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# Best Practices for Managers

BY HATTON GRAVELY

“We need to have a talk.” That simple sentence in relationships usually means an issue needs to be addressed: one person feels neglected, wants more out of the situation, or wants to end it all together. In the world of hospitality, “the talk” has often taken the on-line form of negative guest reviews. Communication is key to making any relationship work, and that fact is no different in that of the resort and owner.

Great communication builds great relationships with owners, engaging them with their property throughout the year and keeping them in the loop about updates, upgrades, and activities at their resort destination. The ultimate goal is to keep them happy because then they support their properties with positive reviews, pay maintenance fees on time, and visit the resort year after year.

So, how does a resort establish policies and procedures to ensure great communication with their owners? Let’s explore several simple types of communication methods that can make a big impact on owner-resort relations.

### Ongoing Touch-Points

Owners like news from their resort throughout the year. A newsletter sent to their inbox or mailbox is a simple way to update owners on changes, photos, upcoming events, and exclusive travel deals that encourage visits throughout the year.

#### *E-mail News*

According to Mailchimp, the travel industry e-mail open rate standard is 27 percent. Keeping track of open rates and measuring against industry standards gives the board insight on what news the owners find important.

Analyzing the click-through data allows boards to gauge owners’ interest about

specific topics to then tailor the content sent to them in the future. For example, if owners consistently click on upcoming events, the next newsletter can include more upcoming festivals with special travel deals to stay at the resort during that time.

#### *Facebook*

In this world of social media, Facebook cannot be ignored. Facebook pages and groups are effective ways of keeping owners up to date throughout the year and promoting the property in a positive way. Analytics on these pages are also used to provide the board with updates on what the owners find interesting and important. Creating a private owners-only Facebook group page has proven to be successful for one resort, resulting in owner-to-owner communication that provides great promotion for the property. For example, an owner recently posted a photo of the renovated pool, which received many positive comments from the other owners excited to visit the resort to see this progress.

#### *Websites & Owners’ Portal*

The Owners’ Portal for each property is the home base for important information about the resort. It’s an owners-only site that requires a login and password and gives the owner access to documents like the bylaws, master deed, Board meeting minutes, and resort photos. Having this information readily available online is essential to keeping owners informed about their property, changes in policy, and Board meeting minutes.

### Leveraging Guest Reviews

With the explosion of on-line user reviews in the travel industry, it is imperative to monitor what people are saying about each property.

“No one loves to read a bad review,” says Bill Young, president of SPM Resorts, “but there is a lot of value in them: Boards can address the issues the guest has mentioned and work to improve the property. Having that guest perspective—both good and bad—helps us form new goals and focus on improvement projects to enhance owners’ experiences.”

In addition to monitoring the guest reviews online, comment cards are a great resource for feedback about the property. “At our properties, every unit has a comment card, and guests are encouraged to fill them out,” explains Trish Docherty, Regional VP of SPM Resorts. Reports are compiled and reviewed by staff, the Board of Directors, and managers.

“All feedback is taken very seriously,” says Docherty, “and guest comments have prompted many changes to the resorts, both large and small.”

One example she cited resulted in a renovation change at the resort: an owner made the request at a board meeting to implement a handicapped-accessible shower into the renovation plans. This was reviewed by the board and subsequently implemented into the upper lobby renovation plan. She provided some additional examples of comments that made small but significant changes—such as adding kettles to the kitchens and changing out coffee mugs for a larger size.

“Responding to these comments and turning a complaint or suggestion into a positive change makes a big difference to the timeshare owners and contributes to a higher rate of guest satisfaction,” says Docherty.

### On-Site Communication & Guest Satisfaction

Finally and probably most importantly, guests need proper communication during their stay from the moment they are greeted at check-in with a welcome packet until they depart.

Young puts a premium on face-to-face communication. He says: “We host an informal owners’ meeting each week with coffee and donuts to discuss the current activities at the resort, go over any policy or procedure changes, discuss business conducted at the Board of Directors meetings, review the association’s current financial position, and listen to owner feedback. These meetings have been very helpful to build relationships with the owners and give the owners a social setting to voice their opinions about the property and make suggestions.”

SPM Resorts also focuses on employee customer service through training, implementing a dress code, and setting

high standards for resort employees. “We want to make sure that every interaction we have with guests is positive, and if the guest does have an issue, we work hard to fix it efficiently in a positive manner,” says Young.

He explained the 15-minute rule at the properties SPM Resorts manages—once a guest reports an issue, someone from the staff must respond within 15 minutes to either resolve the issue or give the guest an update. A work order system is in place that allows for tracking and follow up ensures the issue has been fixed and the guest is happy.

In addition, a day after arrival, a Guest Services Representative places a “welcome call” to every guest to make sure the guest is content with their accommodations, and offers assistance for any requests the guests may have.

“We have found implementing these policies on-site has increased guest satisfaction and fostered great ideas to improve the property,” Young says.

### Great Communication & The Bottom Line

Owners purchase a timeshare because they want to invest in a lifestyle. Communication plays an essential role in making sure they enjoy their vacation purchase—both on property and when they return home. It’s what helps make their ownership decision worthwhile overall.

By engaging owners and working hard to ensure guest satisfaction, successful resorts are able to retain a higher level of maintenance fee collection and boost vacation rentals for the property, which will only benefit everyone in a positive, long-term way. ■



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