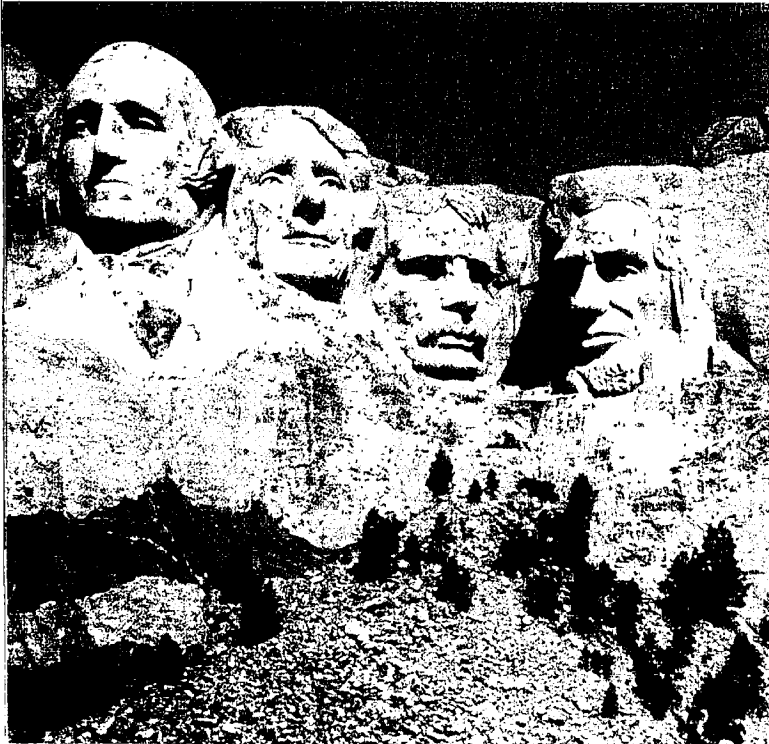


The Best of the Best

Identifying Greatness in Community Association Management

By Lucia Anna Trigiani, Attorney at Law, CCAL



You know one when you see one—yes, indeed—we know a good community manager when we see a good community manager—especially when the manager is in action. I've had the good fortune to work with a host of managers, some great, some not so great—and, I'm glad to say, very few who should consider another line of work. Yes, there are some managers who should hang up their keys and ride off into the sunset!

Key Observations

From the good, and even the not-so-good managers, I've learned much about the community association industry. Good managers are essential to the success of community associations. A good manager holds a community together by offering guidance on the conduct of association business and in creating a tone of cooperation and good will in the governance of the community.

One size does not fit all—what I mean is that a good manager for one community may not work well with another community (that can be said of all professional relationships, by the way). The relationships between community and manager are personal—in that way. Style is so very important and one management style may suit one community and not do at all for another. Finding the match between community and manager is a real art.

Being a community manager is a tough job. A community manager needs to know a little bit (sometimes a lot) about a lot of things. The range of knowledge and experience required of a community manager is tremendously broad—from facility management issues to detailed accounting procedures to a constantly evolving set of legal requirements. There's a lot to know and master!

And, a community manager has to be sturdy. What do I mean by that? The job is demanding—physically and mentally. They need to be up and at the office to deal with contractors and then, fresh and alert at a night meeting of a committee or the board—that goes on for much longer than it should. All the while, a community manager is expected to be patient, understanding, and kind while dealing with the innumerable phone calls and e-mail demanding immediate attention. The folks who choose (or fall into) this profession are to be admired.

Essential Qualities

What distinguishes the *great* managers from the *good* managers? A great manager is a clear **COMMUNICATOR**. A community manager must communicate on a number of levels with the board, the members, contractors and professionals. In this day and age, communication is in several forms—in person, on the phone, by e-mail, and in written word. The communication must be prompt. It must be complete and comprehensive. It must be understandable. The communication must address the question being raised. The challenge is to be as accessible in a way that community leadership expects.

