

Proper Training Helps Leasing Professionals Thrive

BY LISA TROSIEN

While this advertisement is completely false and was not listed in any newspaper, it could potentially describe the conditions under which many leasing professionals work in the multifamily industry today. While the expectations of the position are extremely high, as illustrated by the aforementioned want ad, all too often the position of the leasing professional is treated as a glorified tour guide; an individual put in place to simply show and sell the apartment community.

Many companies still employ the “Sit by Susie” method of training, where the new hire simply sits next to an experienced leasing professional and listens

in on conversations, shadowing the established pro for a few days while they give prospect tours. Worse yet is the situation that many (including myself) have had. After arriving for the first day on the job with high enthusiasm, the boss simply assigns phone answering duties. Such newcomers are then given a price sheet, availability list and feature sheet and little or no other instruction.

Why is this? Often it is the result of having an understaffed leasing office and an overworked manager who really cannot make the time to train a new staff person. But the potential for liability in this situation is huge, if only from a fair housing standpoint.

Leasing professionals must be trained before they hit the sales floor—not after. Basics in leasing, marketing, management, fair housing and customer service must be taught to even the seasoned leasing professional. Fair housing law varies not only by state, but in some cases, by city and county.

To survive in the concessionary economy of most markets, leasing professionals must be extremely skilled. Like the advertisements say, they must be able to sell value. Price may make the phone ring, but it is the skill set of the leasing professional that converts the caller to walk in and sign a lease agreement.

With the number of Internet prospects soaring at virtually all communities that have some kind of online presence, today's leasing professional must know how to send an appropriate

e-mail. They must be familiar with all the nuances of netiquette (the Internet's version of etiquette), as well as the ability to begin a dialogue via e-mail that will pique the prospective resident's interest.

They must also be an expert at pricing. Leasing team members know when a price is too high for a particular apartment home; they also know when there is room to edge up the pricing on a floor plan that literally “leases itself” because of its strong benefits and features. Smart managers teach their leasing team the effects of offering one month free and the value of an apartment community. They also instill in their leasing team a strong sense of fiduciary responsibility to the owners of their community.

“Today's leasing professionals no longer can simply be tour guides,” said Kate Good, President of Net Mystery Shopper. “We must train for

skill and then mystery shop them to

make sure they are always on their best game. At Net Mystery Shopper, we find that even in the toughest market conditions that we have seen in years, companies still accept below-average performance and do not do enough to improve front-line performance.”

Companies that want to succeed in today's changing economy know that the training of their front-line employees is more critical now than ever in terms of creating new residents as well as keeping current ones. The National Apartment Association's National Apartment Leasing Professional (NALP) designation is one such way to ensure that leasing professionals receive the top-quality education required to help their company succeed.

Lastly, some companies believe that the high turnover rate in the leasing position does not justify the cost of training. Perhaps, if companies actually provided their leasing professionals with better training, the turnover rate would decline. ■

Help Wanted

Leasing Professional: Enthusiastic, upbeat salesperson with outstanding customer service skills needed to lease apartment homes in less-than-optimal conditions. Competitors are offering up to four months of free rent and we can't afford to do that. So, candidate must be able to sell value and the experience of living at our community. Proficiency in Internet, e-mail, cold calling, pricing strategies, asset management and crisis management required. Team players need only apply. Training may or may not be included.

Lisa Trosien has more than 20 years of industry experience, as well as expertise on targeted uses of the Internet. Reprinted with permission from the May 2003 issue of UNITS magazine, published by the National Apartment Association (NAA).