

# NAHP Update

## Mindsets in Property Management | BY BRIAN CARNAHAN

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**H**ave you ever thought or said, “I was not in the right frame of mind” or “They always do that?”

Professor Carol Dweck has conducted research into how each of us learns and grows—or does not. Her research is concerned with what she terms the “fixed” mindset and the “growth” mindset.

Property management is a unique environment in which to apply the mindset concepts. In property management, a person deals with issues that involve real estate and people. The potential problems, challenges and opportunities are boundless. The timing of problems is also a factor. A property manager or company executive may be working out an issue involving a repair to a unit or dealing with a resident who has been violating the lease, all while preparing for a monitoring visit from its state housing finance agency or Section 8 Contract Administrator.

The mindset concepts, while generally about personal skills, abilities and intelligence, should not be confused with what might be termed outlooks—for example, whether you consider yourself an opti-



mist or pessimist. In a fixed mindset, it's assumed that this is who he or she is; problems are personal and part of a person's make-up. People with this mindset may also be potentially risk averse. Those

with the fixed mindset, as the name implies, think problems, attitudes and situations are generally permanent.

People in a growth mindset learn from challenges. Problems and issues are not necessarily



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about the person as a person but rather about how he or she can best react to the information received. Those with a growth mindset recognize that people and situations can change, and they can in fact learn and grow.

There are too many challenges in affordable housing to dismiss a growth mindset as a means of overcoming those challenges. Residents are not a category—they are people with wants, needs, pasts,

plans, etc. The same applies to employees, vendors and funders. You must be open to learning from mistakes and problems.

In essence, a growth mindset supports the concept that few things are permanent or exist simply because they exist. You can help someone to think differently, and to understand the real source of a problem or issue. In other words, people are not their problems or situations; things will not

always be as they are at that moment.

Some examples that help to highlight how the mindset approach can be used are below. The intention is to show that one must ask more questions and be more open.

■ **Seemingly troublesome tenant**—Is the problem about the tenant, or a problem the tenant is having?

■ **Market issues**—Is the market simply “bad” for rental units, or are there strategies

you have not yet used?

■ **Calculation/application error**—What can you learn from the mistake? Will better training, policies and procedures help avoid future problems, or is it simply the case that the employee responsible cannot do it properly?

■ **Employee performance**—Do you know if the employee has had sufficient training? Does the employee know what you expect?

#### THE FIVE WHYS

The growth mindset can be aided by using the concept of the five whys, popularized by Toyota to identify the root cause of a problem. The first why is general while the following four are more specific to the causes that emerge.

For example, say a resident was found to not be qualified for a unit after move-in. Below are the questions that would follow:

1. Why was the resident not qualified? **Answer:** The resident was over income limits.

2. Why was the resident over income? **Answer:** The income calculation was not properly completed.

3. Why was it not properly calculated? **Answer:** The property manager did not collect all of the documents.

4. Why were some of the documents missed? **Answer:** She didn't receive enough training regarding what to request from applicants and residents.

5. Why did she not get the right training? **Answer:**

The position needed to be filled at short notice and training was delayed.

While this is a fairly simplistic example and process, it shows the power of asking “why?” More importantly, it reinforces the fact that situations are usually more complicated than we care to acknowledge. Often what we think is causing an issue is in fact the cause. Questions lead to answers that cannot be found through assumptions.

Change is difficult, but not impossible. Nurturing a growth mindset for yourself and those you manage can help to make a difference in the relationships you maintain and how you solve problems. The key is to continue to ask questions; to not label people or situations as unchangeable; and to assume that others, like you, have many complicated motivations, goals and needs.

For additional resources, go to MindSet at <http://mindsetonline.com/> or iSixSigma, “Five Whys” at [www.isixsigma.com/tools-templates/cause-effect/determine-root-cause-5-whys/](http://www.isixsigma.com/tools-templates/cause-effect/determine-root-cause-5-whys/). **NU**

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# NAHMA

# To Tow ... or Not To Tow?

## Seven Tips to Keep That from Being the Question

I do not know a property manager who doesn't grapple with parking issues. At best, they're a hassle. At worst, they threaten resident safety, satisfaction and retention. They can even send you to court.

Towing may alienate a resident ... but failure to act on a parking problem could alienate many residents. The best solution is a proactive approach that maximizes compliance and minimizes your need to have to make the tough decision. Here are seven tips to help ease parking woes on your property.

**1. Understand the parking and towing laws and ordinances in your state and in your municipality.** If you don't already know the laws, an Internet search should yield results. Illegal towing can do more than damage resident relationships. It can be costly. Some states allow the court to award loss of use damages for an illegally towed vehicle. Residents have to prove their case. But win or lose, it's going to cost you time and money.

**2. Have proper legal signage.** Posting parking permit and restriction signs on your property is one of the most important actions you can take to ensure and enforce compliance. With effective signage, residents, visitors, staff and vendors should never have any

question about where to park.

**3. Clearly mark the parking lots and curbs.** Sometimes signs disappear, but parking lot stripes and curb paint is permanent. Mark restricted parking areas as clearly as possible; leave nothing to question.

**4. Create, publish and distribute a clear, well-defined parking policy.** Your policy should spell out—and itemize—exactly:

- Where residents, visitors, staff and vendors may park;
- Where residents, visitors, staff and vendors may **not** park;
- Snow plow procedures;

■ Your step-by-step procedure for handling vehicles that violate the parking policy. It's a good idea to try to notify the owner, whenever possible, before a vehicle is towed. Document your attempts to notify; it will pay off.

■ Actions to take if someone finds that their car has been towed and how much it will cost to recover it.

