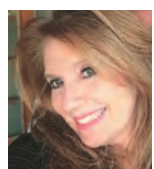




# How To Get the Most Out of the Relationship with Your Contractor

By Linda Duttmann

Ensuring a successful long-term relationship with your contractor can sometimes be tricky given tight deadlines, along with ever-increasing job demands. However, it is possible if you communicate your expectations clearly right from the start. Clear concise communication is so important in any relationship, whether it's personal or professional. You need to ensure that right from the start your contractor understands your expectations. This will ensure you both have the same mindset and vision going forward.



When you think about it, due to extremely long hours, board meetings and building issues, we sometimes see our contractors more than our spouses and significant others. A contractor/client relationship is truly like a marriage – it takes hard work

and mutual respect. Ensuring a good solid contractor relationship will pay off tenfold.

One of the most important things to consider prior to beginning a relationship with your contractor, whether it be your elevator, HVAC, landscaper, or security contractor, is that it truly is a partnership. Our job as your contractor is to help make you, as the property manager, look good. Sometimes high-stress situations can put a strain on the relationship. In the end, it's so important to always remember that your contractor is your partner. We want to help, and are there to work hard, but we need to have the mutual respect that any relationship deserves.

There is no exact science to a contractor–property manager relationship. However, there are a few ground rules that will help ensure a positive experience from the start.

Here are 6 tips to ensure you foster a good relationship with your contractor:

## Tip 1: Define Your Expectations

Ensure that right from the start you define your expectations, and those of your board of directors. It means that from Day 1, you clearly outline how you want your contractor to provide his/her services at your site. A good idea, is to hold a start-up site meeting with all parties involved, i.e., your contractor representative, your superintendent/building operator, the property manager, and sometimes even board members are a good idea. This way there are no surprises and your expectations have been expressed and clearly defined right from the beginning.

## Tip 2: Strong Lines of Communication

Ensure that you continue throughout the duration of the contract to keep strong lines of communication open with your contractor. Whether it be that you want to meet quarterly, yearly, or you just want a phone call once in a while, ensure you define what your needs are up front.

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### Tip 3: Show Appreciation

It really is very simple. The little things truly do matter. You want to stand out from all your contractors' other customers. You never know when you may need a quick price or a rush job, and going that extra mile with simply 'being kind', will go far. I understand that with today's high expectations and constant turmoil, it's sometimes hard to take the time to show your appreciation, but it really does pay off. A loyal contractor will go a long way in helping you run your building.

### Tip 4: Know Your Points of Contact

Sometimes the more points of contact there are, the easier it can be for things to get lost, forgotten or never reach the appropriate person or department. From the beginning, ensure you understand who the points of contact are, i.e., service, invoicing issues etc. Try to streamline the communication. Make sure your contractor knows what form of communication you prefer, i.e., email, phone etc. Always remember, however, to follow up any major items with an email so there is a proper trail.

### Tip 5: Ensure Your Contractor's Time at Your Site is as Pleasant as Possible

Remember that you are paying your contractor for the work they provide to you, but you really should try to make coming to your site as pleasant as possible. Try not to have the attitude that you are paying good money, and you can easily find someone else to do the job. Take the approach that you are in it for the long haul and want to work with your contractor for many years. They will appreciate that. Remember, you hired them because you trusted them, so make sure that while they are on site, they have the time to do their job without distractions, e.g., a superintendent accompanying them while they are performing their work.

### Tip 6: It's Really just a few Simple Words – Kindness and Respect

Just treating your contractor with kindness goes a long way! Whether it is your site technician, your account representative, or the internal folks who you may deal with regarding invoices, for example. We will work harder for you if you treat us the way you would want to be treated. It's also

important, not just in verbal dealings and personal interactions, but emails as well. I think sometimes emails can be taken the wrong way, and, depending on what the issue is, it may be better to pick up the phone and then follow up with an email.

Having a good relationship with your contractor is so important! I think over the years many managers and contractors can sometimes lose sight of just how important that really is. In the end, owner/resident comfort is the common ground and goal that both you and your contractor want. Ensuring we have a

good working relationship will better position us to make this happen.

In closing, the definition of 'kind' is: humane, compassionate, gracious, amicable, considerate, altruistic, good-natured! Let's all work towards just being kind! ■

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