



## March-April 2020 Issue

### An Ounce of Prevention

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It has been said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In dealing with vendors and homeowners or board members, an ounce of communication is worth a pound of resolution.

The following tips will guide you in peaceful relations among all parties involved:

**Set the expectations.** We all know the homeowner or board member who expects two weeks worth of work to be completed in two days. Perhaps in our initial correspondence, the owner will casually mention that they have relatives visiting next week. Do not ignore these items, and do not leave it to the vendor to deliver the news. It is the job of a community manager job to make sure that all parties understand the scope of work to be performed, the initial timeframe of the work, and to anticipate any delays or hardships that may come up.

**Handle new information with confidence.** The vendor opened up stucco only to discover the water damage goes far beyond the initial scope of work. You cannot do anything to change that, but you can handle how you proceed from there. Gather all the facts, photos, and other information from the vendor. Do they have a ballpark figure of how large the change order might be? You know your board. Are they going to want another quote for the change order, even if it means delaying the project? Perhaps the board has not considered the ramifications of delaying a project. Perhaps the work has been pending for several months, and the owner whom it affects starts talking about getting an attorney involved.

Point being, it is the job of a community manager to be an expert communicator and to anticipate the needs and desires of all parties involved. Laying out clearly and without delay any deviations from the initial plan is crucial in keeping the peace and maintaining trust.

**Protect vendors and the Association.** The dreaded call—a homeowner is harassing a vendor working on or near their unit. It is important to ensure that all parties understand that you, as the Community Manager, are the middleperson through which all grievances or gripes should go. If a unit owner takes matters into their own hands, make it clear that the behavior is unacceptable, no matter how right they think they are. Reducing liability is key.

If these guidelines sound simple, they are! Getting past the fear of negative reactions will empower us to be the leaders that our communities need!

### Honesty is the best policy when there is Money in it ~ Mark Twain

On the flipside, being the “Vendor” also requires a lot of finesse and honesty when it comes to working with a community manager, board or homeowner. Communication between the Vendor and those parties is key! Be upfront and honest with them. Provide realistic bids, timelines and a clear scope of work. Unrealistic timelines and underbidding a project just to get the job will only cause misunderstandings and expectations that can result in unnecessary disputes or even loss of future business. Honesty is the best policy!

As the Vendor, it is also your responsibility to clearly communicate details to avoid conflicts with the community manager, board or homeowner. Homeowners can get upset if they feel the Vendor is not performing the job to their expectations or the Vendor is on property without prior approval. If it is a project where you are required to get access to an individual’s home, make previous arrangements with the community manager or directly with the homeowner. Your job is to understand the expectations of the client and to meet those expectations with as little inconvenience to the client as possible.

Make sure to follow up with written proposals, memorandums and confirming emails. Also, include pictures of the property/repairs/maintenance that need to be addressed. Pictures are also important when looking to clarify issues. Keeping a paper trail with any changes and/or requests to the scope of work MUST be documented. Sending confirming emails and summarizing emails of verbal discussions is the best way to avoid disputes over what was verbally discussed. Some

managers, board members or homeowners have specific preferences regarding the method of communication, so always check whether email, mail, or phone is preferred.

As a takeaway to Vendors:

Always make sure you detail the scope of work, work schedule and bids both verbally and in writing. Creating a paper trail reduces the chances of disputes. If a dispute does arise, you then will be in a much better position with a documented record. Assurances on quality control and attention to detail will be greatly appreciated by all parties involved. Let all know that you will be checking in on the project regularly so that you can manage the progress and quality of the services being performed. It is also important to communicate when you plan on being at the property.

Assure the Manager/Board/Homeowners that you are always available for questions and that you would be happy to attend any board meetings as requested/needed.

The key is to avoid conflict. If a conflict should arise, make sure the manager and board/homeowners are on the same page.

Be prepared to have a solution ready or be able to provide options for a solution. Remember—the client will be looking to you as the Vendor for professional guidance and recommendations. This includes making sure you have the necessary requirements to complete the project, i.e. insurance, adequate equipment and manpower.

Leaving the client with a good impression is the key to future continued work. If the manager and board/homeowners are satisfied with your communication, work product, and overall services, you have set the stage for future work on other projects and for referrals.

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