

Service Team Training....What's it worth?

Chad Moulin, Director of Maintenance Training for Weidner Apartment Homes

In the multi-family housing industry there are a lot of comparable features that are offered at almost every location a prospective resident will visit. Everyone says: "We have large and spacious floor plans." And they do. "We have a 24 hour fitness center." And they do. "We have a great swimming pool and hot tub." And they do. "We offer covered parking." And they do. "We have a great maintenance staff." But, do they really???

Residents in today's market are paying higher prices and expecting more for their money. Unfortunately where we most commonly fall short of our residents expectations is in customer service. More specifically, customer service from our maintenance teams. History is our greatest teacher. If you go back and read reviews of your property you will find that a great majority of the negative reviews have to do with maintenance. So why is this? Most likely you will see that a resident is usually upset with maintenance for at least one, if not more of 5 different reasons.

1. They feel that the time frame to get service requests done takes too long.
2. When service requests are done the repairs are not done to the satisfaction of the resident or take multiple times to get the issue fixed.
3. They feel that the service technician's attitude, body language and communication is poor.
4. When service requests are done their apartment is left a mess or is not in the condition that the resident left it in. (lights left on, A/C or Heat turned up or down, door left unlocked, etc.)
5. When dealing with an afterhours call the service technician could not or would not completely resolve the issue.

So, how can we overcome these 5 obstacles that have been put in front of us? The simple answer is Training!

A lot of the time we are only concerned about getting technical skills training for our service teams. Which don't get me wrong is a great thing. But we sometimes forget that our service

teams would benefit greatly from some customer service or people skills training. We need to teach them that they are taking care of more than just air conditioners, more than just faucets, more than just grounds. They are taking care of people and their homes! Simply put, if residents are not comfortable with the people who are supposed to be there to take care of them and their home, they will leave.

We have all heard of WHY? WHEN? WHERE? and HOW? I am going to help you with answering these questions. But, I am going to take these questions and work backwards.

HOW? How do you get your service teams to want training? You can always just demand that they go. But, just because you demand that they go doesn't mean that they will learn anything. First just simply ask if they would like to go to a class or seminar. Ask what kind of training they are interested in getting. Ask them what they would like to be better at. If you have a maintenance supervisor that is very good in HVAC and has no problems with servicing and replacing units, don't send him to a beginners HVAC class. He won't really learn anything and it will just be a waste of time and money. People will learn more if they really want to be there.

Where? Your local Apartment Association is a great start. They offer classes and seminars year round. If you get some ideas from your staff on a topic that you don't see on their education calendar, let them know. They have access to some great speakers and educators that may already have a program or class on the topic you are looking for. Also there are many e-learning classes that may be available.

When? You may think this is an easy one. When? When they are available! But, also take into consideration of when is the best time to send your teams for training. If it is the busy season and your property is going to truly suffer if they are gone, then don't send them. Or you may be able to send part of your team at one time and the other part another time. Also remember, maybe not everyone on your team needs the same type of training. You may have a new service technician that just received their EPA 608 certification and would really benefit from going to that HVAC beginners class. Maybe your Maintenance Supervisor has great technical knowledge but could use some help with his customer service or people skills. So the WHEN? is when it is available, when it is convenient for the property and when that service team member wants to get the training.

WHY? The why may be the most simple and most difficult question. Why? To give your service teams new or improved skills. To give your residents the absolute best customer service possible. To give your owners or management companies a higher return on their investments. The reasons of why go on and on.

So to answer the question of Service Team Training....What's it worth? Over 65% of consumers in the United States change goods or services simply because of poor customer service. I would say that in the multi-family housing industry that number is higher. So if you think about all of the residents that you know moved because of receiving poor customer service. (And there are more than you know about.) Now if your maintenance staff could have saved 20% that is just 1 out of 5. After saving on turn costs, loss to vacancy, utilities and all the costs that are associated with that move out. We could easily save \$2500.00 or more for every saved resident. How do we save them? By having a great move in, by handling any issues they may have in a complete and timely manner, By NOT giving them the option to say that poor customer service is the reason for their notice to vacate.

Service team training is one of the few things that can be a "Win, Win, Win!" for everyone involved. So at your next team meeting ask the question. "What would you like to be better at?" The answers may surprise you.