



# nerej

## **Staff who increase net operating income**

January 26, 2012 - Front Section

Each month, I read hundreds of tenant and customer feedback surveys and the same staff members come up in the comments. Tenants go out of their way to explain their appreciation to these employees' bosses and rave about the service they received on their service experience.

These standout staff members are remarkable at serving tenants. They drive up retention, drive down turnover, drive up Net Operating Income, generate referrals and build a reputation for great service for their employers. They take their position seriously. These staff members get it.

Below I have attempted to summarize what makes these employees so special to hopefully raise the bar and challenge all property management teams to do better. Our industry needs more people who embody the following characteristics and approach to the job:

1) They know the four steps to managing an effective tenant maintenance request experience. These employees are proficient at: (1) engaging tenants effectively no matter what the issue, (2) asking the right questions to understand their needs, (3) explaining possible approaches to solve a need, (4) gaining a commitment or agreement before moving ahead, and most importantly, (5) meeting the tenant need and doing it timely. Customers love the way they take control to ensure the right outcome. If you are a property manager and have employees who routinely work through these five essential steps, let them know it. Share the positive feedback with them. These employees know the #1 reason tenants leave is because of poorly managed maintenance requests. Do you have an employee proficient in this area? Make that person the team leader and have others watch her/him in action.

2) They know how to ask the right questions. They are incredible listeners, acknowledge tenant responses appropriately, and are disciplined in asking questions that are broad and deep enough to capture all essential information. Such pros even have a sheet in front of them with the different questions that should be asked to ensure they don't miss anything important. Asking the right questions helps tenants crystallize their thinking as the two parties team up on a solution. Give these tenant advocates the Investigative Reporter Award. They know how to probe.

3) They know their role.

Tenants feel better at the end of every interaction they have with employees that get it. They are consistent and always make the tenant feel unique and special. They enhance the relationship, leaving each tenant feeling as if he/she is the only tenant that matters. They increase what Stephen Covey calls the "Emotional Bank Account" in his best-selling book, "7 Habits of Highly Effective People."

These super stars have a knack for building strong tenant relationships over time, one tenant at a

time. They explore all opportunities to serve in order to ensure the optimum tenant experience. Tenants talk about them in a positive way all of the time, extolling their positive, helpful, friendship-oriented way. Sharing how they went above and beyond. Recounting how they made it happen on a cold/winter night when it seemed impossible to get that broken window fixed so fast.

They know that losing a tenant means a drop of \$3,000 in Net Operating Income. They know that a lost rent, fixing up the apartment, and getting a replacement hurts the bottom line. Do you have a employee who builds relationships over time and goes the extra mile for tenants? Give him/her the Extra Mile Award.

4) They know why tenants continue to renew.

They know all about the foundation principleâ€”TRUST. They earn trust and they live by their principles both in and out of the office. How do they establish trust? By being other-centered, not self-centered. They think nothing of waiting to go to lunch or leaving late to serve a tenant. Tenant's trust they will do their best, be there for them, and tell them the truth. No sugar coating, no spin, no lying; just down to earth service and respect. They know motives are transparent and wear their other-centered motive on their sleeves.

Do you have the most trustworthy employee on your team that just beams of trust and integrity? Give that employee tickets to the ballgame so they can take their favorite tenant.

5) They know how to get along with anyone.

They know that each customer wants to be treated a certain way in order to feel comfortable. They know tenants renew from staff they like and with whom they have a rapport. They have a knack for knowing when to ask about the weather, and when to get right down to business. They can style flexible in any situation to meet every tenant's need to be treated their way. They do this all in service of the tenant. They know it is not about them, but about the tenant experience. They know how to read tenants and adjust to meet their present mood or demeanor.

Do you have an employee that knows how to read tenants? Someone who knows how to work with the slow-talking, relationship-oriented types as well as the fast-talking, Wall Street types. Give that team member a night out to dinner.

6) They know their stuff.

Tenants respect these employees because they are knowledgeable. They are credible. They have the battle scars and have taken time to learn the businessâ€”how things get done effectively and efficiently, know their area of specialty in property management to advise the tenant with different options to consider, and tenants see huge value in learning from them. They break down barriers. They are like that whiz mechanic everyone goes to when they have problems with their car.

Do you have a employee who has taken the time to learn the business and loves offering solid

advice to tenants? Give that employee a Doctorate Certificate.

7) They know how to balance logic and emotion.

They know how to manage anger from tenants no matter how brutal the conversation gets. They never assign blame, show indifference, respond emotionally, or try to fix the problem too soon. They first let tenants vent as needed. Then, they move ahead to get an understanding of the tenant's needs and desires before moving to possible solutions. They never lose control even if they feel they are right and the tenant is wrong. They are problem solvers. Give them a Rubik's Cube.

One last note: Quickly address any employee who just doesn't get it. Don't procrastinate; quickly take action even if the staff member is your husband, wife, child, uncle, or mother. I've seen too many places keep someone in the wrong position for the wrong reason.

Everyone at the property or within the organization needs to be moving in the right direction, otherwise that out-of-step person will kill your turnover rate before you know it. It only takes 3 months to turn a property into a place no one wants to live. If you have a hunch, you are probably right. Promote magnificence and keep conscious of these seven traits when serving customers or looking to hire the best.