

## 10 Roles Manager's Don't Play

By: Katherine M. Wolfe, PHR, CMCA

I work for an association management company. I meet with and take direction from board members of both single-family homes and condominium communities. Homeowners think I am the “community police, judge, and jury” all rolled into one and that I make biased, unilateral decisions. I am underpaid, over worked, and never appreciated. Who am I?

If you guessed community association manager, stand up and take a bow. You may even be a manager yourself, for which you have my deepest sympathy. All kidding aside, the community manager has an important role in helping an association run smoothly and stay within legal regulations (i.e., NRS 116 and governing documents). However, that role is often misunderstood.

Although board members and homeowners think they are the manager's only client, a manager's portfolio often consists of between eight and 20 communities—each having their own individual personalities. Pretend you are a single parent with eight kids who all want something different for dinner. Arggh!

Planning and organization are key skills in managing all of these different communities, but defining management's role from the get-go should be the manager's first priority.

According to Gil Cross, a community manager with Condominium & Association Resource Group, Inc., who wrote an article for *Common Ground*, there are 10 key misconceptions of a manager's role. Following is a light-hearted parody of these misconceptions and remedies:

1. Managers are referees. Not! Leave your whistle at home and refer neighbor-to-neighbor disputes to the Neighborhood Justice Center. An exception would be a direct violation of the CC&R deed restrictions. Then follow the procedures as outlined by the statutes and governing documents.
2. The manager is not the devil's – I mean—homeowners' advocate. If a homeowner has concerns about the association and its board's actions, those concerns should be addressed directly to the board and not directed at the manager. Request that homeowners put their concerns in writing for the board to review or even better yet, encourage them to come to the next meeting and express their concerns personally to the directors.
3. Managers must be available at all times. Is there no rest for the wicked? With the exception of on-site managers (and even they are entitled to eight hours sleep), community managers cannot be at each homeowner's beck and call. Establish an “access” policy, either

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specified hours the manager is available or calling to set an appointment.

4. Who has responsibility for contractors? This is a joint role between the contractor, management, and the board. Contractors manage their own actions and those of their employees. The community manager monitors job performance and reports any problems to the board. The board determines the course of action to take, if any.
5. Managers are mind readers and practice their mind-reading skills with John Edwards. In an effort to anticipate problems, managers conduct monthly site visits but even experienced managers can miss something or an event may happen after hours (like loud parties). Homeowners should be encouraged to take an active interest in their communities to protect their vested interests of the property by reporting any problems to the manager. Being a concerned homeowner is quite the opposite of being a nosey, meddling busy body.
6. Homeowners feel that since they pay “dues,” they are entitled to direct the manager’s activities. Homeowners rarely call the manager to praise their actions but do call often to complain what the manager did not do. Managers take direction from the board of directors and not individual homeowners. End of story. Period. Finis.
7. Oh, here’s another good one. A manager takes orders from individual board members. What’s that old saying? Too many cooks in the kitchen spoil the broth. The association manager takes direction from the board as a whole. Does this mean the board gets together and has a conference call with the manager each time something needs to happen? No. The board collaborates to make decisions and a designated board liaison (generally the association’s president) interacts with the manager. Liaison language should be a “must” clause in the management contract.
8. Managers (are or are not) responsible for delinquent accounts. The answer is “are not.” The manager’s role as it relates to delinquencies is to authorize the necessary actions to collect delinquencies, provide a regular report to the board, represent the association in small claims court if necessary or refer the matter to an attorney. Managers should not call delinquent owners and try to collect on the account. Let the collections department, agency, or attorney handle all collection activities.
9. Managers are know-it-alls, experienced Jacks or Jills-of-all-trades, psychics, Einsteins, you name it they know it. Boy, all that knowledge

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would make my mind swim and I'd have no time to play. Managers should not (repeat should not) be giving expert advice in areas concerning legal issues, construction, accounting, reserves, or any other area that requires specific expertise. Managers have a generalized body of knowledge within their industry and should not be expected to provide unqualified advice. It is OK to say, "I don't know the answer but I'll check with the association's attorney (accountant, etc.)."

10. (Phew! We're finally at 10). The manager responds to all emergency calls. What's an emergency call? (a) Getting locked out of the house, (b) sprinkler timers set for the wrong time of day, or (c) overflowing lift station. Determine what is an emergency, what is an inconvenience, and communicate those differences to homeowners in the association newsletter. Managers should respond courteously to all calls, of course, but defining emergencies will reduce future conflicts and animosity.

There. Now that we've set everyone straight on management's role, what's for dinner?