



## Street Smarts for Dealing with the Irate Resident

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### ***How to Handle Conflict in Your Work Environment***

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It's Friday morning at the office and you hear the phone ringing incessantly. All other team members seem to have evaporated into thin air. You answer it to find a resident ranting and raving about a mistake that occurred the day before with one of your service techs: You find it embarrassing and try to calm her, but she won't listen. Finally, you manage to get the full story and you realize that you're on the verge of losing this resident's business if something isn't done quickly.

Welcome to the age of the never satisfied resident!

Imagine that you have a hard-boiled egg. The rich yellow yolk at the center of the egg represents the solution to the resident's problem. The hardened white which surrounds the yolk represents the details of the resident's situation, and the hard shell represents his/her anger.

In order to get to the yolk, and resolve the situation, you must first crack the shell. In other words, you have to penetrate the resident's anger. Then you have to cut through the congealed egg white, which means you understand the details of the resident's situation. Finally, you're at the heart of the situation (the yolk), where you can offer a solution to the resident's problem.

So, handling an angry resident is like cutting through a hard-boiled egg. Here's a three-step process to help you do so.

**Empathize with the resident.** This is different from *sympathy*, where you **take on** someone else's problem. Try to understand how the person is feeling.

**Apologize and acknowledge the problem.** You don't have to agree with the resident, but express regret that there is a problem. People want to be heard, and no one's complaint is trivial. Each deserves prompt handling, so do not deal with it in a trivial manner.

**Accept responsibility.** Make sure something is done. Take it upon yourself to DO something. Many times, that's all that people want: the reassurance that something will be done. People want to be helped. They want to know that you care. Use these phrases to get that sentiment across: "How can I help you?" "What can I do for you?" "I'll make sure this message/information gets to the right person."

And in your responses, avoid these *forbidden* phrases:

**"I don't know."** It sounds as if you're closing the door on the resident, or that you're not sure what's going on in your own office.

Better to say: *"That's a good question. Let me check and find out."*

**"We can't do that."** This sentence is extremely negative. Be positive. Try this: *"That's a tough one. Let's see what we can do."*

**"You'll have to..."** sounds accusatory- Try instead: *"Here's how we can help you."*

**Resolve the Problem.** Now you're at the heart of the egg. You won't always be able to fix the problem perfectly. And you may need more time than a single phone call. But it's critical to leave the irate resident with the understanding that your goal is to solve the problem. Then do it. Make the phone calls. Get the information. Find out what you can do for this resident and do it. Then follow up with the resident when you said you would. Even if you don't have all the information you need, call when you said you would and at least let them know what you've done, what you're working on, and what your next step will be. Let the resident know that their business is important to you, that you understand their frustration, and that you're working hard to get things fixed.

Use the tools of respect and empathy, and the "*crack the egg*" process and you'll not only move your professionalism up a notch - your retention rates will improve dramatically!



**About the Author:** Terry Jackson is an acclaimed Operations, Marketing, Management Specialist for the multi-family industry. For more information on Terry's expertise visit [www.TrainToRetain.com](http://www.TrainToRetain.com).