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# You Can't Make Everyone Happy

## But Taking Owner Complaints Seriously Makes a Difference

As a condominium manager, a big part of your job is to enforce the corporation's declarations, rules and bylaws. It's a tough role, especially when residents don't agree with the rules.

Enforcing rules goes beyond catching and correcting bad behaviour. In a compact community that houses hundreds of people, problems are bound to occur when you're not around. Not all residents will deliver the complaint clearly or calmly either. When someone suddenly approaches you with an issue you know nothing about and demands you fix it right away, it can be hard not to react negatively, especially if the person is aggressive or blaming you. While it would be easiest to let the person vent and then go about your day, a manager's goal should be to help residents solve their problems. After all, people are the basis of a condominium – without them, condo managers wouldn't have a job.

So, here are some tips to help managers handle complaints from angry or upset residents:

### 1. When a complaint is received, it should be addressed promptly

Promptly dealing with a complaint will set a positive tone for the rest of the resolution process. Although it's improbable that most issues will be solved in a day, there are things you can do right away to assure the resident that you're serious about helping them. Actively listen to what they have to say, and reassure the resident that you will get back to them about the next steps within a week or two. Let them know that you will look into their matter, but the corporation's most urgent issues must be prioritized.

Ensure that the complaint is formally logged. If the condo corporation uses a software platform or Excel sheet to track violations, make sure new complaints are documented as soon as possible. Assigning a reference number to each request or complaint is a great way to make it easier to provide updates and follow-ups. Alter-

natively, you may consider introducing a formal/online process for reporting rule violations. Give clear instructions on how residents can submit complaints. The same goes for service requests.

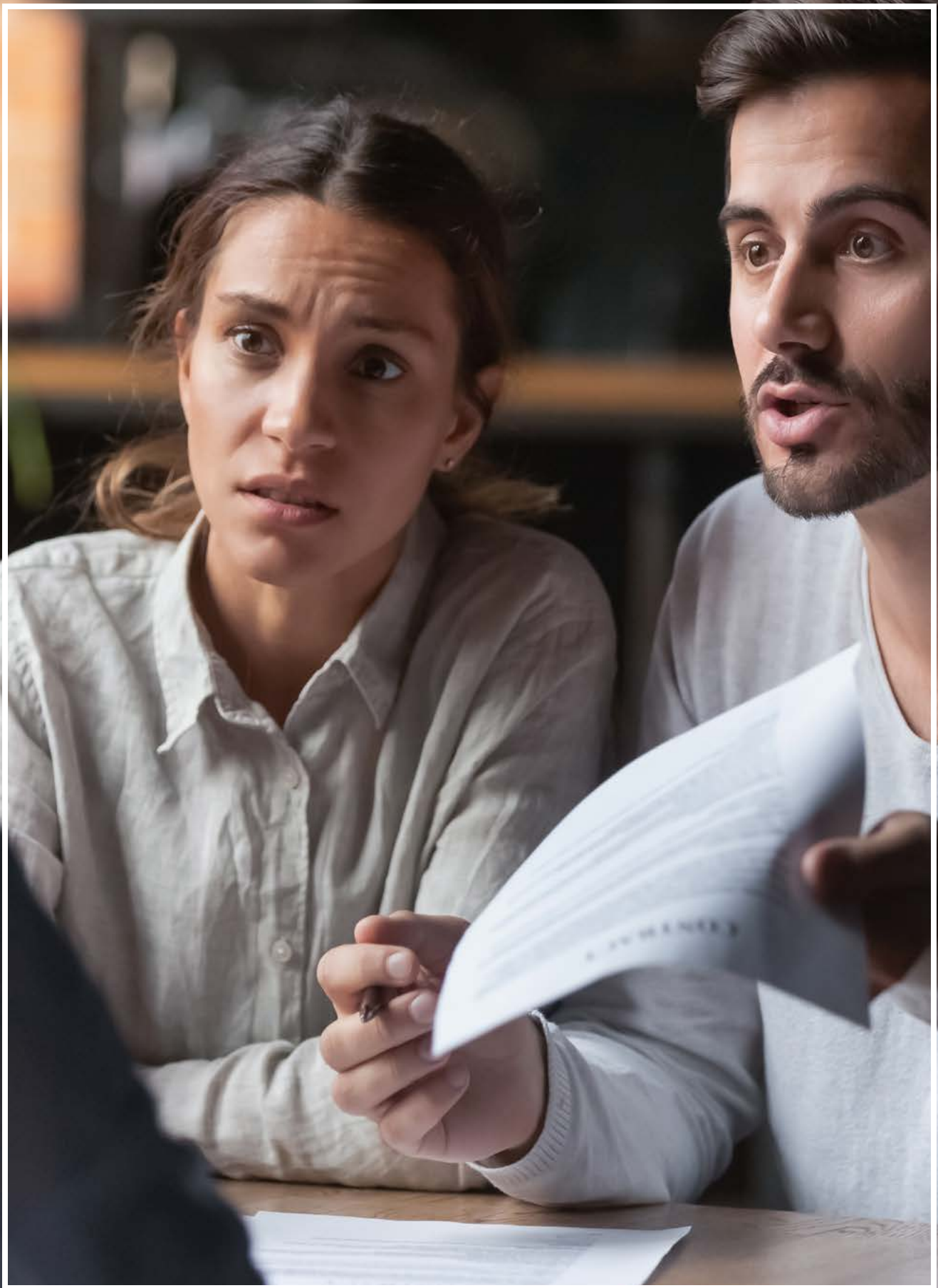
Sometimes, a resident just needs to be heard. They may feel frustrated that a repair has been neglected for too long or that their neighbour is being inconsiderate. By listening, you are showing that person that they do matter and their needs are valid.

