

The Fine Art of Taking Service Request

Response to a Resident's request for "service" is perhaps the single most important factor in Resident retention. And most often, that request for service is maintenance . . . repairs or upgrades in the Resident's apartment home. The attitude of the staff in handling a Service Request, the response time, and the manner in which the work is done will significantly affect the Resident's decision to refer their friends to the community, renew their lease, and even pay their rent promptly.

Most apartment communities offer an online option for requesting service. Depending upon the profile of the community, this may be the communication method of choice for most residents. Yet, the online service request creates an additional challenge and opportunity. The challenge is how to create that special "connection" with your residents who request service virtually. 24/7 access through your property's resident portal is something that will be expected by your resident. The opportunity is turning the online service request into a memorable and unique experience for your resident.

SERVICE REQUESTS --

An Opportunity for The On-site Service Staff

The activity of taking a request for maintenance service from a Resident gives the on-site staff the chance to shine. SERVICE REQUESTS are not simply a part of the on-site person's job. Properly handling a Resident's SERVICE REQUEST gives the on-site team a unique opportunity to accomplish five things that affect occupancy, retention, expenses, and, of course, Net Operating Income. The appropriate response to a SERVICE REQUEST provides the unique opportunity to:

1. **Show Real Service** - Demonstrate that all the promises about "great service" made during the leasing presentation are backed up by prompt, friendly, and efficient "action." No "lip" service — just *real* service.
2. **Promote Goodwill** - Create another positive contact with the Resident by taking the SERVICE REQUEST in a Friendly, Enthusiastic, and Professional manner.
3. **Save Maintenance Costs** - Correct minor maintenance problems before they become major, expensive maintenance headaches.
4. **See the Apartment Home** - See the interior of the apartment home, an inspection!
5. **Create Additional Value** – Remind the resident of what this service would cost IF they were not a Resident in your community.

SERVICE REQUESTS ARE NOT COMPLAINTS

When a Resident moves into a professionally managed apartment community, he or she gets more than four walls and a roof over their head. They also rent service — maintenance service — for the entire term of their lease . . . something like an “Extended Service Warranty” you would get at an electronics or appliance store. But the Resident’s maintenance warranty comes free with their monthly rental payments. We hold this “service” for the Resident at the office . . . until the time they call and request it. When a SERVICE REQUEST is made, it's not a complaint. The Resident is not asking for something unusual, special, or out of the ordinary. Nor is the SERVICE REQUEST a surprise or hassle to the on-site team.

A SERVICE REQUEST is nothing more than the Resident emailing, texting, calling or dropping by the office to pick up something for which they have already paid. He or she owns this service, and the on-site staff *expects* the Resident to contact them anytime of the day or night to "request" it.

Don't look at a SERVICE REQUEST as a annoyance or complaint. A complaint is usually something unsolicited. We have already sold our maintenance service to the Resident and have agreed to "store" it for them in the office. They can pick it up whenever they want. Besides, if the On-site Professional calls a SERVICE REQUEST a complaint or problem, consider what it does to the attitude of the maintenance staff. Who wants to deal with another "complaint" or “problem?” Yet, handling a "request" is much more pleasant.

"FEP" SERVICE —

Friendly, Enthusiastic, and Professional

Disposition, attitude, and, most important, one's *visible actions* are key in properly handling a Resident's request for maintenance service. Be 100% **FEP** when a Resident makes a SERVICE REQUEST. A **FEP** On-site Professional is Friendly, Enthusiastic, and Professional.

☺ **Friendly** - Nothing can replace friendliness. When a Resident calls or drops by the office to request maintenance service, it's not enough to BE friendly. You must be PERCEIVED by the Resident as friendly. An Onsite Professional may be the most friendly person in town, but if they don't come across that way to the Resident, then they are not friendly. The good news is that even on those days when you don't "feel" friendly, you can still ACT friendly. Then, as far as the Resident is concerned, the On-Site Professional IS friendly. When a Resident walks in the door, your aura should be glowing like a huge neon sign above your head that says,

"WOW! I'M GLAD YOU'RE HERE!"

☺ **Enthusiastic** - When a Resident requests service, the On-site Professional must be even more excited to see or hear from the Resident than the day the Resident first leased. Remember, on the Resident's first visit to the community, they were just a prospect. . .now they are rent-paying customer! The Resident deserves even more of our ENTHUSIASM now because they are a member of the apartment community. What a terrible shame if a call or visit by a Resident is received with a ho-hum attitude, while we practically throw a homecoming party for a perfect stranger, a rental prospect. Taking the SERVICE REQUEST gives the On-site Professional the opportunity to show the Resident that all the enthusiastic attention he or she received during the initial leasing presentation was not just insincere hype. It's a chance to demonstrate that we really care, even after the “sale!”

- ☺ **Professional** - How one looks is just the beginning of professionalism. Certainly, the On-site Professional must dress in appropriate business attire. Yet, more important than how you look is how you “**BE.**” Being professional means one has discretion, knowledge, and experience to say and do the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, **RIGHT NOW.** The **PROFESSIONAL** knows the proper response to tough questions about service requests that come from Residents every day. They know how to defuse an angry Resident without promising a response that would be unrealistic or impossible.
- PROFESSIONALISM** is the ability to handle every situation in a way that maximizes goodwill between the Resident and the apartment community and reduces Resident discomfort and unhappiness.

