



HOW TO HANDLE UNIT OWNERS WHO

ACT ABUSIVELY

A PROPERTY MANAGER SHARES TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR BY SHLOMO SHARON

It is common for a condominium corporation to have a unit owner who is unhappy with whatever is being done in the building, and always criticizes things and insists that things should have been done differently. This same owner may even sometimes complain about his fellow residents.

Complaints and criticism are one thing, and can certainly be valid. Sometimes, however, an owner crosses a line, acting abusively towards the management company's employees, the board, and other residents. Abusive behaviour can take the form of threatening e-mails and foul language, and in some instances can get physical.

As the condo corporation's governing body, the board is responsible for dealing with owners. Often, an owner who acts abusively is looking for a reaction. If the board keeps the following tips in mind when responding to such an owner, it has a better chance of

defusing the situation.

Set rules

If owners want to raise their concerns at a board meeting or annual general meeting (AGM), it's important to set ground rules.

Advise owners that they can make arrangements to present their concerns at the next board meeting, but attach a time limit to their presentation. Likewise, provide AGM attendees with rules of conduct before the meeting.

If owners interrupt, the chair can tell them they can't be heard at that time, as the meeting must proceed according to the agenda. However, these owners should be told that they will have a chance to speak at the appropriate time.

Establish zero tolerance for foul or abusive language.

Stay calm, stick to the facts

If an owner uses foul language in letters, e-mails, or phone calls to board members, management staff, contractors or other owners, tell the owner to stop. However, leave emotion out of it. One way of doing this is to simply say, "Your point has been noted and the matter will be

considered."

Ask the owner(s) to refrain from calling or suggest they take a different approach. It is very important that the board members and management staff never threaten owners.

If an AGM chair reacts emotionally to an owner who stands up and tries to control the meeting, that owner may escalate the disruptive exchange and force the chair to end the meeting. Remember that meetings are conducted in accordance with an agenda, and the chair should keep the meeting on track. If the disruption occurs during the "Other Business" section of the meeting, the chair should stick to the facts and avoid the emotional aspect.

Ensure safety

Given the risk that abusive behaviour can turn physical, it's important to ensure everyone's safety.

If an owner continues to be disruptive during an AGM, the chair should not hesitate to ask that owner to leave the meeting. The board should also advise the owner that the issue was noted and will be reviewed by the board at a different time.

If a disruptive owner refuses to leave

the meeting, call security and/or the police. As a last resort, this measure should only be used if the owner has refused to comply with the chair's direction. Sometimes, if the board is aware that an owner(s) might try to disrupt a meeting ahead of time, it may want to consider hiring a security company to be present, just in case.

It is important to keep a record of all the telephone calls, e-mails and letters that contain any harassing, abusive, or threatening comments. Ultimately, if an owner continues his or her abusive behaviour, the board should have the corporation's lawyer send that owner a letter.

Boards and management should always welcome an owner's legitimate concerns, even if it is coming from the same person time and again. However, it is important to distinguish between a chronic complainer and an owner who resorts to unacceptable behaviour.

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