If there are seasonal issues in your area, such as snow or flooding, send timely reminders that reiterate the parking policies and procedures.

**5. Review your parking and towing policies with your snow removal and towing vendors.**

Make sure they understand that only authorized personnel from your staff can request that a vehicle be towed.

**6. Personally address parking issues with problem residents.** Some parking infractions are not as defiant as they may seem to you or to other residents. When parking issues arise, one-on-one notices are far more effective than blanket reminders. It does not have to be a nasty confrontation. Stay calm, refer to your parking poli-

minimize slippage.

It's important to document all your parking compliance efforts. Take photos of your signage, parking lot, curb markings and any instances of policy violations. Keep a record of all your communications to your residents, whether community-wide or one-on-one. Your documentation should show dates, times and message content. It should also confirm that your residents received your communications. If a conflict or legal issue arises, all of these will work in your favor.

The name of the game here

**MAKE SURE YOUR PARKING RULES DON'T SLIP THEIR MINDS. Proper signage, marked parking spaces and curbs, a published policy, personal reminders and community-wide announcements all work together to minimize slippage.**

cies and rules, and make sure the resident has a copy. Keep a record of your resident contact with the date, time and content.

**7. Communicate regularly, and always document.** Managing your property is your job. But your residents have their own jobs, busy—often hectic—lives, and lots on their minds. Make sure your parking rules don't slip their minds. Proper signage, marked parking spaces and curbs, a published policy, personal reminders and community-wide announcements all work together to

is to maximize parking compliance and minimize towing instances. It takes a proactive approach, vigilance and a commitment to regular communications with your residents. **NU**

*Nick Frantz is the National Sales Manager for Property Management Solutions at One Call Now, where he has worked since March 2011. He specializes in property management solutions—commercial and residential—assisting in communications between property managers and staff and residents. Nick holds a B.S. degree from Miami University. [www.onecallnow.com](http://www.onecallnow.com).*



# Preventing the Spread of Disease

## It takes action!

**Q:** There are so many flu viruses going around! What can we do to prevent the spread of flu and other illnesses?

**A:** Here are some tips that should help:

**1. Have your maintenance staff follow a strict cleaning regimen,** especially from October to May, the period prone to seasonal flu activity. If possible, send out email blasts to staff about potential virus outbreaks and possible symptoms.

**2. Create a cleaning checklist** to keep staff from getting complacent. Consider switching from traditional rag mops to flat microfiber mops and pads that can be washed in a washing machine.

**3. Go antimicrobial.** A recent study found that the most contaminated surfaces in offices tend to be break room sink handles, microwave door handles, keyboards, refrigerator door handles, and water fountain and vending machine buttons. Focus on cleaning these germ “hot spots” to improve overall workplace wellness.

**4. Encourage hand washing.** Hand washing is the number one way to halt the spreading of pathogens, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Unfortunately, not everyone takes this simple hygiene measure. A 2010 study by the American Society for Microbiology and the American Cleaning Institute found that 93 percent of women and 77



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percent of men wash their hands after using the restroom. Post signs in restrooms reminding everybody of the risks involved in spreading germs from the restroom to the rest of the facility.

**5. Offer the flu shot.** Giving residents access to flu shots is another way to reduce workplace illness. Consider offering an incentive type program that gives employees and

residents some type of small gift for getting a flu shot, or have an organization come out and provide the flu shots.

**6. Offer wellness workshops.** These are great ways to educate employees on the most effective techniques, from fitness plans to stress-management methods and

healthy eating ideas. Instead of leaving workshops to the discretion of individual offices or housing units, organize seasonal workshops and encourage both staff and residents to attend.

Although individuals need to take control of their personal health and wellness, preventing disease is a team effort—and it starts with your facility. **NU**

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# Small Town, Big Responsibilities

**NAME:** Janey Arnold  
**POSITION:** Community Manager, North Fork Manor  
**MANAGEMENT COMPANY:** American Apartment Management, Inc.  
**YEAR OF CERTIFICATION:** 2005

The 56-unit North Fork Manor Apartments in Saltville, Virginia, has always had only two employees: a property manager and a maintenance person. Back in 1988, Janey Arnold's husband was the maintenance person, and when the property manager left, he found himself responsible for both duties.

Finally, Janey was hired part-time to do paperwork, and "I'm still here," she said.

When American Apartment Management, Inc. took over the property in 1990, "I got grandfathered in," she said.

Founded in 1972, American Apartment Management has successfully grown to manage over 5,000 units of multifamily housing. These properties are located in nine states and comprise over 50 separate developments. It is a full service property management firm that currently has five regional asset managers along with a corporate training department, a computer and information technology department, and a corporate marketing director.

When American Apartment Management took over North Fork Manor, Janey suddenly had access to multiple training opportunities, and "now we have training all the time," she said, "from NAHMA, SAHMA, managers' meetings, conference calls—it's all really useful," she said.

Clearly Janey is doing a good job managing this town-home community of families, since the property consistently does well on REAC inspections and management reviews. Plus what Janey likes most about her work are the many different kinds of people she encounters.

"We serve a very diverse population," she said, also not-

ing that Saltville, with its "two big red lights," is the kind of place where everybody knows everybody.

This can be her biggest challenge.

"Sometimes residents come to me with personal problems, and they're just looking for a way to vent," she said. "I don't really want to get over-involved, but I do listen." While she takes pride in a job well done, she can also take pride in the trust residents have in her—knowing that she'll be a good listener without being a gossip or a complainer.

"I try to make this a safe and comfortable place to live, in all respects," she said. **NU**

PROTECTING THE INTERESTS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROPERTY MANAGERS AND OWNERS

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