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Why Integrity Matters More in the Age of a Pandemic

*"We may make mistakes - but they must never be mistakes which result from faintness of heart or abandonment of moral principle."
~ Franklin D. Roosevelt*

Like anyone, property managers make mistakes. Owning it and making amends is more important in these strange and challenging times than ever before. In a time where information seems to be constantly changing and sometimes contradicting itself, the last thing condo directors and owners need is for managers to add to the confusion - or worse, outright mislead them.

When property managers find themselves in situations where financial considerations and public trust are factors, they must take charge and assume complete responsibility. The question, 'is it enough to apologize for an error repeatedly?' lingers at every opportunity. The answer, of course, is a resounding NO! A strategic plan to mitigate harm and fix any issues arising from it must follow an apology (and one specific, sincere apology is sufficient). These days, it can sometimes feel as though all we hear are elaborate

excuses. Instead, do better by admitting the mistake and doing all you can to atone for it. Is it really that simple, though? We have to keep in mind that although directors are insured and protected from liability provided they have acted honestly and in good faith (and have Directors and Officers Liability Insurance coverage), property managers are not afforded such protection when wrongs are committed in the course of their work. Therefore, they must exercise their best judgement to safeguard themselves and - more importantly - protect their integrity.

Here are some simple steps a property manager can take:

Self-Awareness

This is by far the most difficult area for many managers. Plain and simple, the manager needs to be self-aware. What I mean by this is the ability to recognize the areas in which they are

weakest and anticipate errors. Let's examine a possible scenario to illustrate this: Suppose a manager is struggling with the challenges of deciphering financial statements prior to presenting them to their board. The manager has to recognize at the onset that they must overcome the obstacles set before them one way or another. To achieve this, brutal and honest self-examination is necessary from the manager. Being proactive is crucial in combating costly mistakes and the erosion of trust between the property manager and the board/owners. The benefits of self-awareness invite the manager to seek the help they require. Understanding and recognizing their weaknesses is an invaluable first step in seeking guidance from colleagues or other sources, thus avoiding costly mistakes. Self-awareness is, therefore, an intricate yet integral part of preserving one's integrity.

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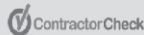
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Admitting the Mistake Openly

Captain Obvious once stated: "Ideally, it's better to eliminate the prospects of making mistakes - but most of us are fallible beings." We all possess an inclination towards self-preservation. When you take the way out that protects your reputation at the cost of your integrity, it diminishes the value of the relationship the manager has with their board directors. By attempting to dismiss or cover up serious errors, managers are only digging themselves deeper into the proverbial hole. Now is the time to stop digging. Of course, there are professional and ethical advantages in recognizing and properly admitting a mistake. The biggest ones are a) eliminating the self-serving desire to continue to defend an incorrect action; b) avoiding additional pitfalls in covering up the primary mistake, and; c) demonstrating integrity by taking responsibility for the mistake. It doesn't have to be a drawn-out public spectacle, but it does need to be genuine.

Move On

While owning the mistake and atoning for it is always the best course of action, sometimes it's just not possible to truly repair the damage done. If so, it's time to move on. If you're an avid sports fan like I am, you'll know it's a common mantra for an athlete to have a short memory or, better yet, "mild amnesia." At a certain point, there is value in the ability to forget past blunders in order to focus on achieving current objectives. This is as true for a professional athlete as it is for a property manager.

Through experience, when coming clean post-mistake, my relationships with my boards did not diminish but indeed strengthened. There is somehow an unspoken mystical bond between screw-ups. Board directors are people too and likewise prone to making mistakes. When managers admit we are wrong in our actions, we affirm to the board that we're human and fallible, just like them. The willingness to humble oneself when you are in the wrong is a gateway to manager/board cohesiveness - integrity fuels trust, and those two things are lifelong acquaintances. Admitting fault when projects and assignments go sideways often says more about a manager's integrity than being right in the first place. When the board sees

you stepping up and owning your mistakes, they feel more confident that they can trust you to do the right thing in challenging scenarios. I've had situations when my boards witnessed me admitting and owning silly mistakes, and they, in turn, have felt secure enough to acknowledge their own errors in judgement. Board and property managers can create relationships where, instead of being shamed, mistakes are examined for the benefit of growing and developing together. ■

Bill Lang, RCM, OLCM, BBA, is a Property Manager with CIE Property Management & Consulting. Bill enjoys opening the lines of communication between condo directors, owners, professionals and trades to get projects and initiatives done. With over 14 years under his belt, he has a vast array of property management and consulting experiences. Bill has managed condominiums in Waterloo Region, Hamilton, Toronto and the GTA.
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