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# Professional Condominium Manager or Office Helper?

Every property manager wants and needs to progress professionally, as well as financially. But do we work to progress as managers and professionals? Or are we content to remain with our “recent RCM” status, attitude and knowledge base?

Every new condominium manager, similar to everyone else in any new career, starts off as a novice, almost as office help, or a clerk with some education. As the tenured amongst us know, graduating with an RCM or newly acquired General Licence is just the beginning of our educational experience. A new manager is habitually at the low end of the pay ladder, and that is fair. However, we as managers have two basic types of education: the formal, such as continuing education through ACMO, your management company or other cred-

ited institutions, and the school of hard knocks or real-life experience. It may take a village to raise a child, but it takes a group of residents to educate a manager.

The more challenging residents bring with them the opportunity for the manager to learn, grow and stretch as he or she becomes a better, smarter manager. After numerous encounters with those who challenge us the most, we learn how to deal with more difficult individuals. I will not nor can I ‘dis’ the unfortunate person who thinks he or she can obtain better service by being belligerent or degrading to a condominium manager because things are never good enough or fast enough and the favourite line against a manager is “we pay your salary”. No one chooses to be a sociopath, it just happens. The

professional condominium manager must learn to not take comments such as this personally, and that will help him or her to grow and evolve into a successful community manager, which may be a better definition of what we aspire to do.

Perhaps part of the problem lies with residents who are not aware of what a professional condominium property manager does. It is not just sitting in the office answering a phone, or providing parking, pool or gym passes. Community managers are on call 24 hours a day/7 days a week. We practice both the technical skills that avoid mishaps such as severe equipment failures, while working together with the board to oversee the careful budgeting and spending of millions of dollars. As we learn to develop the people skills that permit us to work

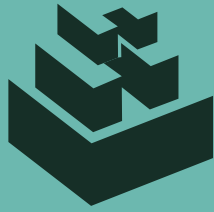


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with those less practised in social interactions and even the anti-social, we become true professionals. At this point in our careers we should be looking to progress financially to reflect our technical and interpersonal achievements.

Let's face it; most of us would not work if we didn't need the money. Money doesn't make the world go around, it just sustains the momentum. I know of two young men who purchased BMWs they could barely afford stating they "deserved" the car. Of course, everyone deserves certain basic things like liberty, safety, food, but a BMW? As managers knowledgeable in budgets, finance, basic accounting, contract and condominium law (and a host of other subjects), we realize we deserve what we can afford. But we also deserve what we have earned. If a manager has stretched himself or herself educationally and academically he or she deserves success, and success comes with a dividend.

If you worked prior to property management in a complementary industry you should leverage that as well. Many jobs that are less technical are stronger in the people skills. Emphasize that! If you worked in trades such as home services or automotive, emphasize those strengths. If

you worked in retail, your customer service skills are probably better than most. If you have just graduated from high school you will, regrettably, not have the depth and breadth of experience you will have in ten, twenty or more years. We all start off as office help. It is only in politics where an individual can catapult right to the top due to a great sales pitch and self-promotion.

Yes, the condominium world is very political. However, we are the civil servants of that world and while we shelter the good board members from the hoards who believe they are not earning what they are (not) paid, we must walk the tightrope of civil servant and management authority. These are two hats that are worn by police, fire, MPs, MPPs, counsellors and condominium property managers.

By your actions, it is your responsibility to show your board of directors and residents that through hard work and continuous improvement you have earned the right to be called a professional and to show that professional condominium managers are not office help. Regretfully, too few people ask their manager for his or her credentials. Too few residents realize the responsibility and serious nature of our profession, and sadly a senior condo-

minium manager and an office helper look alike to most people. We do not have insignia to show rank like in the army and police force. Only occasionally does a resident ask us our education or experience. I suppose they think it rude; however, it would be wise for an owner to inquire about what they get for what they pay.

It is a good step forward that we are now being recognized by the government as licensed professional property managers with all the responsibility that entails. You have the right to call yourself an expert, your professional insurance and your employer should recognize and reflect these truths because for many years that wasn't the case. ■

**Bill Colucci** is a trained heating technician who has spent over thirty years in property management, twenty of those years focused on condominiums. Regardless of his technical credentials, Bill still finds a BA in Literature & Drama extremely useful in the condominium theatre. Bill currently works as Senior Property Manager and Director of Special Projects for CityTowers Property Management Inc.  
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