

# Staff Meetings? Who Needs 'Em? You Do!

BY LISA TROSIEN

Staff meeting. Two words that can strike dread and fear into the heart of any team member at an apartment community. Why? Generally these meetings are conducted to disseminate bad news (the property is up for sale; the property has been sold; occupancy is way down; the main office is coming tomorrow and they're not happy, etc.).

Other nagging issues: Maintenance wants the meeting to start at 8 a.m.; the leasing team wants it to start at 9 or 10. Housekeeping and grounds staff want to know why they have to attend because much of the meeting usually does not affect them or their work. The list of complaints is endless, but it does not have to be that way.

Staff meetings, when handled properly, offer a great way to foster a stronger sense of teamwork. Productive meetings can be done in less than 20 minutes by following a few simple steps.

**Do not provide any food.** That's right—skip the donuts. This will make everyone focus on the meeting itself and not on who gets the last Krispy Kreme. Plus, it is healthier. And, who cannot afford to go without a donut now and then?

**Have a timed agenda and stick to it.** With a timed agenda, each item is listed in its order of discussion and a time limit for that discussion is assigned. This will keep all conversation about the topic centered and relevant. Remind everyone how much time there is to discuss the topic and do not go over the time limit unless there is a critical need to do so.

**Remove all the chairs from the meeting room.** This is optional, however, many companies say this works like a charm. If people can't sit down, they do not linger and will therefore work harder to solve any issues discussed at the meeting.

**Make your staff meeting "mobile."** This excellent idea was created years ago by industry veteran Debbie Davis of United Dominion Realty Trust, and it still works like a charm. Here's why: If the focus for the day is on that vacant apartment that has been vacant FOREVER, have the meeting in the vacant apartment. Review every possible problem with the apartment and come up with a solution for leasing it by the end of the day or week. If the focus for the day is on the continual mess of the pool



area or amenities, meet in the amenity area to discuss and come up with solutions. Be willing to move the staff meeting to create stronger solutions to problems.

**Include an activity in the meeting.** Trainer and speaker Bill Nye, a former property manager, used to build an activity into every staff meeting. One very successful ongoing activity he used called "geographic trivia" not only livened up the meeting, but trained leasing professionals as well. Here's how it works: Review all rental applications to see from which states and/or cities most of the new leasing prospects are coming. Then, relay the pertinent facts of those states

and/or cities to the leasing team. For example, if the state that was sending the most traffic to the community was Michigan, the leasing team should know the capital city, the major industry, top two colleges (including their colors and mascot), major professional sporting teams from the state/city, and climate. After discussing the facts of the municipalities with the leasing team, conduct a pop quiz at each staff meeting. The team member with the most answers to the geographical trivia wins a small prize.

Not only does it foster a fun and competitive spirit, it provides the leasing team with conversational material to share with their prospects from their particular city or state.

**Guest hosts.** Have different people take turns running the meetings. Some of the most productive meetings are run by team members who do not usually take charge. Trade off the host duties once per month and the results will be amazing.

Property staffs who meet regularly have a better rapport as a team, solve problems more easily and have far better lines of communication than those who do not. Try implementing one of these ideas at a time into your staff meeting schedule, starting with the timed agenda. If you have never had staff meetings before, there is no better time to start than now. ■



*Lisa Trosien has more than 20 years of industry experience, as well as expertise on targeted uses of the Internet. Trosien can be reached via e-mail at [lisa@apartmentexpert.com](mailto:lisa@apartmentexpert.com).*

*Reprinted with permission from the February issue of UNITS magazine, published by the National Apartment Association.*