

Staff Matters.

If board, management, and staff aren't working together, the building will suffer.

Brian Scally, vice president and director of management at Garthchester Realty



Isn't staffing a building one of a manager's biggest challenges?

Absolutely. We took over management of a property in Westchester a while ago, and the board members were very dissatisfied with the level of service they were receiving from the superintendent and the staff. They felt the building wasn't maintained in a proper fashion.

How did you address their dissatisfaction?

When we take on a building, my property manager will walk from the roof to the basement with the super and the staff, taking notes. The manager will then point out some things that are done well, some things that can be done better, and things that we expect to be continually maintained in a better fashion. We do this as a group because we want everybody to be on the same page so we can describe exactly what we see and what we want addressed going forward.

So what was the problem with this Westchester staff?

The superintendent wasn't providing the staff with direction. The staff was doing what they could do, but the superintendent wasn't actually working. He would sit in his office, or he would leave the property during the day, and the board was becoming disgruntled with this because the members felt that they were paying for services they weren't getting. They had to pay outside contractors to fix things or paint things that the staff could have handled, but wasn't.

Who's responsible for getting the super to do his or her job?

It's a team effort between the board and the property manager. If the board is not happy and wants to see things done, the property manager

has to convey that to the superintendent and the staff. If the property manager isn't directing the staff, the staff is not usually going to be proactive. Some are, but in this particular instance, they were not. So when we came in, we explained what we expected, and we laid out the protocol to be followed.

Did they follow it?

Unfortunately, the porters bought in, but the super did not. He was a 25- to 30-year employee. He felt it wasn't his job to do certain things, so he would sit in his office or he wouldn't be there. What we had to do is what's called progressive discipline. We had to explain to the superintendent – and we do these things in writing so they're documented – that we were giving him a directive. If that directive was not followed, we're going to give a verbal warning that's also in writing. So now that's one write-up. That write-up is sent to the union, to the employee, and it's put in the employee's record in my office.

The third time he refuses to follow an order, he gets suspended. After that, I terminate. I can then go to the union and say, "Look, I have progressive discipline. I've instructed this employee on multiple occasions, in writing, and he or she refuses to do this work." As long as I have everything in writing, 99 percent of the time we'll be backed by the union.

So you got rid of the super?

Yes. The board selected a new superintendent. He gives the staff directives and inspects the building on a daily basis. He's making sure that everything that the board and management want is being done. If he sees something, he'll jump in. It has given the building a cleaner appearance and it has also saved money because things that the old super would call out for now are being done by the staff. So it's a win-win, and everybody's happy. ■