

# 12 Ways to Improve the Performance Of Your Service Team

Douglas D. Chasick, CPM<sup>®</sup>, CAPS, CAS, Adv. RAM, CLP  
*The Apartment Doctor*<sup>™</sup> / [www.NOINews.com](http://www.NOINews.com)

With soft markets and shrinking budgets, the focus on retaining Residents and saving money is at an all-time high. Since our Service Team members are the key to achieving this goal, here's 12 ways to make it happen!

1. WHY MOST PEOPLE DON'T PERFORM AS EXPECTED: My basic premise is that 98% of all Employees REALLY WANT to do a good job (when you find you have hired one of the other 2%, arrange a transfer for them to the unemployment department). The people who want to do a good job thrive on training, knowing what is expected of them, receiving positive feedback, getting effective leadership, and being compensated appropriately. So, when someone isn't performing, here's where to look:

- A. They don't know what you want them to do: We must make certain that we are CLEARLY communicating what we want done; we also have to communicate our performance expectations so our Employees know what is expected of them.
- B. They know what you want them to do, and they don't know how to do it. Training is the answer here - just because someone has experience doesn't mean they are TRAINED. It is our responsibility to make certain we train our staff in how we do things HERE.
- C. They know what to do, they know how to do it and they think you don't care whether or not they do it! Make certain that you acknowledge ALL performance, good and not so good. For the good stuff, thank them

SPECIFICALLY, and in front of as many of their team members as possible. For the not so good stuff, you should be even more specific, and do it in private, behind closed doors.

EXAMPLE: Just saying, "Thanks – you're doing a great job" doesn't really say anything, does it? What behavior are you trying to reinforce? Be SPECIFIC – saying, "Hey Doug, thanks for handling that broken disposal in Mrs. Smiths' apartment today. I'm sure she was very pleased that you got there so quickly!" tells Doug that you appreciate promptness – so, if Doug is one of the 98% that want to do a good job, he will now know that promptness is something you value!

2. KEEPING THE FAITH: Yes, times are tough, some policies are dumb and some supervisors probably should be prohibited by law from ever interacting with another human being for the rest of their lives – AND, none of that gives us permission to join the whiners. A good leader keeps the faith, no matter what the circumstances, and is a source of inspiration to their team. If things are SO BAD where you work that you can't keep the faith, then you can't keep the job – move on!

3. T/T/T (TRAIN/TRANSFER/TERMINATE): As I said above, most people don't perform because they lack training – so, TRAIN THEM! If they are still not performing up to expectations once you're certain that they're fully trained, then maybe a transfer to another job or another property is necessary. I've had incredibly talented people who were ineffective Managers and became brilliant Assistant Managers. And, since every property has its own personality, we need to match our Employees to our property profile. Finally, if someone is trained and is in the right job/at the right property and STILL isn't performing, FIRE THEM!! Sure, I know how hard it is to find competent people and I've made more than my share of "Well,

someone is better than being short-staffed" mistakes, and, every time I've done that I've been bitten right in the butt! The non-performers will drive away the performers, since the performers will get angry and resentful that the non-performer is able to do less and still get paid.

4. THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO, PART 2: Who is taking service requests in your office? Probably the Leasing Professionals, right? Great, so what training have they gotten in writing a clear, concise and complete service request? Have you sent them out with the Service Team for a day, observing and getting some hands-on maintenance experience? One of the MOST frustrating things for a Service Tech is to get a service request that doesn't clearly identify the problem, so the Service Tech can bring the right tools and parts with them and handle the problem on the first visit. How motivating do you think it is for the Service Tech to have to go back to the shop for tools and parts 10 times a day, and then get questioned by the Manager about why they ONLY completed 10 service requests that day?

5. THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO, PART 3: OK, pop quiz time – Who has the MOST CONTACT with our Residents? The Service Team, right? So, how much CUSTOMER SERVICE training do your Service Techs receive? Our Service Techs spend most of their day in Resident apartments, so what are we doing to improve their communication skills? We train them to handle a broken compressor; do we train them to handle angry Residents? Enough said on this one!

6. GIVE THE GIFT OF TIME, PART 1: Want to get all of your service requests completed on the same day you receive them? Well, either hire more people or receive less service requests! Since most of us can't afford to hire more Service Techs, let's reduce the number of service requests! How? By thoroughly training our Residents, AT MOVE-IN, about how to work everything in the apartment. "Disposal jammed? No problem, here's how to fix it." "It's 120 degrees outside and

your HVAC will only cool your apartment to 82 degrees? No sweat (well . . .), let me explain the laws of physics to you." Walk the Residents through their new apartment home and show them where everything is and how everything works – it will definitely cut down on your Service requests.

