

NAHP Update

Not Invited: Handling Unauthorized Occupants and Trespassers | BY JOHN E. LEONARD

IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 Smart Advice
Proving social security numbers or benefits
- 4 Seven Top Qualities of a Strong Property Manager
- 6 NAHP Profile
Lana Pace: A happily entrenched go-getter

Two of the biggest challenges that keep property managers up at night are people who

frequent the property but may not really belong there, especially people who are:

- Living without authorization in an assisted unit, or
- Linger, loitering or just regularly trespassing through the property's common areas.

As with most challenges with a heavy human factor at play, keeping up with your property's residents—authorized and not—requires a good understanding of your own rules and policies. But beyond that, according to many experts, these situations demand common-sense, support from owners and/or administrators (O/As), and a strong ability to communicate and problem-solve.

Because of real-world consequences—including an actionable violation of the agreement to allow only authorized residents to live in their units—tenants should be aware that any new occupant, or one with a new or changed situation affecting eligibility, requires an immediate alert to property management. In addition to



not being allowable, housing extra people also consumes resources intended for tenants and can pose additional safety and security risks beyond the scope of the management plan.

A GUEST—OR SOMETHING ELSE?

In online chats and in gather-

ings of onsite property managers, stories abound about the various explanations for “overdue” guests: they don’t live here, that’s not their car, they’re just passing through, and the like.

Often, unless you are managing a very limited number of properties in a small and visible space, information on a long-



NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (NAHMA)—Protecting the Interests of Affordable Housing Property Managers and Owners



time “guest” comes from other members of the community. While this information may be accurate, you need more information before determining if a fraudulent use of the home is happening. Sometimes the tenant lacks awareness of the lease and what constitutes an unauthorized occupant and needs a reminder.

A logical two-step process is to, one, talk with the person providing the tip to see if the allegation has legs, and, two, follow-up with the tenant directly.

Within those two simple steps, however, is the potential for the situation to escalate unnecessarily. After all, tenants are allowed to have visitors, stay-over guests, and friends at their homes, and generally will see their company as just that—temporary visitors, not permanent fixtures. Keeping the tone neutral and as unemotional as possible can dampen any spark of confrontation that may arise.

One step advised by managers is to ask the tenant to confirm the individual’s non-

residency in writing (including signature and notarization). In addition, the tenant should provide details on the guest’s actual residence, with proof including recent mail to that residence, a copy of the lease or a property record identifying the person, and a utility bill. To top it off, ask the individual in question for a signed and notarized statement of his or her residence. Copies of all the documentation should go in the tenant’s file.

Sometimes—perhaps too rarely—this steady process motivates the tenant to follow the property’s written policies and rules. If not, then the file has been started to resolve the situation through more drastic means, including eviction. In addition to the possibility that the unauthorized occupant leaves, there is a possibility that the person can meet eligibility criteria and be added to the lease.

In all, the tone should be one of protecting the tenants who are rightfully there and making sure that long-time

“guests”—who in a worst-case scenario may be fugitives, felons, sex-offenders or others who would have been flagged at screening—don’t threaten the safety of others.

HANGING OUT AND CUTTING THROUGH

For the other kind of uninvited guests—those who congregate, loiter or trespass on common areas of the property—security and liability issues are heightened.

“You not only have the right to keep trespassers off your property, you have a responsibility to do so as well,” says security consultant Chris McGoey in a post on his website. “Unfortunately, many site managers are reluctant to speak to a trespasser because they don’t have the skills for effective communication or don’t know how to interact with potentially difficult people.”

J. Patrick Murphy, president of LPT Security Consulting, in an article in *Tax Credit Housing Management Insider*, outlined ways to prevent loitering. These include such steps as:

- posting no trespassing signs,
- establishing and publishing rules for guests,
- communicating with residents,
- approaching the resident, not the loiterers, to resolve the situation
- installing adequate lighting,
- defining site boundaries with fencing or other physical markers,
- removing public pay phones, particularly if they’re near congregate mailboxes
- getting the police involved, if necessary
- considering a curfew, and
- investing in controlled access

to property and units.

Angie Barrows (NAHP-e, CPO), Northwest Florida Regional Manager for Emmer Management Corporation, stresses the connection between security steps and tenant accountabilities. “We are in the midst of installing cameras,” she says. “And our common areas shut down when we leave the premises. Visitors of the property are the responsibility of the residents, and we do hold them accountable.”

In some situations, meetings of residents’ communications councils and heart-to-heart discussions with tenants who may attract the unwanted visitors have been helpful techniques in avoiding the “us versus them” scenario and from resorting to more drastic actions, such as calling the police.

