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A General Licence is Not Enough

Last week I found myself dealing with a particularly touchy problem. Without going into detail, water was everywhere, and no one seemed to be able to agree where it was coming from. To make matters worse, one resident refused access and claimed they had simply spilled a small pot of water while cooking, while the resident below had a ceiling caving in from gallons of foul-smelling water from above. Both residents threatened to sue if they were required to pay anything. The longer story involves a set of leaky aquariums and an online fish business, but I digress.

The point is, the role of a condominium manager can be complicated

— *very complicated*. To do the job well requires detailed knowledge of various laws, insurance procedures, conflict management, finance, and of course, how every component of a building works. This means that on any given day, a manager is expected to be a pseudo lawyer, accountant, engineer, and a mediator all rolled into one. True, we are not likely to be an expert in any one of these fields, but the expectation from our boards is that we know enough to add value. Of course, the level of value is subjectively determined by the director and each board. Some boards have little patience for the manager who regularly asks to spend money seeking advice from others.

This is not to say that the job of the manager is more difficult than other professions, just that it has its unique challenges. The main problem in our industry is education. Few professions allow their licensed members to take on such a high level of responsibility with so little training. For example, a teacher requires two years of education, an engineer and an accountant at least four, and a lawyer three before even starting their careers under substantial supervision. Yet condominium managers can get a General Licence after four online courses and two years on the job. What they do during those two years and how much supervision they receive is, to

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a large extent, up to the management company that they work for.

Let's consider this for a moment. With four courses and two years on the job, a licensee can be placed in a position of considerable control over what is effectively a multi-million dollar corporation overseen by a volunteer board of directors who themselves have only a limited amount of relevant training. This lack of education for managers and directors can have profound repercussions for condominium owners. It is not uncommon for owners to wind up facing special assessments, unnecessary lawsuits, or poor workmanship on projects, due in part to managers who either lack the qualifications needed to effectively run their business or lack the skills to stop their volunteer boards from making critical mistakes.

So how does the RCM stack up to the General Licence holder? To the casual observer, it appears that the requirements for the RCM are actually quite similar to those of the General Licence. The RCM requires the same four courses and a similar amount of on the job training. This being the case, what makes someone with an RCM stand out?

There are a number of differences; however, one of the main ones is that the RCM designation is voluntary. This simple fact can account for a large difference in quality between General Licensees and Registered Condominium Managers. RCMs, by definition, have gone above and beyond the minimum

requirements and have taken an active role in their own education because they are required to do continuing education every year as part of maintaining their designation. And although the base educational requirements remain similar, the attitude of the manager can

community, which has been supporting, advocating for and connecting managers for 44 years. ACOMO members have access to a wealth of resources and the opportunity to network with other professionals to share experiences, expertise, and best practices.

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be drastically different. This can mean more attention to detail, integrity, and a stronger desire to do the job well.

The second difference is that the RCM requires continuing education. Managers with RCMs are required to earn at least 20 educational points each year by actively engaging in the condominium management community. This involves going to educational seminars, luncheons, and networking events that help to further their education. As ACOMO continues to increase its educational offerings according to its new Strategic Plan, we can also expect higher-quality resources and educational content to become available to RCMs looking to learn more and to improve their skillsets.

A third difference is the fact that RCMs are part of ACOMO's professional condominium management

Unfortunately, General Licence holders don't have the support of a professional community.

The job of the condominium manager isn't getting any easier. There are more regulations being passed down, more expectations from owners and boards, and an ever-expanding body of knowledge that needs to be learned in order to succeed. While the industry has a long way to go in terms of educational standards, managers who have gone beyond the General Licence to achieve their RCM designation continue to prove that they are up for the challenge. ■

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