



FirstService
RESIDENTIAL



TEAMWORK

the key to exceptional service

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**The best
managers have
the support
of an entire
management
team.**

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Having the most capable people managing your association is, no doubt, one of your highest priorities. If you're like many boards, that probably means having a community association manager —and maybe on-site staff as well — with the right traits, skills and experience.

Of course, a manager's capabilities are important, but the best managers don't do their job alone. Instead, they work as part of a management team so they have the support and expertise they need to provide the best service possible.

This guide describes both the inherent qualities to look for in a manager and the ways in which a team approach can raise the level of service you receive. It also arms you with a "dream team" checklist you can use to determine if a management company is able to provide your community or building with the highly qualified management team you deserve.

What Makes a Great Manager?

Your community association manager is an integral part of your community. They make a commitment to provide you with excellent service, so it's important for them to have the right personality and the emotional intelligence to deliver on that commitment.

Personality

Not everyone has the personality to be a community association manager. For one thing, the role involves continual interaction with board members, residents and vendors. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that someone with an extroverted personality — a “people person” — will not only be more comfortable working with a variety of individuals throughout their day, but they will even feel energized in a role that requires it!

[Find out what criteria your management company uses to hire and place association managers.](#)

Having a manager who is hospitality minded will also benefit your community. Hospitality-minded managers tend to care more deeply and are motivated to go above and beyond for the residents in your community. Managers with this trait take a personal interest in the appearance of your property and thrive on providing great service.

“When you have a manager who cares, it's no longer a job for them,” explains Anthony Gragnano, regional director at FirstService Residential. “It comes

naturally to them to make sure there isn't a single cigarette butt on the driveway, for instance. They are there checking at 7 a.m. because they know that's when residents are leaving the building. They have a sense of ownership.”

In addition, a manager needs to be a strong leader so they can direct vendors, help you keep board meetings on track and, if you have on-site staff, direct them to provide your community with the best service possible. “A capable staff really starts at the helm with the manager being able to develop a highly qualified team and engage with them,” says Gragnano. “Even if someone is a really talented manager, if they lack the ability to manage or lead people, that will impact the quality of everything from your front desk staff and valet service to housekeeping.”

According to Jeff Musselman, vice president of high-rise at FirstService Residential, another quality that a manager needs to have is strategic foresight. “The day-to-day operations are important, but the board also depends on the manager to be looking at things like reserves 5 and 10 years out, projects and life expectancies. They need their manager to be calling these things to the board's attention and helping them navigate and prepare for them. That foresight — I call it the ‘telescope’ — is a big part of the value a great manager brings.”

The manager's personality also needs to match that of the community or building. “You can have a stellar manager, but if they don't mesh with the personality of your association, they'll never be

successful,” Gragnano points out. “For example, some properties need a rules-driven manager, but that type of manager won’t do as well at a laid-back beachfront community.”

Emotional Intelligence

Unlike personality, which doesn’t change, emotional intelligence is a skill set that can be learned and improved upon. Emotional intelligence refers to the level of awareness a person possesses with regard to their own and others’ emotions and how well they are able to manage their behavior and their relationships based on that awareness. A manager with highly developed emotional intelligence is particularly valuable for your association because they possess:

- » **Self-awareness.** They know their strengths and weaknesses, they seek out opportunities to improve and they aren’t afraid to ask others for help in those areas in which they lack knowledge or skills.
- » **Empathy.** They can put themselves in residents’ shoes and understand their perspective.
- » **Social skills.** They are friendly, polite and professional.
- » **Self-motivation.** They don’t wait to be told what to do, and they are resourceful when unexpected issues arise.
- » **Self-regulation.** They remain calm in the face of escalating tension or crisis situations.

These traits translate into a manager who is more productive and organized, as well as more capable of making decisions proactively. Having a high level of emotional intelligence also gives a manager the ability to adapt to the needs of different properties, adjust easily to changing priorities and strike a balance between being a trusted advisor and a collaborative partner.