Clarity of message and intentions are paramount. As a tenant’s rights advocate in the *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* acknowledged, no-trespass policies play an important role if they guide the limits of a staff member’s discretion to act; codify clear standards; and protect a tenant’s right to have visitors. Moreover, such policies can “play an important role in protecting individuals from their [domestic violence] batterers” and help keep violent or criminal non-residents off the property.

Overall, successfully taking charge of the flow of non-residents produces a win-win-win situation—respect for the rights of tenants to have guests, a safer and more secure community, and a more manageable asset for owners and administrators. **NU**
John Leonard is a Washington-area freelance writer.

Proving Social Security Numbers or Benefits

Documentation and verifications at the time of application for affordable housing and for subsequent reevaluations are critical tasks for managers of HUD-assisted housing programs, including Section 8 housing choice voucher and project-based voucher programs.

Tenants are required to report all changes to household members and income to the management promptly. All household members receiving a subsidy are required to prove legal residency under HUD rules. (See HUD's Occupancy Requirements of Subsidized Multifamily Housing Programs for details.)

Social Security information is a key component of the process. Managers, tenants and tenants' family members should be aware of changes in Social Security Administration (SSA) operations regarding Social Security number (SSN) documentation. Beginning February 2014, SSA will no longer issue SSN printouts and the agency's field offices will stop providing benefit verification letters.

SSA explains, "To leverage our technology investments and meet the increasing

demands for our service, we're making changes to how we provide some services to our customers. Later in 2014, Social Security will stop providing benefit verification letters in our local offices. You still will be able to get an instant letter online by creating a personal mySocial Security account or you may call our toll-free telephone number to request one by mail.

"Also, to help prevent identity theft, we will discontinue providing Social Security number printouts since they have no security features and are easily misused or counterfeited. If you need proof of your Social Security number and you do not have your Social Security card, you will need to request a replacement card by completing the Application for a Social Security Card and providing the required documentation."

PUSH TO ONLINE ACCESS

SSA notes that agencies of all sorts can serve clients faster because they won't be depending on a snail-mail letter to arrive. Online access—"perhaps even from a computer in your office," says SSA—will get up-to-date information more quickly.

With mySocial Security, those who receive benefits

can view, print or save an official letter that includes proof of their:

- Benefit amount and type;
- Medicare start date and withholding amount; and
- Age.

SSA's fact sheet, *How To Create An Online Account* (Publication No. 05-10540), provides step-by-step instructions and explains how to get a benefit verification letter.

Due to the emphasis on online access, SSA asks that customer-facing staff no longer send tenants or potential tenants to a Social Security office for a benefit verification letter.

SSA says it will continue to work directly with advocates, social service agencies, and other third parties to make sure they have access to available data exchanges to obtain SSN information "without needlessly requiring their clients to undertake the task."

Beneficiaries can obtain a benefit verification letter by registering for an account or, if they are unable to go online, by calling the national toll-free number 1 (800) 772-1213. The phone process is automated.

Members of the public can register for a "my" Social Security account at www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount and safely conduct business online on a 24/7 basis. **NU**

PRESIDENT

Gianna Solari, SCHM, NAHP-e
gianna@solari-ent.com

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Kris Cook, CAE
kris.cook@nahma.org

COORDINATOR, TRAINING, EDUCATION & SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Natasha Patterson
npatterson@nahma.org

DIRECTOR, MEMBERSHIP

Brenda Moser
brenda.moser@nahma.org

EDITOR

Catherine A. Smith
Community-Based
Communications, L.L.C.
cbc.smith@comcast.net

DESIGN

Mary Butler
butler5s@comcast.net

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Brian Carnahan
John E. Leonard

2013 NAHMA CERTIFICATION REVIEW BOARD

Chair

Maria Oymaian, SHCM, NAHP-e

Members

Jennifer Coberth, SHCM, NAHP-e
Nancy Hogan, CPM, NAHP-e
Jan Peters, NAHP-e
Melanie Shapiro, NAHP-e
Rich Skoczylas, SHCM, NAHP-e
Gwen Volk, SHCM, NAHP-e
Julie Wall, NAHP-e
Angie Waller, SHCM, NAHP-e

NAHP Update is published four times a year by the National Affordable Housing Management Association, 400 North Columbus St., Suite 203, Alexandria, VA 22314, Phone (703) 683-8630, website: www.nahma.org

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Complimentary to NAHMA credential holders.

QUERIES: Letters to the Editor and other queries should be sent to NAHMA Coordinator, Training, Education & Special Programs Tim Bishop at tim.bishop@nahma.org or to the address above.