TAKING A SERVICE REQUEST

1. **Write It Down!** Never try to take a SERVICE REQUEST by memory with the intention of verbally delivering it to the Maintenance Technician. A Resident's request for service is much too important an item to trust your memory! Write or keyboard the SERVICE REQUEST in detail on a comprehensive SERVICE REQUEST form. Input the request for the resident if they have walked into your office or initiated a phone call. Why direct the resident back to your online portal when you can easily input the request for them?
2. **Get the Details!** Below are seven items of information that are essential for any properly handled SERVICE REQUEST.
 - ✓ **Name** - Get the caller's name, and check to see if they are, in fact, a Resident, lessee, or occupant. If not, get the person's name who signed the lease for the apartment.
 - ✓ **Date and Time** - Not only is the day and date of the SERVICE REQUEST important, but also the precise TIME of the call, note, or in-person request. (On requests written by the Resident, note the earliest time that the on-site staff became aware of the SERVICE REQUEST). The time of the request allows management to monitor the appropriateness of the response time to each SERVICE REQUEST.
 - ✓ **Apartment Home Address and Unit #** - Make sure you include the full address in case there are duplicate apartment numbers at the community.
 - ✓ **Mobile and Work Phone Numbers** - Insist that the Resident give a daytime and evening telephone number so the on-site staff can follow up if there are any questions or problems completing the SERVICE REQUEST. This is also an ideal time to update the Resident's information for the property. It's amazing how a Resident with "no phone" suddenly has all types of phone numbers when they need maintenance service.
 - ✓ **Detailed Explanation of Maintenance Requested** - The fastest way to drive a good Maintenance Technician "nuts" is to give sketchy information on the SERVICE REQUEST. An inadequate explanation, such as "Leak in Bathroom," can be very confusing, frustrating, and brings up lots of questions such as:

Which bathroom?	Is it damaging the unit?
What kind of leak?	What is the priority?
Clean water or sewage?	Sink, tub, or commode?

When the Resident calls, texts, or emails with a "leak in the bathroom", the On-site Professional digs for details. Here is an example of the line of questioning that would provide enough information to help the Service Tech handle the problem most effectively and timely.

Example Script for Taking a Service Request

On-Site Professional: “Thank you for calling the Barrington Apartments.”

Resident: “Oh, hello. Listen, I live here and I have a leak in the bathroom.”

OP: (Very sincerely) “Oh, I am sorry to hear that. I’ll be happy to help you. This is Phillip. May I get your name?”

R: “This is Mrs. Pace, Mimi Pace. I have lived here for seven years.”

OP: (Again, very friendly and genuine) “Yes, mam! How are you Mrs. Pace?”

R: “I’m okay, but I have this water leak.”

OP: “Don’t worry! We’ll take care of it. Now if I recall, you are in Apartment Home #142. Is that leak in the hall bathroom or the one in your master bedroom?”

R: “Well, it’s in the bedroom, and it’s very annoying.”

OP: So that we can take care of it quickly, let me make sure I understand the details. Is it a sink faucet leak or something else?”

R: “No, it’s not the sink. It’s on the floor around the commode.”

OP: “Okay. Is the water clean or is it kind of dirty?”

R: “I think it’s clean. It doesn’t smell or anything.”

OP: “So, it’s probably not a sewage problem. Is it coming from the back of the commode, perhaps where the water tank is connected to the commode bowl?”

R: “Oh, hold on . . . let me look. (. . . a few moments past . . .) Yes, that’s what’s happening. It’s leaking from the thing that holds the water, the tank.”

OP: “How fast is it dripping?”

R: “Not real fast. There is a little puddle of water each morning when I get up. But after I wipe it up, I don’t notice any water for several hours. But I slipped on the water this morning and almost fell.”

OP: “Mrs. Pace, you stay at home most of the day, don’t you?”

R: "Oh, yes. I don't get out much since my husband passed away. And at my age, it's hard getting out in this heat!"

OP: "Mrs. Pace, we don't want you to slip and fall, so please be careful. I'm going to schedule Jimmy to come over this afternoon between 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. Is that okay?"

R: "Yes, that would be fine."

OP: "While he's in your apartment, I'm also going to have him check your air-conditioner and change the filter so we can keep you nice and cool."

R: "Oh that will be nice. Thank you."

OP: "You're very welcome. That's what we're here for! Is there anything else I can help you with?"

R: "No that will do it."

OP: "Before you go, let me get your telephone number in case something comes up."

R: "Okay, my mobile. It's still (469) 692-4913."

OP: "Great! Thanks for calling, Mrs. Pace. We're really glad to help — and to have you as a Resident. Do not hesitate to call if you have any more service needs."

R: "Okay, thank you, Phillip. Goodbye."

3. **Don't Forget These Extras** - In addition to the Resident's name, date and time of request, apartment number and address, mobile and work phone numbers, and a detailed explanation of the maintenance requested, include the two items below:

- ✓ **Comments or Promises Made to the Resident** - Record any significant comments made to the Resident . . . especially any promises or time frame mentioned for completing the SERVICE REQUEST. Again, the more detail, the better.
- ✓ **Name of On-Site Person Taking the Service Request** - Finally, the individual who takes and writes the request signs their name in case anyone has questions.

Does taking this much detail sound too time consuming? Remember, it takes much less time than what can be wasted if the Maintenance Tech cannot understand the problem and has to make several trips back and forth from the apartment to get the right tools or parts. And this time -- doing it right the first time -- will save you time compared to the "hours" you will spend with an angry Resident whose request for service was overlooked, incorrectly prioritized, or just not fully completed.

**TAKE THE LITTLE EXTRA TIME TO GET THE DETAILS
and Save Much Time in Dealing with Call Backs and Unhappy Residents**

The Service Request Promise

1st - Do exactly what you say you will do.

2nd - Do it right the first time!