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Service Recovery and Effective Customer Service

Service recovery occurs when an organization is able to resolve a client issue and regain his or her trust following a breakdown in service delivery. A service breakdown occurs when the service delivered fails to meet a client's expectations. In some cases, the product or service functions as it was designed or intended; however, the client has misunderstood how the product or service functions resulting in a service breakdown.

In condominium communities, our owners, residents, boards and employees are all our clients. A promise not kept, deadline missed, repairs not completed in a timely manner, repairs completed poorly, a staff member was rude are just a few examples of the types of service

breakdowns that can occur in condominium communities.

Reports on service breakdowns can be an opportunity for a condominium community to make necessary changes or adjustments to prevent similar breakdowns in the future. There are many factors in the service process that can lead to a failure to meet client expectations. Generally, these factors fall into three categories:

- organizational – processes and procedures, human resources and technological support systems;
- employee – communication, knowledge, attitude and technical skills; and
- client – failure to use information correctly and failure to follow up.

Mistakes happen. When a mistake has

occurred, identify the cause and remedy it quickly to your client's satisfaction. Successful resolution of a service breakdown is the client's perception of how well resolution occurred, not yours. If the client believes that he or she was not treated fairly, honestly, in a timely manner and appropriate fashion, or that they are still dissatisfied (for any reason), your efforts failed.

Mr. Smith reported that his suite door lock was stiff and difficult to open. The property manager arranged for the locksmith to check and repair it. After the locksmith completed the repairs, the door lock was still stiff and difficult to open. Mr. Smith called the property manager to express his dissatisfaction. So how do we resolve a service break-

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down? Each organization will have their standard operating procedure, but they all share some common procedures:

Thank You

Thank the client for bringing the service breakdown to your attention. “Mr. Smith, thank you for informing me that the contractor did not repair your door lock properly.”

Apologize

Sincerely apologize to the client for the service breakdown. “Mr. Smith, I am sorry that the contractor did not repair your door lock properly.”

Listen

Listen and show you support the client and his or her viewpoint, where appropriate. By taking a client-centred approach to problem analysis and solving, you are closer to resolving the issue satisfactorily.

Gather the Facts

Before you can implement a service recovery action plan, you have to determine why your client is dissatisfied. Listen and ask appropriate questions to

determine what went wrong in order to decide the best way to recover.

Empathize

Let the client know through your words and actions that you are concerned, do appreciate their views, feelings, or concerns, and that you will do your best to resolve their concern. “Mr. Smith, I can appreciate your frustration.”

Solution

Once you have gathered enough information, obtain agreement from your client, and then act. The faster and more appropriately you act, the more important the client will feel. “Mr. Smith, when would it be convenient for you to have the contractor return to correct the repairs?”

Follow Up

Once the recovery is completed, ensure that any necessary follow-up actions are instituted such as calling or emailing the client. “Mr. Smith, the contractor returned on Tuesday to correct the repairs. Was everything completed to your satisfaction?”

Clients should not have to wait for their concerns to travel through the organizational hierarchy. Service recovery is the responsibility of all employees, not just managers. All employees who interact directly with clients should be trained on service recovery and empowered.

Service breakdowns and recoveries should be treated as learning opportunities. Maintain a system of tracking client complaints and the resolution so that, over time, trends or specific issues may be and systems can be amended or put into place to address issues before they become future complaints. Service breakdowns and recoveries should also be used to generate new ideas and improvements.

Let's create a culture of service excellence. ■

Yasmeen Nurmohamed is the president of Royale Grande Property Management Ltd, an ACMO 2000 and ISO9001:2008 certified property management company. Based in Toronto, Royale Grande is committed to building vibrant and engaged condominium communities for a more inspired way of living. royalegrande.com



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