#### Key takeaways

- Ensure the resident feels heard
- Give them a timeframe regarding when you will follow-up
- Document the complaint or issue

### 2. Residents might be emotional when they are making a complaint

If a resident has been jolted awake at 2 AM by a barking dog for the last week, they're going to be upset. However, managers should also remember that if residents





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are coming to you, it is an indication that they trust you to help them. Put yourself in their place. Maybe you have been in their situation before, and you can remember how unhappy you were.

Be genuine and personable. Remember that residents are people, and they should be treated with respect. Residents don't always realize how busy you are, but it's also not their job to cater to your schedule.

Engage in the conversation and ask pertinent questions. If the resident is upset and taking their anger out on you, do your best not to react emotionally. Focus on the problem and suggest solutions that may address the concerns. If a rule has allegedly been broken, give the resident an idea of what will happen next and give them clear instructions about what actions, if any, they can take. And be mindful of your body language. Crossing your arms or avoiding eye contact sends the message that you're not fully available or fully willing to help.

Finally, never make promises. While telling someone what they want to hear will make them happy for the time being, you may not be able to deliver on that promise. The goal at this stage is to listen to the resident and gather facts. You may find that after investigating, this complaint stems from a personal dislike of someone else. If that's the case, there isn't much you will be able to do to make the resident happy.

#### **Key takeaways**

- Don't get distracted by emotions
- Be genuine
- Don't make promises

### **3. Solve the problem quickly and efficiently, or find someone who can**

There are issues where management has to call in a sound technician, plumber or architect to get to the root of a problem. Don't be afraid to ask for help from a professional if you're having trouble proving or disproving something. Bringing in an expert will likely result in a faster solution.

Even if the resident is not happy with the outcome, they will be less likely to start a new fight with you if they've seen the work that went into investigating/resolving the issue.

#### **Key takeaways**

- Ask for professional help when you need it
- Make use of the best resources available to you to get the best outcomes

### **4. Most importantly, ensure that you frequently communicate with the resident**

Even the smallest update ensures that the resident doesn't feel forgotten. Keep all concerned parties up-to-date whenever new information becomes available. If, after looking into the issue, you find that the corporation needs to take action, let the resident know what those actions are and when they can expect them to occur.

In cases where no further action is required from the corporation, explain why. Residents won't be happy with this

type of response because they will feel as though their problems were not solved. Offer as much information about the reasoning behind the decision process and provide additional resources to the resident, if applicable.

#### **Key takeaways**

- Keep all concerned parties in the loop as the issue progresses
- Provide an explanation to the resident if the corporation will not move forward with the issue
- Offer resources to the resident, if possible

### **Conclusion**

Enforcing the corporation's rules can be a thankless job. But, on the flip side, you may end up making some residents very happy by ensuring their neighbours respect the rules and the other people in the building. While it's impossible to make everyone happy, the best thing you can do as a manager is to take complaints presented to you seriously, keep the lines of communication open, and handle problems in a fair, consistent and timely manner. ■

**Brian Bosscher** is the president and founder of Condo Control. He started the SaaS company in 2008, bringing with him a wealth of experience from the software development and wholesale banking/capital markets industries. Brian is also the board president of his condominium. [condocontrolcentral.com](http://condocontrolcentral.com)



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