

A Day In The Life of A Property Manager

By Cathy Macaione, CMA Direct



<http://www.StopTheGremlins.com>

Property managers wear many different hats. The job requires them to deal with many different kinds of people and situations that, at times, may seem bizarre or even hilarious. Flexibility, the ability to maintain a cool head, and a sense of humor not only make property managers more successful, but also make the job less stressful.

I would like to share some stories from my experiences at a 450-unit high-rise community on the Southside of Chicago. These stories are all true; and they highlight some of the strange situations a property manager must face, but that are never mentioned in the job description. I find some of them humorous, some sad, and some are just plain weird. But I hope you learn from them, and also enjoy them as much as I do.

Stealing Kisses

We had a rodent problem in one of the buildings. Yes, mice. And although the infestation was a major concern, one resident was able to bring a smile to my face over her experience with a mouse in her apartment.

She called and said, "I'm sitting on my couch in my living room and a mouse just ran by me with a Hershey's Kiss in its mouth. Could you please send someone to catch the mouse before he eats all of my Hershey Kisses?"

Just the image in my mind was enough to make me laugh. All I could say was, "What are you doing that close to the mouse, and why are you feeding the rodents?"

Keeping a sense of humor and being able to laugh at situations makes the property management job much less stressful.

Raining Cats

A lot of the residents had lived in this community for twenty to twenty-five years and their apartments, for the most part, had never been upgraded. One of these long-term residents called and said that her carpeting was bald and she needed new carpeting. So I arranged for the maintenance crew (most of whom were Hispanic and spoke very little English) to move her furniture, take up the old carpeting, and install new.

As they were moving the furniture, the resident's cat got scared and came clawing out from underneath the sofa. But it started jumping around the apartment, and...well...someone left the window open with the screen up and, yes...you guessed it, the cat jumped right out the seventh story window.

Unfortunately, this must have been the cat's ninth life, because it did not survive. The resident was very upset, but we had no idea that she had a pet. The resident services man was standing in the driveway when it happened, and the cat almost landed on him. You should have seen the look on his face when the cat came falling out of the sky. We sent the resident flowers.

This is why it is so important to communicate with residents and know as much about them as you can, including how many pets they have, if any. If we had known she had cats, we could have forewarned the maintenance people to keep the windows closed, and we could have asked her to keep her pets locked up during the carpet installation.

Spare Scents

My mission at this particular property was to create a resident services-based community, and in doing so I made a point to visit every resident to say hello and ask if there was anything I could do for them. One of my residents was a former Evangelist Minister in her eighties who collected clothing and sold it at the church.

When I went to visit her, I took her several bags of clothing to sell at the church. She appreciated it very much, and as I was leaving she whispered in my ear that she liked perfume.

"Excuse me," I said. "What do you mean?"

"Any fragrance would do," she said. "I love to sleep with perfume on. It doesn't matter if the bottles are open or not. I'll take anything you have."

Sometimes, it's the little things that are important to people. After that day I made it a habit to bring her a bottle of perfume whenever I saw her, even if it was an open bottle. That simple gesture overjoyed her and made her stay at our community more enjoyable.

Everyone Has a Reason

We had one prospect who had a different injury every time he came into the office. He had an ace bandage on his head one day, a crutch in his left hand the next, and his leg wrapped another day. Our application policy requires a hundred dollar holding deposit and a thirty-five dollar application fee in a money order or cashier's check only. So he put down his holding deposit on an apartment and was waiting to get approved. But then he called the office a few days later to ask a favor. We were still processing his application (he wasn't approved or rejected yet) and he said he was in a bind and needed to take a loan on his holding deposit. So, we gave him back his money and said that we could not hold the apartment for him. He told us he would bring the deposit back when his situation improved.

The point to remember is that people go through various things in their life, and being flexible is important. The simple act of returning his deposit helped him out greatly and left him with a positive impression of our community. He did come back about three weeks later and put his money down again. He was approved and moved in, and has been a great resident.

All Alone in the Big City

We had one unit with two brothers living with their elderly mother. The mother was on subsidy and paid \$102 a month in rent. But then we stopped receiving her payments. After eight months of non-payment, we filed for eviction. When the two brothers came to the office to discuss their non-payment status, they told me that their mother had died eight months ago and that they forgot to tell us. We did obtain occupancy and the sheriff came to put them out. Some of their belongings were taken by other family members to put in storage, and the rest of their furniture was put out on the street.

I felt really sad to see this, until one of the brothers decided that because his chair was on the sidewalk, that was where he was going to stay. There was nothing we could do about it, or so he thought, and he sat in his chair on the curb and drank a quart of liquor out of the bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag. Before I knew it, he had a few other residents out on the sidewalk to join in his little party. He really thought that he could stay on the sidewalk and entertain.

I called social service for him, but he did not want to go to the agency. I called our liaison police officer, and he said he could arrest the man and then send him to a shelter. I wasn't sure if I wanted to go that route. So I called his sister who said, "Go ahead and have him arrested. He can't come to my house." It amazes me how people get into this situation and then they have no one to help them.

I told the man that I would give him until 5:00 p.m. to leave, or I would have the police take him to the station and then the shelter. At 5:10 p.m. he was still in the chair on the curb drinking his liquor with no intention of leaving. I had no choice but to call the police liaison and have him take the former resident to the shelter. This was a humbling experience to see that so many people don't have anyone in their lives.

This unfortunate incident taught me that everyone needs someone, and most people don't have anyone to turn to. I found it sad that he had nowhere to turn and he couldn't function on his own. I felt that the system had let this person down, because in order for him to go to a shelter the police had to take him; no one from the shelter could pick him up. This person would have rather slept on the curb than go to the police station or a shelter. In this business, compassion is key.

The Ups and Downs of the Job

People want a good place to live, no matter what income level they are. They all deserve to live in good conditions. Many people have lived in poor conditions before, where the owners and property managers collect rent but never make any repairs. Their rent went up every year, but no repairs were ever made. Like anyone, residents just want their problems to be heard and understood.

Empathy goes a long way, especially in property management. Show your residents the changes you make, show them what they get for their money, and most important, show them you care.

About the Author

Cathy Macaione, President, Stopping the Real Estate Gremlins, Cathy Macaione Educational Resources and CMA Direct, Inc., an Apartment Marketing and Management Specialist and Employment Placement and Temporary Leasing Professional Placement Service, has more than 23 years in the Real Estate Industry. Cathy's creative marketing skills have won her numerous awards including Chicago's prestigious CAMME and ALEX awards. She demonstrates her creativity and expertise through the exploration and implementation of alternative marketing methods. Prior to starting her own consulting business, Cathy held numerous positions, ranging from leasing professional to property manager to marketing/training director, for several large management companies. Cathy is also an experienced trainer and developer of "Personal Touch" workshops and seminars.

Cathy is a frequent contributor of articles on marketing, maintenance, leasing and management tactics to industry publications. She facilitates and present for Sales, Marketing and Magic's Brainstorming Sessions. Cathy is the author of "Six Days to Success: Training the New Leasing Professional" and creator of "Stopping the Real Estate Gremlins", a complete Video DVD training series. Cathy is a national speaker and speaks on topics related to Leasing, Marketing, Maintenance, Customer Service, Tax Credit, Image and Resident Retention.

Cathy holds and Illinois Brokers license and has earned the H.C.C.P designation. She remains actively involved with The Chicagoland Apartment Association.

For further information on Cathy, please contact her at macaione@ix.netcom.com or 630-529-5028