

White Glove Security Enhances Bottom Line Real Estate Value

The Importance of a Residential Security Program with a Strong Customer Service Focus

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Property managers at residential communities wear a lot of hats from filling vacancies and negotiating and enforcing leases, to maintaining the building and property, and securing the premises. To be successful, property managers need the support of their entire team – including security. A comprehensive physical security program at a residential property should extend far beyond the typical security responsibilities to also include a strong focus on customer service. Security officers should contribute to an environment that makes tenants and visitors feel safe and welcome, and encourages people to consider the community as their future home.

Property managers understand that savvy real estate buyers and leaseholders carefully review neighborhood statistics and demographics which include crime rates. Residential communities that employ quality security professionals are better able to deter crime and respond to and recover from emergencies, therein making these residences a more favorable place to live and a safer investment.

In addition, today's residential security professional is trained to maintain a safe and secure environment, as well as learn the culture of the property and deliver outstanding and personalized customer service. In my role at a leading physical security services company, I oversee residential security teams servicing gated communities and high rise dwellings. People who visit secure properties with a white glove approach to customer service gain a very favorable impression - which ultimately leads to higher market perceptions.

Security officers often serve as the first and last impression of a residential community, complex or building. It is important that residents, their families and their guests feel safe, secure and welcome. Security officers trained specifically for residential properties understand the need for a careful balance when developing and maintaining a secure yet friendly atmosphere.

Amazon's founder, Jeff Bezos said that, "if you do build a great experience, customers tell each other about that. Word of mouth is very powerful." Delivering a white glove customer service experience is the strategy of anticipating a customer's needs and providing an exceptional and unforgettable experience. Property managers who strive to deliver a high level of customer service recognize the opportunity in partnering with a security officer provider that can support this effort.

What type of security professionals make the best fit for residential communities? It is important for the security contractor to employ friendly, confident security professionals who enjoy working with the public and who are attentive to detail so they can carry out the important tasks of their posts and patrols, while also serving as a good representative of the property or management company. Security officers should be personable and have good language skills so that they can easily communicate with both residents and visitors.

A residential security officer acts as an ambassador who, as the initial point of contact, can make a critical difference with the resident/visitor experience. A people- and service-oriented mentality is key. A customer service-minded security officer is in tune with the needs of the property and seeks out opportunities to go the extra mile – and is prepared to do so. An example is a security officer at a pet-friendly community who keeps unexpected treats - dog biscuits - in the gate house. When a resident or visitor with a dog passes by, they are offered a special treat for their pet. Another example is a security team that keeps umbrellas at the front desk for use by tenants and their guests. These small but impactful gestures are part of the mission to deliver a white glove customer service experience and reinforce the value of the property.

To meet all of the property's needs, including customer service, training is critical. Property managers will be more satisfied with their security officers' performance when they align with a security provider that places great value on the importance of training. Security officer learning should be wide ranging, covering everything from residential patrol techniques and access control to customer service, emergency response procedures and, if desired by the property manager, CPR.

Customer Service Creates Security and Property Success

Training and a dedication to helping the residents at the community where she is assigned were critical to the heroic events behind a Security Officer of the Year award winner for Myisha Pullum. Each year, one security officer in the United States is recognized for outstanding service and actions in the security profession with this award by the ASIS Security Services Council. Pullum was conducting rounds at the Coronado Shores condominium complex in Coronado, CA, when she heard a commotion in the pool area.

“Officer Pullum came upon an unconscious child with a parent who was attempting to shake him to consciousness,” says Mark Merideth, District Manager, AlliedBarton Security Services. “Officer Pullum took control of the situation and began administering CPR. After five minutes of CPR, water was expelled from the child’s lungs, and the child began to breathe on his own.”

“Lifeguards from the City of Coronado, police and paramedics then arrived to assist,” says Merideth. “The responding police officers and paramedics commended Officer Pullum for her immediate actions and said she likely saved the life of the child. The child was treated at a local hospital and was released in good health.”

Officer Pullum’s concern for the safety of the community she serves did not end when the paramedics intervened. Recognizing the continued need for her services, and the need for privacy for the family involved, Pullum quickly directed guests to leave the area and helped clear a safe path for paramedics to take the child to the ambulance. Residents there feel comforted knowing that they have the eyes and ears of security trained to help ensure their well-being.

An affinity for customer service and sensitivity to protect resident’s private homes is also evident in the security program at the Blue & Green Diamond Condominiums in Miami Beach, Florida.

A high level of security for this pristine beachfront property starts with assigning customer service-oriented security officers to control access points. The main entrance separates two towers and all individuals must enter there before going into the Blue or Green Diamond. Another access point is the pool area. Many of the Blue & Green Diamond’s residents and guests utilize the large, ocean-side swimming pool with two hot tubs and a separate children’s pool. Since it is ocean-side, there is direct beach access. Although the Blue & Green property and pool area is closed off with a gate, it is vital that access only be granted to Blue & Green Diamond residents and guests. This requires a security team that can create an environment that is friendly and welcoming to residents and guest, while also carefully monitoring access. Interlopers need to be turned away in a polite yet firm manner.

To monitor the property’s marina, the security team uses CCTV cameras to identify unauthorized boats or individuals. The officers also physically inspect the area and are a presence at the marina to help deter crime. The Blue & Green Diamond property manager credits the security program as a contributing factor to the decrease in crime in the neighborhood.

The Right Fit for Your Property

It is important to keep in mind that not all residential security programs are the same. When selecting a security partner for a customer service focused program, property managers should look for the following:

- ◆ Industry-specific Expertise – Securing a residential community is very different than securing a manufacturing facility. The right security partner will have not only extensive residential property experience but also expertise in customer service.
- ◆ Focused Recruiting – Security officer selection is critical. Not every security officer is cut out for a very public facing, multi-faceted role. The ability to both secure and welcome is a unique talent and the security officers filling that role must be carefully screened and selected.
- ◆ Emergency Response – Your security provider should have the local management support and manpower to handle emergencies. A natural disaster that leaves the community without power or

makes a primary exit road impassible should be considered as part of the security program development. While no security measure can prevent these occurrences, communication, preparedness and evacuation plans are needed.

- ◆ Communication – Customer service and communication go hand in hand. The security provider should be open to communication from not just the property manager but the homeowners as well. Security needs to be informed of extended house guests, resident vacations and safety issues on property.
- ◆ Residential Security Training – Security training needs to be specific to your needs and continuously accessible to the security team. Training should cover a range of areas including customer service, fire safety training, emergency preparedness, evacuation procedures, residential security basics and effective patrolling techniques.
- ◆ Tailored Solutions – Before mapping out your security solution, the provider should become knowledgeable about your neighborhood, your residents and their guests and a host of other important areas, including your desired level of customer service, so that they can make appropriate recommendations.

A strong customer service philosophy within your security program can make a significant impact on your property. Well-trained security teams help a community feel safer and its residents to sleep easier knowing that their neighborhood is protected and that their real estate values will be strong.