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Customer Service Skills Everyone Needs

The on-call manager receives a telephone call on the emergency line at 9:30 Saturday night. He is deeply engrossed in an action movie and is reluctant to hit the “pause” button. After a couple of rings, he answers and hears a frantic senior on the other end of the line reporting water coming from the unit above through her light fixture over the kitchen sink. The manager yawns audibly and replies that this is nothing to worry about and quite common in a stacked townhouse. He advises her it is probably due to the forgetful neighbour above plugging their sink, walking away and forgetting they left the tap running. The manager suggests that if the caller does not wish to go upstairs and bring the issue to her neighbour’s atten-

tion, she should put a bucket under the leak and place towels around to help dry things up or simply ensure her sink is not plugged to allow the water to run down her drain. The manager advises he will contact the neighbour and request they turn off the running tap and remove the sink plug. After he disconnects the call, he contacts the neighbouring unit to advise them of the issue and his suspicions are correct. The forgetful owner has left the tap running but quickly turns it off. The manager returns to his movie.

Another on-call manager receives a similar call the same evening and picks up after the first ring. This manager takes the time to listen to the senior and makes attempts to calm them. He

inquires about the amount of water, advises the owner to turn off the light and assures her he will have an emergency outfit dispatched to mediate. He informs the owner he will be contacting the neighbour above to instruct them to check their kitchen sink before contacting any other service personnel. He disconnects the call, and immediately contacts the neighbour above who confirms they had let their sink overflow. Once the water has been shut off the owner has made a commitment to start cleaning up the water, the manager contacts the emergency contractor and ensures someone will be immediately dispatched to inspect both units. He calls the elderly unit owner back and



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lets her know someone is on the way and will be at her door momentarily. He also provides the name of the company he has dispatched in case the owner is nervous about opening her door to a stranger. Before hanging up, he asks if

of their expectations, **communicate** in detail how you are going to resolve their issue or, if you cannot help them, assist them in understanding the limitations of living in a condominium. Often, we are required to deliver bad

phe strikes, keeping a level head will not only instill confidence in your ability to resolve the situation but will also enable you to effect resolution more efficiently. Although each handled the situation in a different manner, both managers in the examples above were confident in the solutions they initiated. The goal in each case was to stop the water and mitigate the damage, and both achieved that in a calm manner despite the frantic unit owner.

Read your audience. Become adept at judging the reaction which best suits each situation to assure the most positive outcome. A successful manager will know when a firm diplomatic hand is required or when a situation calls for empathy and understanding.

A property manager wears many hats and must be able to **think quickly on their feet** switching hats countless times each working day. It is important to be able to react quickly but equally necessary to relax and appreciate that we may not be able to accomplish everything we had hoped in a day due to unexpected interruptions.

Customer service is exactly what it states. Providing service to your customers. The examples used demonstrate interactions with owners/residents but these skills are important tools as well when working with contractors, service providers and industry professionals. While positive interactions are not guaranteed, you and your clients will be left largely satisfied when these tools are utilized. ■

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there is anything else the unit owner needs and when she has confirmed she is satisfied, he rings off.

Of course, both scenarios are exaggerated to some degree, but they clearly illustrate the difference between a manager who exhibits customer service skills and one who does not. Using these examples as a comparison, this article will identify customer service skills useful to property managers.

One of the most important skills is the ability to **listen and be attentive**. Manager #1 was just too anxious to return to his movie whereas manager #2 was willing to spend some time with the caller. We need to be cognizant that unit owners with issues just want to be heard and occasionally they simply need to vent or require reassurance. If owners feel you are not listening or are trying to rush them along, not only will they become more frustrated, they will interpret your reaction as disrespect and their issue of little value. Be **patient** and really listen to their problem repeating back the facts to demonstrate you've understood.

Once you have a clear understanding

news when owners' expectations go beyond what the corporation documents permit, so make every effort to use **positive language**. Try to put a positive spin on the message you are delivering. For instance, in the examples above, had the emergency leak not been a corporation responsibility, the manager could have carefully explained the limitations but offer to provide the contact information for a suitable contractor. Be **respectful** and speak in terms that are easily understood. Show **compassion** without becoming patronizing but at the same time **assertive** regarding the corporation's position.

Be **honest**. Don't make promises you have no intention of keeping or know you cannot keep just to appease someone. They will keep coming back and each interaction will be more difficult than the last, jeopardizing your integrity.

Not all exchanges will be pleasant. It's essential to be able to handle even the most difficult resident or situation calmly. **Self-control** demonstrates a level of maturity and professionalism and when catastro-



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