



COLORADO REAL ESTATE JOURNAL

THE COMMUNICATION CHANNEL OF THE COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE COMMUNITY

MAY 19, 2010 – JUNE 1, 2010

Conflict resolution: What kind of property manager are you?

"The visit lasted no more than five minutes," said a disgruntled tenant, "and she quickly won me over. Instead of summoning me to come to the management office, sending me a lengthy, condescending e-mail or delegating the matter, she walked to my office in the building to have a brief face-to-face conversation with me. Although the interaction was not long, I felt heard, understood and valued. She cares, and that makes all the difference."

In contrast, another disgruntled tenant shared this encounter with a property manager: "He asserted his power and position and delivered a monologue rather than a dialogue during our call. He always hides behind e-mails and never returns my calls. I am amazed he picked up his phone. It always goes to voice mail. I doubt he even knows where the building is located. I have never seen him at the building. He is no property manager. We can't wait until our lease is up. We're out of here."

What's the difference? I would suggest it is belly-to-belly, eye-to-eye, face-to-face leadership. That's the secret of great property managers. That is why they are so effective in handling contention, conflict, breach of contracts, missed commitments, broken promises, violations of common courtesy and the everyday abrasions of life. They are not afraid to meet



Steven S. Sessions
President/
chief executive
officer, Fuller
Management
Services, Denver

face-to-face, to show recognition and high regard for the other person.

What's their secret? How and why are they so responsive to others – their concerns, hopes, needs and fears? Because they also understand

the four dynamics of empathy: *I hear you. I understand you. I like you. I can work with you!* In other words, they do not take offense. They are able to respond favorably to others because of what they have cultivated inside. As another author writes: "Regardless of how another person interacts with you, you can give away only what you have inside to give. Just like the proverbial orange, when you squeeze it, you get what is inside – it has nothing to do with who does the squeezing, or the circumstances surrounding the squeeze. What comes out is what is inside. If you respond to hate with hate, or anger with anger, it is not because of what was directed your way; it is because that is what is inside you. You can't give hate if you have only love inside, no matter how much squeezing comes

your way."

On a personal note, Debbie and I are proud parents of five wonderful children. Three are now married and we now have five beautiful grandchildren! When our children were young, we attended a parenting seminar hosted by Cherry Creek Schools. It was at this seminar that we met Foster Cline, M.D., and Jim Fay. They completely changed our ways of parenting. They clearly demonstrated the difference between the three parenting types or patterns: helicopters, drill sergeants and consultants. In essence, helicopters make a lot of wind, noise and vibration. They hover, rescue and protect. They behave the way they do because they confuse love, protection and caring. Drill sergeants also make a lot of noise, and they stir things up. They're forthright and definite. Jim taught us: "If you are not at war, raising teens by barking orders at them isn't really effective. In fact, it can cause war. The real world does not operate on punishment, it operates on consequences. And, helicopters can't hover forever. And eventually, drill sergeants go hoarse!"

Fay and Cline then introduced us to the third alternative, which has worked so well for us as parents, but also has had direct application in my life as a property manager. The consultant parent/property manager asks questions and offer choic-

es. Such parents don't dictate, they advise. Like business consultants, guidance counselors and therapists, great consultant property managers do not give orders. They offer their own points of view while exploring those of their tenants and vendors. They use paraphrasing and thoughtful silences. They don't ground anybody. They rarely get mad and shout and they don't allow themselves to be manipulated or abused. But they do offer lots of empathy and understanding.

Yes, "consultant property managers" live much happier and more profitable lives. Being a great consultant property manager requires not only implementing and practicing the tools and techniques of conflict resolution, but also a very important and basic shift in attitude. I really do believe that it is the daily duty of every consultant property manager to promote the happiness, not discontent, of everyone he encounters. It is a choice. How well we effectively resolve conflicts or not depends on how well we really communicate. I have found that most problems can be solved if both participants feel their opinion is respected and they try to understand the other's point of view. There are three types of property managers: helicopters, drill sergeants and consultants. Which one are you?▲