NOTICE: Contents of *NAHP Update* should not be regarded as the final authority on policies, regulations and legal or other issues. Opinions are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent opinions or policies of NAHMA's board of directors or staff or consultants. NAHMA is not liable in any way for omissions or inaccuracies.

COPYRIGHT: Contents of *NAHP Update* are protected by copyright and may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, without permission and attribution.

Seven Top Qualities of a Strong Property Manager

If you ask managers in the affordable housing industry what attributes you need in order to be a solid performer as an onsite property manager, the list runs long—evidence of a complex job that draws on the left- and right-sides of the brain, and the entire heart.

Trying to find an absolute consensus on the top qualities of a strong property manager tempts the fates and probably sets the stage for energetic arguments. While no one doubts that a strong technical knowledge of real estate and affordable housing practice is important, many of the key attributes skew toward what

feel their leadership confidence. Actions need to be taken; decisions affecting lives and property investments need to be made on a daily basis.

For onsite managers, taking the leader role depends greatly on the situation. In real-time situations—complicated tenant interactions, on-site accidents, emergencies, and rush repair orders—stepping up and leading makes a difference. But an ability to lead side-by-side with supervisors and knowing when to “lead by following” are priceless skills.

2. Self motivated. Although a well-run operation has clear job descriptions and work plans for onsite managers and other

conversations with tenants that raise your antennae even higher? If your answer is that you are self-motivated to resolve the problem or elevate it to a more appropriate level, you have helped your property to improve.

3. Well organized. Whether you’re onsite managing 20 units or 200 units, you face a daily barrage of details. Deciding what to prioritize and how to keep multiple tasks moving forward is what HR specialists call superior executive functioning skills.

In executive functioning, the trick is to rank all the possibilities, not to furiously try to do everything at once. Well-

you known as a person who gets things done because of your organizational skills? Do your organizational skills result in your boss reaching out to you to for a strong assist when new projects and procedures are needed?

For many new on-site managers, strong organizational skills help them quickly climb the learning curve and perform to job expectations. For veteran managers, organizational skills allow them to seamlessly dispatch routine tasks, saving time and energy that will be needed when the inevitable property and people challenges arise.

4. Adapts to change with little resistance. “Change is the



old management theory called the “softer skills” and 21st century management practice deems as absolutely essential.

Here are seven of the top qualities the bubble to the top:

1. Ability to take the leader role. Regardless of where they fit in the company hierarchy, onsite managers realize that tenants and fellow staff need to

staff, how many days go by before something happens that stretches or falls outside those guidelines? Do you ignore the situation or actively determine how to resolve it? Are your daily/weekly/monthly reports on time? How about early?

What happens when you spot an issue on the walk-throughs or hear something in

organized managers act strategically, tackling the biggest payoff tasks in a logical way and pushing less-important tasks down the list.

So, are your routines in place so that regular tasks are done efficiently and effectively? Do you use task organizers—computer-based or not—to keep yourself on track? Are

only constant in life,” goes the old saying. That could have been written with onsite managers in mind. Though organization, steadiness and ability to stay on task, as noted above, are critical qualities, so is the ability to adapt and stay flexible.

While most bosses will entertain your honest question of “Why are we doing it this

way now?" feet-dragging and persistent skepticism about the change won't help in the long run.

Change presents an opportunity to seize the day and help your company move forward. Change may also create a need for your special talents (see ability to take the lead, above), which could position you for career advancement.

5. Firm yet compassionate. Particularly when dealing with tenants, a firm yet compassionate approach produces a winning combination. In your role, you know that not every infraction of property rules is on purpose or antagonistic. You will understand that ten-

Seasoned property managers know that one solid step to building trust comes from building your listening skills. Think of your role at the center of a circle. Orbiting around you might be: owner, regional management, other administrators, contractors, fellow staff, the broader community and, most importantly, the tenants.

Listening skills increase trust, and that trust is an intangible asset that you may need to cash in during times of stress and conflict at your property. A capacity to hear and to understand their concerns are an important part of surviving and thriving in your job.

If you're always pushing what you want to say rather than actively listening to colleagues and tenants, take a cue from top managers and start your own personal listening tour. As one manager told another after a meeting with tenants:

"Here's a little feedback for you: You made some great points, but you missed a lot of opportunities to stop talking ..."

7. Able to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing. In your customer-facing role, your excellent interpersonal skills mean that you are a great intermediary between your owner's interests

and residents. Effective communications incorporates great listening skills and an active interest in understanding how to reach your customers and other external audiences.