Training Support



Without in-depth knowledge of all that it takes to run an association, it's easy for board members to make costly mistakes or to overlook important tasks simply because they are not experts. That's why so many associations depend on the expertise and guidance of an association management company.

However, unless the management company encourages and invests in consistent and continuous training for your community association manager and on-site staff, you can't be sure of their level of knowledge. In-house trainers should be part of the management team supporting your manager.

In-House Training

When a management company incorporates training professionals on the management team, it is demonstrating an understanding of the relationship between training and exceptional service.

"A company that has an extensive onboarding and training program for its managers is making a significant investment in their development," says Claudia Eftimie, director of training at FirstService Residential. "It is growing a talent pool with a consistently high level of skill and expertise."

Eftimie explains that your manager's in-house training should consist of fully developed programs with both e-learning and face-to-face components. E-learning enables managers to take classes at

their convenience anytime, no matter where they are located. Face-to-face training offers the ability to obtain insights from professional trainers in an interactive setting where they can ask questions.

Credentials and Outside Training

An increasing number of states and provinces require community association managers and other people involved in managing associations to be certified or licensed. Although the prerequisites to receive these credentials may vary, they generally involve completion of specific education.

Even if you don't live in an area that has these requirements, your community or building will benefit from a manager and on-site staff who have credentials and designations that match your property type. Designations that have been obtained through a recognized program or organization (such as the Community Associations Institute — CAI) let you know that the person you are hiring is a qualified professional with the knowledge and experience to advise your board accurately.

Managers and staff should also be motivated (and encouraged by their company) to attend conferences and seminars where they can learn about industry and legislative changes and exchange information with their peers.

360 Degrees of Support

Managers often wear multiple hats, especially if they work independently or for a small company. However, even the best-trained managers can't do everything themselves, nor can they have expertise in all there is to know about running your association.

With a "dream team" approach, the manager has 360 degrees of in-house support. This lets them focus their attention on fulfilling their responsibilities to your association, including helping your board plan and strategize, following up on issues and enforcing policies. A manager from a larger company with a local presence is likely to be well supported so they can give you personalized service. Look for a manager who has administrative support, receives guidance from someone with extensive operational experience (such as a regional director) and has access to professionals with specialized expertise.

Administrative Support

One reason your board may decide to work with a management company is to avoid shouldering all the responsibilities involved in running your association. A community association manager who has hands-on assistance will be more capable of doing their best work for your community and less likely to burn themselves out.

"A truly capable manager is only as good as the support they have," said Heather Peters, business development director at FirstService Residential. "You need to have a manager with a good support system so they don't get overloaded."

Ask if the manager will have an assistant manager, administrative assistant or coordinator to help with day-to-day duties and provide office support. Also make sure there is a 24/7 customer care center that can support the manager by addressing many of the questions and requests residents may have.

“ A truly capable manager is only as good as the support they have. ”

– Heather Peters, business development director

Regional Director

Your association looks to its manager for guidance and direction, but who does the manager turn to? Chances are it's their regional director. Easily overlooked during the evaluation process, the regional director who will be overseeing your manager plays an extremely important role.

Teamwork: The Key to Exceptional Service

Speaking from his own experience as a regional director, Gragnano says that “A great manager will leverage that relationship with their regional director. When a manager and the regional director are in sync, the property is much better off. For example, if a board member calls me, I already know why they’re calling because the manager has been keeping me in the loop.”

An organized and involved regional director will be able to fill in — or substitute the right person — when the manager isn’t available, know how to determine which manager will fit best at a particular property and develop the manager’s skills. They should also have notable skills in the following 3 areas:

- » Relationship management (to work with board members)
- » People management (to work with and develop managers, staff, etc.)
- » Operational management (to handle processes, property/building functions, etc.)

If a regional director excels in all of these areas, the manager is also likely to be successful.

“**When a manager and a regional director are in sync, the property is much better off.**”

– Anthony Gragnano, regional director

Access to Specialized Expertise

Your manager and staff should be able to get the advice and support of experts for issues that require specialized knowledge. When your manager has a team of professionals backing them up — including accounting, legal, training, engineering, human resources and technology support — you can be sure that the information they receive and the recommendations they follow are well founded.



