

The Many Hats of the Condominium Manager

By Michael E. Le Page, RCM

How many hats are necessary for a condo manager to wear? Michael Le Page explains some key manager responsibilities.

THE ONE THING condominium management is not – is routine. No two days are alike and roles played by the manager are ever changing. Through the course of an average day a manager may need to wear a number of different hats and at times wear more than one hat simultaneously.



The successful condominium manager has a professional skill set that includes a very strong ability to multi-task. On any given day a lot happens in a condominium corporation and staying abreast or ahead of all things can, at times, prove to be challenging.

Below is a sampling of the many responsibilities and roles a manager may need to fill and the hats worn to fill them:

SITE INSPECTOR. Managers walk the site frequently and conduct inspections. There are varying types of inspections. First is a full, detailed inspection in which all the nooks and crannies of the common elements are carefully examined, detailed notes are taken and a report is generated. Secondly targeted inspections are completed in which a specific item or items are the area of focus. The objective is to determine the status of a particular situation or if a repair is completed satisfactorily or to ensure the equipment is functioning properly. Lastly there is a monitoring inspection, which is an overview of the property, where the focus is on the resident and visitor impact ensuring there are no fire code violations or rule breaches that necessitate action.

In completing the inspection, an essential tool is a list detailing specific items of concentration. This assists the manager to maintain focus as one may develop a tendency over time to overlook various items. These lists are then a reference in coordinating the necessary services required.



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(Photo: Rudolph Ens Photography)*

SERVICE COORDINATOR. Work orders are issued to reliable firms to complete any and all repairs needed. Scheduling of repairs in a timely manner is essential; however, one must bear in mind all activities within the corporation to minimize conflict and maximize the benefit of the work in progress.

In addition access may be a concern and coordination with residents is necessary as well as ensuring the resident's satisfaction with the timeliness of the work, the work itself and the cleanup on completion. All of this is to be completed within budgetary limitations and spending restrictions using qualified accountable trades that provide timely service, dependable work and a fair ratio of cost to quality.

CONTRACT NEGOTIATOR. Prior to entering into an agreement the manager may be asked to negotiate further with a contractor. In so doing it is key to understand that for any business transaction to be good, it must be good for both parties. A service provider may be asked to sharpen their pencil or expand upon

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the scope of the service and these requests must be fair and always in the condominium's best interest. Negotiations could also be about payment schedules, start dates and the sequence of how efforts will be completed.

COLLECTION AGENCY. The manager ensures all maintenance fees are collected in a timely manner and all delinquent accounts are protected in accordance with the corporation's arrears policy. The collection procedure must be universal in application with specific, age-triggered timelines.

BYLAW ENFORCER. Not unlike municipal bylaw enforcement, management must be diligent in ensuring that the bylaws, rules and regula-

tions of the corporation are adhered to. Commonly the breaches pertain to residents expanding the boundaries of their units or failing to remain considerate of the impact their lifestyle may have on the balance of the community. There are also the 3Ps to condo living – pets, parking and people.

Pets – the focus is on animal control and containment. Cats and dogs should not wander unattended and pet owners must be diligent in cleaning up after them.

Parking – it is amazing how many condominium residents interpret the words “visitor's parking” to mean spare resident parking. It is not. Visitor's parking is for visitors and it will always be for visitors. Quite simply, resident vehicles do not belong there and any compromise to this rule usually leads to compounding problems.

People – residents must remain cognizant of the close proximity of their neighbours and the impact their actions can cause. Loud car stereos with vibrating bass tones, late night hallway goodbyes with open

doors all create anxiety to neighbouring residents.

In enforcing the bylaws the manager remains completely impartial and the application of enforcement, as it is for collections, is to be universal – nameless and faceless. The manager must have the strength of character to issue the necessary letters and remain available to receive any rebuttal that may arise. The manager must be careful not to overstep and perform police duties, rather when situations warrant them.

PROFESSIONAL ADVISER. Not only does the manager provide advice and guidance to the board of directors on a continuing basis, in so doing they must also be careful not to overstep their level of expertise. It is important to know when to step forward and when to step back. Management must suggest to the board as situations necessitate that the solicitor be called or the engineer consulted, and should either be appointed the manager must continue to manage and not relinquish their duties in any way to the consultant. It is important that the areas of responsibility be discussed and understood by all parties.

MEDIATOR. In the condominium world disagreements arise between neighbours over a plethora of issues. Management is often placed in a position to mediate resolution where there is not necessarily a breach in the condominium documents (which is much more cut and dry) but where someone's lifestyle negatively impacts on another's quiet enjoyment of their home. Resolving these matters can be a tedious process in which management must remain neutral in hopes of gaining increased tolerance from all parties.

At board meetings, the board may come to an impasse and management delicately assists the board in reaching a decision where action is necessary. Equally, disputes with trades need to be resolved.

Management stickhandles through these disagreements in hopes of reaching an outcome that is favourable to the corporation on a global scale at all times. In all cases it is in everyone's best interest if this is done without litigation.

COMMUNITY LIAISON. Often there are concerns of fence squabbles amongst neighbours or matters of security to which management must remain sensitive and appreciative. A sensitive ear must be lent to all parties and a position framed by the corporation's documents is to be offered. This position is not always the most popular one but the manager must possess the fortitude to deliver the message and stand by it.

TEAM LEADER. The manager forges a team relationship with the administration and building staff. However at the same time they maintain their position in the hierarchy of the management team. This is essential to ensure accountability amongst the individual members of the team. It is important to maintain these invisible lines. Priorities need to be established as situations evolve and having everyone row in the same direction with accountability is essential. A good manager can delegate but not abdicate their position and will ensure that the team

is cohesive. When it is not, a good manager will call for the appropriate player change.

The manager must corral not only the support of his onsite team but also that of all trades and service providers to the condominium. In lead the manager must ensure the trades deliver services with a level of priority worthy of their being entrusted with these responsibilities.

PUBLISHER. The manager issues notices and circulars with respect to the happenings within the community. Informative newsletters are distributed updating timely items, reiterating rules and regulations and informing residents of seasonal matters. It is important that all communication is clear, concise and cordial.

What the manager is first and foremost is a good neighbour to the community as a whole. The manager must always remain cognizant that they hold a position of trust and honour within the community. They have an obligation to the residents as well as to the bricks and mortar and must ensure that their respective needs are met within the parameters

of the Act and the corporation's documents.

In preparing this list of hats there were numerous hats such as arbitrator, public speaker, administrator and more, where if the manager does not possess these skills directly, they need to be supported by a team that can ensure they can deliver them.

Very few individuals possess all the skills and tools necessary to wear all the hats and this is where the depth of resources of the management team/firm can be fully appreciated. These responsibilities are

prevalent each and every day in every condominium to varying degrees and the responsibility to wear these hats is never ending.

Lastly (and often we lose sight of it) after wearing all these hats, the manager retires at the end of the day to their own home, where they must wear the hat their private world requires of them.■

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