A great manager is **RESPONSIVE**. The most successful managers are managers who anticipate and issue and address the issue even before it's raised. But, equally important for a manager is to respond once a concern is presented. Response to a burned out light bulb can be as important as responding to an important written demand. A community will have confidence in a responsive manager. Community members take comfort that concerns are addressed, if a manager is responsive to inquiries and demands—even if the response is that the matter will be researched.


A great manager is always **PREPARED**. Whether the preparation is for a board meeting or for dealing with an issue, the great manager anticipates questions and is prepared with an answer. The great manager doesn't have all the answers, but she does know where to find them and often times has found the answer before the question is raised. The great manager researches an issue before the meeting so that at the meeting, he or she can present alternatives to the board. The great manager knows all of the information in her management report from front to back—and, is

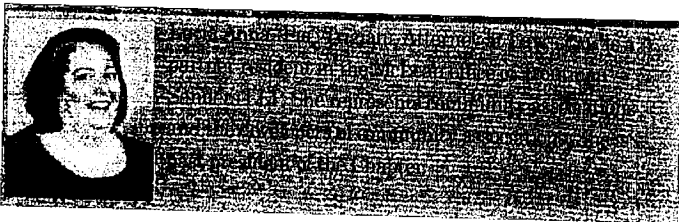
ready to respond to any question at the board meeting.

A great manager is **ORGANIZED**. The successful community manager has systems in place to ensure that business is conducted and that all is in order. He or she keeps track of assignments and the progress of work on those assignments. He or she knows how to put a board meeting together and compiles all of the information that the board needs to make decisions. His or her follow up is enhanced because his or her work is in order.

A great manager is a good **LISTENER**. My dad used to say that children should be seen and not heard. Well—that's applicable on some levels to community managers. They are the ultimate behind the scenes player. A community manager needs to be a good listener—to hear what a community member or the board is saying even though that community member or board member might not be clearly articulating their concern.

A great manager is **EMPATHETIC**. A community manager must understand the opposing view point and be respectful of it.

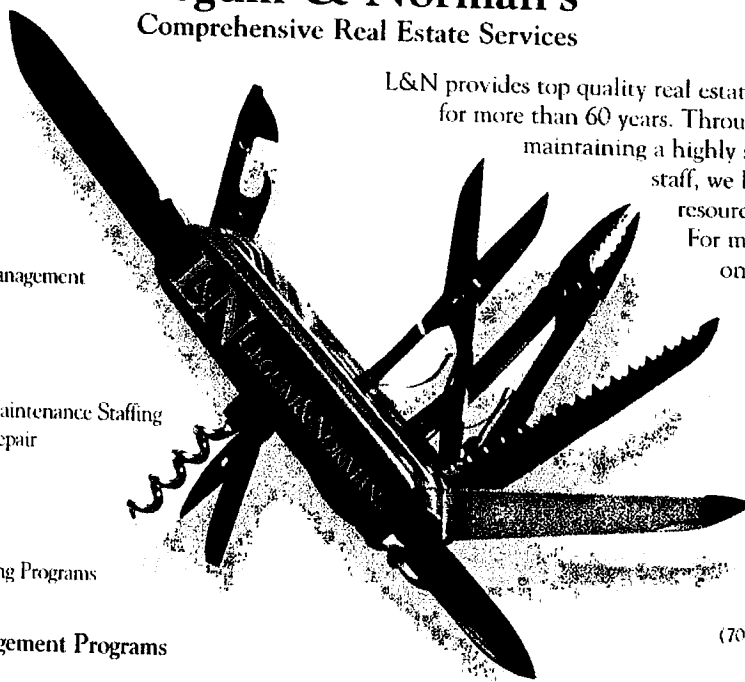
I have tremendous respect for the profession, the talent, and vast experience that the profession requires. We need to attract qualified persons to do this very challenging and often difficult work. Once in the profession, we need to support the work of managers and encourage managers to perform to expectations. 



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