

Add Customer Service to Your Skill Set





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Assertive Communication Helps Deliver Exceptional Service

Condominium managers are responsible for people's greatest investment – their homes. Because the stakes are high, sometimes condo owners can be demanding, argumentative or hostile, and the condo managers are on the front line. You need strong customer service skills to manage your constituency with excellence.

Like all professionals delivering a service, condo managers need to manage their customers, such as, the residents, internal staff, external suppliers and board members, with courtesy and diplomacy. These internal customers can be the assistant, the maintenance staff, the IT consultant, the chairperson of the Board and all the condo residents.

Having a customer service mentality and some of the skill sets to complement it, will work in your favour.

Use Assertive Communication

As the lead person responsible for so many functions in the condo community, you must deal with differing priorities, crises and day-to-day responsibilities. Regardless of what happens, you want to maintain good will. How does assertive communication come into play? Understanding the true meaning and intent underlying this practice is the key. Assertive communication teaches strategies to communicate with respect for self and respect for others. These skill sets will help you navigate

challenging situations with the goal of keeping relationships intact.

The first priority when the costs are high and outcomes are critical for the resident, is to understand and empathize with residents who are upset. You want to communicate with authority yet in a respectful way. Your body language must be congruent with your verbal language, assertive not aggressive. You want your message to be clear and succinct, not rambling. Your tone of voice should be firm, not sounding frustrated or condescending.

In all areas of property management, there will be times when you need to say “no” or set limits. Saying “no” can be difficult for a number of reasons. You

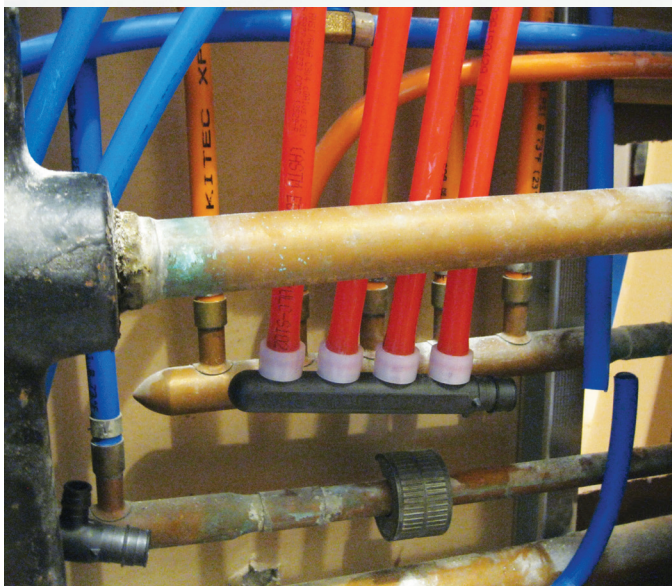
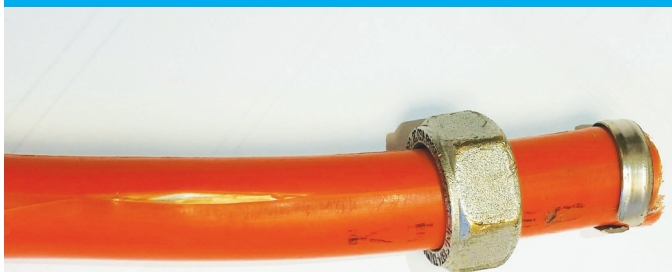


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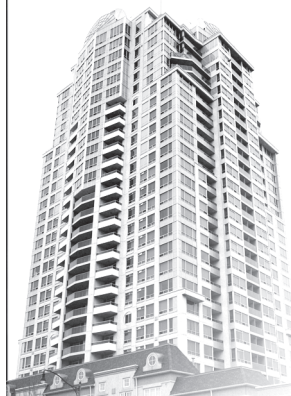
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don't want to disappoint, you want to be liked and you want to avoid the conflict or push-back that often follows when you refuse a request.

Learning Tip: When saying "no", keep your tone of voice neutral, devoid of anger, frustration, or sarcasm. Repeat the request to ensure you understood the question. Let them know briefly why you must refuse. Then use the actual word "no" in your last statement. *"I realize the deadline is tight and you want all three quotes for the job today. In order to do it properly, I need to get input from several other people, which means more lead time. So, no, I can't get three quotes by this afternoon. Let's look at another alternative."*

Following up on broken promises or missed deadlines is another challenging situation for many people in professional service. How do you challenge your residents or board members without distancing them? One assertive communication strategy suggests stating the verbal agreement, as you understood it, followed up by an open-ended question. This is a respectful way to confront someone. It gives them a chance to speak up for themselves and explain what factors caused the agreement to be broken. This approach is more respectful than an accusation. It gives the other person the benefit of the doubt and seeks a joint solution.

Learning Tip: When you want to confront someone who broke a commitment or promise, state the verbal agreement, as you understood it. Then ask a question. *"I understood that we agreed you would get back to me by Monday. Today is Wednesday, and I never heard back from you. What happened? Where do we go from here?"*

Setting boundaries is all about teaching others how you expect to be treated. If you hear lots of complaints about things gone wrong, and the interaction becomes ugly, it's important to let that person know they are crossing the line. You have the right to let them know how you expect to be treated.

Learning Tip: When an angry resident starts swearing, yelling, threatening action or making complaints about you, allow them to complete their rant, no matter how long it takes. It's important to address the abuse rather than the issue at hand.

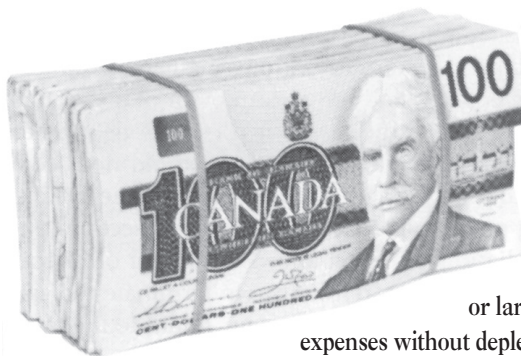
"I want to help you with your problem, but I won't continue this conversation if you speak this way/swear/yell/threaten me. Can I have your promise to speak respectfully? Now, let's move forward with solutions that will help you."

Assertive communication is a learned skill. All professionals who interact with clients benefit from a customer service mentality. Across many industries, people who manage others' expectations, who deliver a service and deal with challenging interactions will benefit from learn-

ing the values, beliefs, and strategies that accompany an assertive approach to communication. Try these strategies at work. You may be surprised by the benefits of adopting an assertive approach to customer service: enhanced professionalism, better relationships and less personal stress. ■

Bina Feldman is a corporate training consultant and communication skills expert specializing in personal and professional development.
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