



Do You Have What It Takes to Be a Great Community Association Manager?

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A stormy housing market has taken the wind away from the sail. It has created a huge impact not only on buyers and sellers of real estate but also on real estate professionals working in the industry. Many mortgage brokers, real estate agents, and sales people working in the housing industry are leaving the business and looking for an alternative career in the community association management industry.

According to www.collegegrad.com, employment of community association managers is projected to increase about as fast as average for all

occupations through the year 2014. In addition to job growth, a number of openings are expected to take place as existing managers transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force. Opportunities are offered for individuals with administration, financial, management, real estate, or related experience, and for those who attain a professional designation.

Previous employment involving customer service and managing employees is an asset to pursuing a community association management position. In the past, individuals with a background in building maintenance have advanced to community association management positions with their strengths and knowledge of building mechanical systems; however, this path is becoming less common as employers place greater emphasis on administrative, organizational, financial, and communication skills in order to have what it takes to be an effective community association manager.

It appears that there is a severe shortage of experienced managers. It takes a lot of perseverance and dedication to be a great manager without getting burned out. Newly licensed managers need to learn how to navigate the waters in order to be effective.

In order to be an effective manager, it takes a real passion for people, property, and problem solving. A great manager is a protector, a planner, and a provider. It is not just a job, it is a career. Managers that are passionate

about their work get more done and are dedicated and committed to the position. Great managers realize that it is not a nine-to-five job, and they don't seem to mind when the job entails putting in the time to attend board meetings and the time required to get the job done.

The Protector—Asset Management

The association needs to feel confident and a real sense of security that the manager is there to guard and protect its assets. It is amazing to me how many managers I meet that are deficient in reading and understanding financials, accrual accounting, and the budget process. It is vital to understand and identify items on the association's balance sheet and income statement. In addition, it is essential for managers to not only maintain the property to the highest standards, but also, to always

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be thinking about how they can continue adding value, cost savings, energy efficiency, and value to the assets in the event there is a sudden change in the board of director's goals and objectives. Managers not only need to understand the financial aspect of the association, but they should have the financial savvy to make recommendations for the long-term benefits of programs such as going green initiatives, retrofitting, or investing in a certain type of wireless technology or smart building that would be highly attractive to existing and

prospective residents.

I am seeing an enormous increase in what the board of director's and resident's expectations and needs are from the manager. Boards are expecting managers to have a clearer understanding of what it takes to manage a building—right

down to the capital expenditures, analysis of water and electricity during peak months, to the costs associated with regard to repairs and maintenance and supplies.

Therefore, managers must walk the talk and manage as if they were acting as a CFO for a company. Managers need to take responsibility and accountability of the financial duties, to include generating an analysis and evaluation of monthly financial statements and producing variance reports.

The Planner—Preventative Maintenance

Managers that make recommendations and have established a preventative maintenance plan are looked at as being proactive rather than reactive. These managers are recognized as having what it takes to be a great manager. Preventative maintenance projects reduce the cost and inconvenience to residents of unnecessary emergency repairs or consuming operating expenses. Allocating resources and setting long-term and short-term goals with your board of directors will assist the manager and the board in setting realistic goals. A strategic plan will also provide a basis for evaluating and controlling the association's performance and progress for each item. A great manager doesn't make promises he or she can't keep. Actions speak louder than words. Planning is important and if the plan is not in place and mistakes are made, it is important that the manager learn from his or her mistakes and takes control of the situation.

No one else can do the manager's job because the manager uniquely holds the authority within the team that encompasses the staff and board of directors. All must exercise the team approach with respect to the planning process and work together to implement and carry out a detailed plan. This approach will prevent repeated inconveniences to the building residents. A great manager decides where the team is headed and communicates his or her visions to them.

The Provider—Communication, Flexibility, and Organization

The manager has access to all of the information, resources, materials, statutes, documents, rules, and any other legislative changes

which would have an effect on carrying out the association's management duties. Always listen and try to understand what the board, residents, and staff are communicating.

Great managers are the ones who challenge the existing complacency and are prepared to lead their team forward towards a mission and a vision. They are the ones who recognize problems, seize opportunities, and create their own future. Ultimately, they are the ones who stop to think where they want to go, convey it, and then have the confidence to set out to achieve it.

An effective manager opens the lines of communication with the least amount of drama, disruptions, and distractions. The keys to good communication and to being a great manager are to be detail oriented, organized, flexible, following up, and following through. Communication is vital in maintaining a healthy relationship with the board, the staff, and the residents.

A great manager must also be a good listener. The board must be able to communicate its wants and needs to the manager in order to maximize a positive relationship. Respect, success, and professionalism will then follow.

The position of being a great community association manager is a balancing act and requires an incredible amount of organization and multi-tasking skills. Managers must be able to answer phone calls in a timely manner and provide detailed management reports, updates,

memos, websites, and newsletters in order to rule out any misunderstandings, rumors, and misconceptions.

A great manager must have the ability to work with their staff, outside vendors, attorneys, accountants, and insurance agents and must always communicate professionally. A great manager must have great interpersonal and communication skills needed to work with all professionals in managing the association.

A great manager is a "jack-of-all-trades" and in order to succeed in this fast-paced work environment must continue to receive education in all areas of association management. Continuing education allows for the manager to learn and gain the necessary knowledge and skills required in order to stay afloat and in touch with new laws, technology, and products in the industry. Managers that dedicate their time to earning designations from the Community Associations Institute take on the initiative to obtain a deeper understanding of all aspects of association management.

Associations are looking for qualified, dedicated, and knowledgeable professionals to advise and manage their associations. Managing people is a challenge. Great managers must play many roles in associations and handle various situations. Brian Tracy, a self-help author, says, "Practice Golden Rule 1 of Management in everything you do. Manage others the way you would like to be managed."

You have the opportunity to make a huge impact upon the way in which your association operates. As your vision becomes more focused, your ideas will appear stronger and more credible. Not only will it be easier to convince others that you have developed your own positive management style, but it will also be easier to maintain your own conviction and motivation when you reach any pitfalls or obstacles down the road. Your common sense and experience are your best guides in analyzing the problems that you face in your day-to-day challenges as a great manager. If you have the passion to be a protector, a planner, and a provider, you have the ability to shape your own work environment, and you have what it takes to be a great manager. ■

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