Technology Support



The right association management tools can help managers do their jobs more efficiently. When technology professionals are part of the management team, those tools can be tailored and updated according to customer needs. In-house technical support also means shorter turnaround times with no third-party exposure of sensitive information.

Tools should provide managers with visibility into needed information, flexible access and communication capabilities. They should also help on-site staff better manage services and activities.

Visibility

Managers and other members of the management team should have tools that enable them to quickly see the status of work orders, payments and violations, as well as view community documents, such as financial summaries and policies. These tools should also provide them with access to analytical data that they can use to help contain your community's costs and streamline your operations.

Flexible Access

If a manager can update information electronically no matter where they are (such as the status of

on-site work or resident payments), residents and board members can stay current about these issues by looking online rather than by contacting their manager. This frees up the manager to tend to other community matters. In addition, a technology tool that enables flexible access makes it easy for a manager (or other assigned staff member) to log violations, needed repairs or other issues in real time.

Communication

A manager's responsiveness often depends on the effectiveness of the tools they use. Their technology should make it easy for them to communicate instantly with board members and residents, as well as send out mass communications about important events or emergency situations through email blasts, texts and automated phone calls.

Service Management

Depending on your community's offerings, you may have the option of making golf, spa or fitness class reservations; requesting valet parking or concierge services; or seeing if packages have been delivered. Your on-site staff is usually responsible for managing these services, so a tool that helps them effectively do that can be a real asset.

Signs of a MANAGEMENT “DREAM TEAM”

Use this checklist to identify a highly qualified management team.



WHAT TO ASK

WHAT TO EXPECT

1

What qualities does our management company look for when evaluating candidates for association management roles?

- People person
- Genuinely caring
- Leadership aptitude
- Strategic thinking
- Emotional intelligence
- Proactive
- Motivated
- Adaptable
- Empathetic
- Self-aware
- Calm problem-solver

2

Do community association managers have professional credentials? Which ones?

- Designations granted by the Community Associations Institute (CAI), such as:
 - Association Management Specialist (AMS)
 - Large-Scale Manager (LSM)
 - Professional Community Association Manager (PCAM)
- Certified Manager of Community Associations (CMCA) designation granted by the Community Association Managers International Certification Board (CAMICB)

3

How does our management company support the training and development of managers and on-site staff?

- In-house training professionals
- Learning programs designed according to role
- Manager coaching by experienced regional directors

4

What other types of training does our management company encourage managers to do?

- Outside courses
- Attendance at seminars
- Participation at conferences

5

Besides my manager, who else is on my management team?

- Administrative support (as needed) from an assistant manager, coordinator and/or administrative assistant
- Support from their regional director
- In-house professionals with specialized expertise in accounting, human resources, IT, etc.

6

Does our management company provide managers and on-site staff with technology support and tools to help them?

- In-house technology staff
- Visibility into project and account status, work orders and community documents
- Flexibility for managers to update information electronically anytime, from anywhere
- Ability for on-site staff to more easily manage reservations and other resident services

Teamwork: The Key to Exceptional Service



It may take time to uncover whether your community will have the support of a management team that has what it takes to give your association exceptional service, but it's a critical part of your evaluation process. In the long run, making the effort up front to ensure that you have highly qualified people working for you will have a big impact on property values and resident lifestyles. Use this guide so you'll know you're getting the dream team you deserve.

To learn more about how to identify the right management team for your community or building, [contact FirstService Residential today!](#)



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About FirstService Residential

FirstService Residential is North America's property management leader, partnering with 8,500 communities across the U.S. and Canada. HOAs, community associations, condos and strata corporations rely on our extensive experience, resources and local expertise to maximize their property values and enhance their residents' lifestyles. Dedicated to making a difference, every day, we go above and beyond to deliver exceptional service. FirstService Residential is a subsidiary of FirstService Corporation (FSV), a North American leader in the property services sector. Find out how we can help your community thrive. Visit www.fsresidential.com/california today!

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