maintenance and a reliability upon prompt service and technical ability, maintenance plays a significant role in public relations.

The leasing consultant or manager sells the quality of the maintenance service to the prospective resident. After the resident moves in, each time he requests a service for his apartment, the maintenance technician is assigned the responsibility for fulfilling his request. Performing any maintenance task is an excellent opportunity to display the pride you have in your work, ability to do a great job, and concern and appreciation for your residents, the people who pay your salary. Never look at a resident as an interruption of your work. They are the purpose of it. The resident does us a favor when he rents from us. We aren't doing him a favor by renting to him. The resident is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is the most important person in our business. Never forgetting that makes it much easier to smile through whatever situation you find yourself in. People usually treat their boss differently and nicer than others. That's usually because he signs their time sheet or paycheck. Always treat residents as you would your boss.

The resident deserves the most courteous attention we can give him. He is the lifeblood of this business and ultimately our boss. Remember he pays our salary. Without him, we would have to close the doors.

Recently a survey of apartment residents indicated that the top two pet peeves of renters was intrusion of their privacy and incomplete repairs. Unless an emergency situation arises or you need to inform the resident about shutting off the water, electric, etc., you should not knock on the door unannounced and ask to look around inside when the renter is home. When the apartment is rented you turn over to the renter a legal interest in the property similar to an ownership right. You are turning over the right of "quiet enjoyment," as the lawyer would say. This is the right to be left alone and have one's personal property undisturbed.

Don't enter without renter's permission except in the case of an emergency such as fire, wind damage, water leakage or utility problems. It's the law to give at least 24-hours notice and you must enter at a reasonable time, (usually not before 9:00 a.m. or after 5:00 p.m.)

The second major complaint of renters is that the owner or manager does not make prompt repairs when they report something wrong. If you want renters to pay rent in a timely fashion, you must reciprocate by making good repairs quickly and professionally, service leads to increased occupancy. People love to talk about rare experiences --- like receiving professional quick service.

The maintenance technician represents the apartment community and the management company or owner in a professional role. His appearance is evaluated by the residents and his overall image makes a strong statement about how business is taken care of.

Here are some basic rules for your maintenance personnel to follow as you cultivate those good relations with residents:

1. The resident is always right. Don't ever argue with the residents.
2. Dress code is important. A neat appearance makes a resident feel more comfortable about the maintenance person being in the home.
3. Never smoke inside any occupied or rent ready unit. Radios should be kept at low volume when working in a vacant unit.
4. Never drink alcohol with residents --- Just say no!
5. Never gossip about other residents, vendors, staff or owner.
6. Don't look through residents belongings including closets, drawers or refrigerator.
7. Never discuss business of the property with residents or vendors.

8. Never promise anything without the manager's knowledge or approval.
9. Always inform the resident about what you are going to do, about how long it will take, then do it.
10. If the water or electricity is going to be turned off for any reason, inform the resident with as much notice as possible.
11. Never open the door or allow unauthorized people into any occupied unit.
12. If you are alone in an occupied unit and must leave for any reason, always make sure the unit is locked whenever you leave.

Remember, the resident views management and maintenance as the same entity. They expect good service as part of the deal. Retaining residents is the best method for keeping vacancies low and turnovers at a minimum, which means your job will be easier.

Try every day to go out of your way to make every resident you come into contact with feel like they are special.

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