7. GIVE THE GIFT OF TIME, PART 2: Anyone who has ever been "on-call" for the weekend knows it's no fun! Your pager might as well be plugged into the wall, because you can't go far, right? Well, why not schedule a Service Tech to work Tuesday – Saturday or Wednesday – Sunday? How about having someone work 12:00 noon – 8:00 PM two days a week? After all, our Residents seem to be home when we are closed, so why not be open and turn overtime into regular time?

8. YOU CAN'T MANAGE WHAT YOU DON'T MEASURE: What's the deal with annual reviews? I can't even remember what I had for lunch last Tuesday, yet I'm supposed to sit down with you and review 365 days of your performance? GET REAL! At a minimum, review each of your Service Team members monthly: schedule a 15 – 30 minute meeting, and review where they are, where they need to be, and what they can do to improve. Sure, we need to have an annual review for salary; however annual reviews will not help improve performance tomorrow (unless the review was yesterday!)

9. YOU CAN'T MOTIVATE ANYONE BUT YOU: Look at the "typical" motivation programs in place today – bonuses, contests, ETC – are these REALLY motivation or are we just creating a new generation of Pavlov's dogs? TRUE motivation comes from WITHIN – we want to do a great job for US, not YOU! The only way to TRULY motivate someone is to create an environment where people feel appreciated, valuable, informed and an integral part of the overall success of the property and company. How do we create that environment? By HONESTLY and OPENLY sharing our

vision, showing how everyone is vital to achieving the overall goals, and communicating frequently about where we are, where we need to be, and what we need to do to get there. Your Service Team's performance will dramatically increase when they EXPERIENCE how important they are in making the goals real.

10. GIVE THE GIFT OF TIME, PART 3 – PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE: Here's another way to reduce the number of service requests you receive – maintain the physical plant so stuff doesn't break. According to Mel Schneider, CAMT, an effective preventive maintenance program can reduce service requests by as much as 80%! As the old saying goes, "You can pay me now or pay me later – you'll have to pay at some point". If you've cut back on preventive maintenance because of staffing or budget, you're just kidding yourself. You'll spend more time and money (and create more frustration for your Service Team, who know that the extra time and money could have been avoided) fixing it WHEN it breaks, than taking care of it BEFORE it breaks.

11. ELIMINATE THE "LITTLE" FRUSTRATIONS: Frustration negatively impacts performance, so let's look for stuff that creates frustration and eliminate it. How about not having an adequate inventory, so you have to stop in the middle of a service request and drive to Home Depot or Ace Hardware - 3 or 4 times a day? Or as I mentioned earlier, getting to an apartment and discovering that the service request is incomplete or incorrect, so that you have to go back to the shop to get the right tools or parts? Or not having a two-way radio, so that the people in the office page you when you are wedged underneath the kitchen sink and you have to wiggle out and call them back because your pager went off? How about meeting up with a Resident who was promised something by someone in the office – and that someone in the office never told YOU what they promised the Resident?

C'mon, let's deal with this stuff so our Service Team can SHINE!

12. PEOPLE DON'T LEAVE THEIR COMPANY; THEY LEAVE THEIR BOSS: Read almost any survey about turnover, and you will learn that the number one reason that people leave is THEIR IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR! How can we even think about improving the performance of our Service Team when we're spending time replacing Team members? Here's the bottom line: Would YOU enjoy working for YOU? Yes, enjoy – we spend the better part of our waking hours at work, and if we don't enjoy what we're doing and who we're doing it with, eventually we'll make a move.

\*\*\*\*\*

Douglas D. Chasick, CPM<sup>®</sup>, CAPS, CAS, Adv. RAM, CLP, is *The Apartment Doctor*<sup>™</sup>, a Multifamily speaker and consultant specializing in restoring rental health to ailing apartment communities and management companies. Doug is also the Editor of NOI News<sup>™</sup>, a subscription-only newsletter for Property Managers. You can reach Doug at (321) 956-2188, by writing to [Doug@Aptdoctor.com](mailto:Doug@Aptdoctor.com), or by visiting his website, [www.NOINews.com](http://www.NOINews.com)