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# An Exercise in Perspective, Balance & Communications

My favourite catchphrases include: “We work where you live,” “competing priorities,” and “difficult conversations with passionately angry people.” All excellent ways to paraphrase the everyday challenges of condo management! The work of property management, specifically residential condominium management, can be challenging, especially during an anxiety-ridden worldwide pandemic. Thankfully, no two days are alike.

As condominium managers, WE WORK where you live – and as if that is not complicated enough, YOU LIVE where we work! The residential property management industry is unique in that way. It makes for an unusual relationship where we all approach the same issues daily from

our own different and unique perspectives! As you can imagine, the potential for friction and misunderstandings is ever-present. It requires all parties’ ability and willingness to look beyond their views to really hear and understand one another.

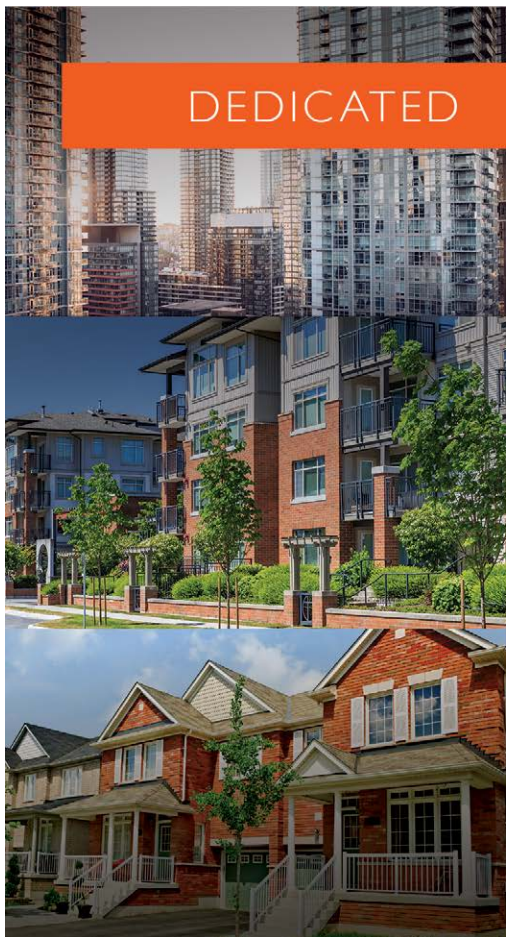
### **The Manager's Competing Priorities**

Condo Managers are pulled continuously between competing priorities, including:

- the various employment and contractual obligations they have towards the condominium management firm which employs them;
- their professional duties and responsibilities under the CMRAO

Code of Ethics to safeguard their management licences;

- fulfilling their contractual obligations towards the condominium communities under their care;
- providing timely and relevant advice and recommendations to their Boards to allow board members to make sound decisions;
- managing and supervising staff and contractors to ensure that all legislative and code requirements are met to mitigate risk and safeguard their corporations from liability; and
- coping with the ever-increasing needs, wants, and expectations of their condominium ownerships and their boards.



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In juggling these competing priorities, the manager must be wary not to overstep the boundaries of what falls beyond the scope of the condominium corporation's responsibility or of his/her own authority, ability and responsibility.

## A Balancing Act

In accordance with the *Condominium Act, 1998*, those members sitting on Condominium boards across the province are generally responsible for managing their corporation's affairs and, in most cases, to manage a multi-million dollar investment on behalf of the owners they were elected to represent. They have agreed to serve their communities, serve as stewards of their condominium corporation, and are responsible for all activities under their direction/supervision.

In all cases, they are ultimately liable and responsible to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the safety, welfare and security of the residents who reside within the properties under their care. For all of the above reasons, the standard of care mandated by the Act is relatively high; because the stakes are high.

From a board member's perspective, managing the multi-million dollar property which houses all of YOUR homes and protecting your collective investment is an exercise in achieving a finely tuned balance between:

- making sure the current owners enjoy a safe, comfortable, liveable community. In other words, managing your homes of the short term;
- planning and implementing fiscally prudent funding plans for the building's future needs to protect the collective investment and ensure that current and prospective owners may also enjoy living in a safe and comfortable community. In other words, managing your homes and investments in the long term.

From a licensed condo manager's perspective, this finely tuned balance is best achieved by:

- making sound financial decisions;
- by fairly and reasonably applying and enforcing legislations/governing documents;
- by assessing and managing risk/liability in a wholly imperfect and ever-changing world;
- by allocating finite resources to seemingly infinite needs;

- by implementing proper, safe and fully compliant operational procedures protecting the health, safety and welfare of all those who occupy, visit or work in the building.

Of course, one mustn't overlook the owner's perspective. For every owner, there is likely to be a slightly different and legitimate perspective. For a variety of perfectly good reasons, some owners may be more inclined to favour the short-term (operational), tangible, everyday needs of their home over the longer-term (reserve) goals of the corporation in which they have invested. Others will have a more long-term approach to their investment and be willing to take a broader view to reserve fund contributions. Still, others will view the property solely as a long or short-term income investment and have different opinions on managing the corporation's resources.

Somewhere between the board's and the manager's perspectives, there is a balance between "doing things right" and "doing the right things." Somewhere between the condominium corporation's and owner's varying perspectives, there must be a balance between what is expected, what is permissible, what is required, and what is advisable. In most cases, the reconciliation of all of these perspectives is just one of the board's many daunting tasks!

## Communications – Hearing and Understanding One Another

It takes a specific mindset to remember, accept, understand and cope with the fact that a significant proportion of the owner's communications will come in after regular business hours. In a residential property management setting, that makes perfect sense! From the owner's perspective, evenings and weekends are when they are home; it is also when they are likely to be reminded of that "thing" they have wanted to bring to your attention.

From the condo manager's perspective, imagine going home at the end of your workday with that euphoric feeling that comes with an empty (or almost empty) inbox. Unsuspecting that another 100+ emails will be waiting for you the very next morning, each requiring your immediate attention first! True story. It helps to keep a sense of humour.

As condominium managers, we routinely communicate about sensitive and sometimes embarrassing issues such as rules infractions, enforcement, complaints, hoarding, pest infestations, staff management/discipline and other assorted public health and mental health issues. We are often called upon to have difficult conversations with passionately angry people on a day when they are clearly not at their very best. More often than not, these conversations happen in the owner's home, whereby all rights they should be entitled to feel safe from interference.

The passionate response, though sometimes somewhat unpleasant, is understandable. That said, from an employment perspective, the passion occasionally results in a difficult-to-manage and unacceptable work environment for our staff. From the condo manager's perspective, they are in their workplace and should be entitled to the protection of workplace policies.

Like every other condominium management challenge, these can only be overcome by remembering that there is always more to a situation than what initially meets the eye; that there is always more than one side to a story. Every person is uniquely equipped (or sometimes ill-equipped) to deal with life challenges, and their approach, while it may be significantly different from your own, maybe just as effective or better than yours.

In the end, a balance between our varying perspectives and our competing priorities can best be achieved by finding a way to speak openly and politely without judging/offending. Keep an open-minded approach and be willing to listen with the purpose of understanding, rather than just replying. Try to understand or at least acknowledge each other's perspectives and keep a sense of humour! ■

**Josée Deslongchamps**, RCM, ACCI, and member of the CMRAO Advisory Committee, is owner, president and principal condominium manager of DES Services Inc, with 30+ years of experience in the Ontario condominium industry. Josée's focus on building strong relationships within the condominium industry has continued to be at the heart of her management approach. [desservicesinc.com](http://desservicesinc.com)