

in the board room



Managers are an essential element of a well-run HOA, and are recognized as a valued asset to the community. For some HOAs, the manager role is treated as an undesirable but necessary expense. As a board, your approach to managing the manager can make the difference between a struggling HOA or a well-run organization.

How long has your current HOA manager been in place? The one before that? A revolving door of managers, or management companies, is an indicator of ineffective HOA operations. High turnover among managers and management companies are costly to the HOA in the long run. A trusted manager who knows the board, is very familiar with the property; and understands the needs of the members will be able to do their job far better than a newbie.

Maximizing HOA Manager Effectiveness

Setting realistic expectations, reviewing performance, encouraging teamwork, delegating, and minimizing burnout will ensure your association runs smoothly.

By Todd Greisen, CCAM

THE PERFORMANCE BENCHMARK

Your manager has legal obligations under your management contract. Use that as a checklist to clarify what the manager should be doing, or not. All board members should have a good understanding of what is expected under your management agreement. Annual review of the contract can help distinguish between desired results and reality. Maybe it's time for renegotiation.

HOA managers often complain that boards ask more of them than their contracted responsibilities. An experienced manager will answer such a request with a "yes!" but a caveat will follow—"for an additional fee." A less experienced manager may also respond with a "yes," offering themselves as someone who goes the extra mile. To their own long-term detriment, they undervalue themselves when doing so. One request is likely to result in more to come. As a board, if you're overdriving your manager without the reward they deserve, you're being short-sighted, too.

THE ROLE OF MANAGERS AND THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Two roles are involved in managing the manager: your contracted management company and you—the board of directors. Before placing all the blame for mistakes and failures on the manager, or the management company, consider what you can do to make them both successful.

You're a team. Teams are made up of individuals. But individuals do not always make a team. Successful teams bring out the best in every person. HOA documents can't force you to work well together as a board, or work well with your manager. To become a cohesive team, begin by setting your board titles aside. Yes, there are legal implications and obligations involved as president, treasurer or secretary of a board. But sometimes egos can surface with titles, impeding a spirit of teamwork.

Although there may be good reason for it, a board president who controls all interaction with the manager may be limiting his or her effectiveness. All board members should have the opportunity to openly discuss management issues or concerns, at least during executive sessions.

Even though they are not voting members, an effective manager should be welcomed as an influencer with important decisions. Given this role, managers will be recognized as members of the team that runs a successful HOA.

THE TEAM BEHIND THE MANAGER

Your manager should be well-supported by the management company that hired them. An open line of communication with both will improve the effectiveness of your team, and be reflected as a well-run HOA. Depending on your contract, your HOA manager may have an in-house support team that includes accounting or maintenance functions. Can those team members field questions directly, instead of calling, emailing or texting your manager?

Some boards and individual members are heavily involved in the day-to-day life of the community. That can be okay. Accountability is important. However, it becomes ineffective when the manager is micromanaged. It can be hard for some board members to let go, and risk the possibility of mistakes. It happens. We're all human. So let's be frank. Some of us are control freaks. It's your money (HOA assessments) after all, right?

Managers cannot blossom to their full potential when they are micromanaged. Try to let go—just a little.

BLAME-GAME BURNOUT

Remember, it's not just the board. Managers also field calls, emails and text requests directly from member owners. Oh, and those all happen with the HOA's contracted vendors, too. Is there on-site staff to be managed as well? The workload grows exponentially.

If member complaints are on the rise, if projects and assigned tasks continually remain incomplete, if deadlines are often missed, is all the blame on your manager? Maybe, but are you utilizing them effectively?

We've all experienced it at some point: burnout. It's something that happens to HOA managers all too often. So ask yourself these questions:

- Is the workload commensurate with

time available to serve your HOA?

- Would an onsite manager better serve the HOA, compared to a portfolio manager?
- Is additional staff needed?
- Can some tasks be outsourced?

Work with your management company to assist in completing a work/time analysis.

TACTICS FOR MANAGER EFFECTIVENESS

At least once per year, invite the entire staff of the management company for a meet-and-greet with the board. Or provide time on an upcoming meeting agenda for personal introductions to staff members. This minimizes trust issues by putting a name with a face of people to contact regarding specific needs.

Use technology. So much is available online and on smartphones. Sure, nothing beats a conversation with a live person, but simple inquiries and information can be found without bogging down the manager. For example, can work order requests be submitted directly into the HOA's management software?

A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page on your HOA website can answer questions to minimize emails and phone calls to the manager. Have a section that answers frequent questions from realtors, as well. Have forms and often requested documents available on the website to streamline workload. Billing inquiries and statement requests can be handled behind secure firewalls.

Onsite managers may have improved effectiveness by limiting office hours. A steady stream of residents coming in can interfere with progress of other necessary tasks.



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