Internally, bosses appreciate clear, concise oral and written reports. Even more important, clear written communication helps maintain a history of property decisions and actions, should ownership or management change or if questions arise during management reviews and audits. Clear communication won't by itself accomplish every task or solve every problem. But day in and day out, clear communication will be your most reliable tool for doing a great job.

Property managers have a tough job. Developing and strengthening the qualities that help you do your job can make each day less stressful and more productive.

If you don't recognize these seven qualities in yourself, or if they seem overwhelming in combination, consider a few starter steps to move forward. Take advantage of NAHMA and your local AHMA for training and educational resources. Seek feedback from your supervisor and trusted colleagues. Put your new knowledge into action, amping up your value to your company and building your career. **NU**

Thanks to Angie Barrows of Emmer Management Corp. and Jan Peters of Eden Housing, Inc. for their ideas and help in focusing this article.



ant families run into personal and household problems on a regular basis.

But you also know that effectively functioning in your job means that problems need to be fixed promptly and directly—for the safety, health and security of the overall tenant community.

6. Good listening skills.

Welcome New Certificants!

NAHP Executive

- >> Kathleen Strohl
WinnResidential
Linthicum, MD
- >> Jonathan Adam Watkins
Community Housing
Partners
Richmond, VA

NAHP

- >> Patricia Juba
Peabody Properties, Inc.
Braintree, MA

Earn one of NAHMA's prestigious professional credentials, which are dedicated solely to recognizing and promoting achievement of the highest possible professional standards in affordable housing management. Programs include:

- National Affordable Housing Professional (NAHP™)
- National Affordable Housing Professional-Executive (NAHP-e™)
- Specialist in Housing Credit Management™ (SHCM™)
- Certified Professional of Occupancy™ (CPO™)
- Fair Housing Compliance™ (FHC™)
- National Affordable Housing Maintenance Technician (NAHMT™)
- National Affordable Housing Maintenance Supervisor (NAHMS™)
- Credential for Green Property Management

Take advantage of NAHMA's training opportunities and add value to yourself as a professional.

For more information, go to www.nahma.org and click on Education/Credentials.

A Happily Entrenched Go-Getter

NAHP: Lana Pace, NAHP, CPO
MANAGEMENT COMPANY: Holiday Apartments
POSITION: Chief Financial Officer
YEAR OF CERTIFICATION: 1995

“I’ve done a lot of things in my life,” says Lana Pace, and this is so true.

She went to nursing school and got a degree in medical technology. Then she switched to accounting and got a Bachelor of Science degree. She finished her accounting degree on a Friday and started on her Masters’ in Business Administration (MBA) the next Monday. She worked in accounting for coal mining and construction com-

panies “until coal mining stopped here in Harlan County, and a lot of people were laid off,” she said. Then she began working as a professor at Lincoln Memorial University.

Pace began working for Holiday Apartments 21 years ago. The complex is owned by two brothers and Pace has handled operations of its 13 buildings.

It’s one of the few rent supplement (rent sup) buildings in Kentucky, so residents range from low income to people who can afford to pay market rate rents. It makes for a very diverse community that includes professionals, workers of all types, the recently retired and the elderly.

One thing that makes Pace’s management situation

unique is that she lives with her husband on the edge of the fenced-in campus in a house owned by the company. This enables her to keep a close watch on what’s happening. “Each building is like a little community within a larger community,” she says. “Everybody knows everybody else, their habits and their visitors. If something is out of the ordinary, we see it or neighbors let us know.”

“I’m here 24/7,” Pace says. “Everybody knows I’m here and accessible. I’m the on-site everything.” With the assistance of a clerk and two full-time maintenance men, Pace is proud of the property’s impeccable appearance, landscaping and security.

What she both likes and

finds challenging about her job is “the human interaction.”

“When you’re just doing accounting at a business, you see numbers. Here, you see people, and sometimes their needs are more than we can take care of,” she says. “This is especially true as people age, and we have some residents in their 90s. We’re not an assisted living facility, but we do all we can for as long as we can. They can be independent two-to-three years longer here than anywhere else. Then I have to step in and take action to get the family to support with home health care or other support they need.”

For the most part, though, “everybody’s happy, and we consider it the best place to rent in all of Harlan.” **NU**

PROTECTING THE INTERESTS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROPERTY MANAGERS AND OWNERS

National Affordable Housing Management Association
400 North Columbus Street, Suite 203
Alexandria, VA 22314
www.nahma.org

spring 2014
NAHPupdate

PRSR STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Hyattsville, MD
Permit No. 61