

Preventing Manager Fatigue Syndrome

How can management company executives help save managers from burnout?

BY EMILY YOST



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Let's face it. Association residents don't often pick up the phone to share how much they love their managers. When homeowners do call, it's usually about a problem, which they expect to be remedied quickly. And stressful interactions like these, coupled with other work responsibilities, can be taxing.

So what can management company executives do to help prevent managers from suffering burnout?

BALANCE PORTFOLIOS

"From a customer service standpoint, we've found that we cannot over assign or overload a manager with too many properties, so we balance their portfolios," says Larry Riddlehoover, CMCA, AMS, PCAM, president

of Southern Community Services, AAMC, in Columbia, S.C. "It's important that managers have some easy accounts (along with the) more challenging or time-consuming ones. As we hire new managers, we take properties off of senior managers—thus eliminating excess workload."

LIMIT NIGHTTIME MEETINGS

"We watch very closely the number of nighttime meetings our managers attend," says Ron Weinhold, AMS, PCAM, vice president of Talis Management Group, AAMC, in Raleigh, N.C. "We ... ensure that the total number of meetings (managers will be responsible for is limited to six to eight per month. Any more than that, and you're going to burn out your manager." »

Since nighttime meetings limit the time managers have to be with their families and recharge, some management company executives eliminate night meetings altogether.

For instance, at Emerald Coast Association Management in Miramar Beach, Fla., all meetings occur during standard business hours; the latest meeting is scheduled no later than 4:30 p.m., according to Jay Gelder, CMCA, AMS, PCAM, the company's president and CEO.

If a client community's board adamantly requires a nighttime or weekend meeting, the association is charged an additional fee for that service, and the fee is given to the manager who handles that account.

"I tell my clients that, just like other professional service providers, such as an attorney or a doctor, you pay extra to see our managers in off hours," Gelder says.

Managers need to decompress, so executives should limit—or eliminate altogether—on-call hours.

ABOLISH AFTER-HOURS CALLS

Managers need to decompress, so executives also should limit—or eliminate altogether—on-call hours. Consider hiring an answering service that alerts managers to a call via text and provides them with callback numbers. A manager can determine if an issue warrants returning a call or waiting until the following workday.

If hiring an outside service isn't in the budget, consider rotating managers to ensure that everyone has adequate time off from after-hours calls.

OFFER NON-MONETARY BENEFITS

While managers should receive competitive salaries and benefits packages, other non-monetary benefits—like administrative support, flextime and ongoing education—also can help ease job stress.



"We are generous with salaries and time away from the office ... to relax and recharge," Ridlehoover adds. "We understand that many managers are reluctant to take time off because they're concerned about the mountain of paperwork waiting for them when they return. We eliminate that stress by always having part-time, on-call employees (who) support the manager. The intent is, when (managers) return, they aren't overloaded, but refreshed and ready to conquer."

At Talis Management, each newly hired manager handles his or her own administrative work at first, in addition to management responsibilities, according to Weinhold. "Once (a manager's) portfolio grows, we assign a dedicated administrative assistant," he says. "Because the manager (now) knows what the assistant does, he or she can empathize, recognize the workload

and set proper expectations. We've also found this philosophy provides Talis Management with a built-in growth pattern. Managers work hard to ensure their portfolios grow, and they obtain an administrative assistant's support."

FLEXTIME, TELECOMMUTING AND EDUCATION

Managers don't always have to be in the office to get the job done. Consider offering flextime, along with the login to the company's servers, so managers can work remotely from home.

On-the-job training is important, but ongoing education is essential for both the manager's and the company's success. "Education boosts managers' confidence and gives them a sense of pride in their work," says Gelder.

Like many others, his management company, Emerald Coast, invests in its employees' education. And Weinhold's company pays all transportation and lodging costs associated with managers' education.

"We require our managers to have their CCAM, and we encourage them to get their PCAM designation," he says. "Education makes them better managers. The more competent a person is, the easier it is to do the job."

OTHER STRESS RELIEVERS

Management company executives can create a positive, supportive, team-oriented office culture in a number of other ways, too, including:

- **Hold monthly manager meetings,** and bring in industry experts—like legal or insurance professionals—to discuss hot industry topics. Such encounters can provide educational opportunities that build manager confidence, as well as a forum where managers and team leaders can interact, discuss challenges and find solutions together.

- **Meet with each manager individually and regularly** to stay engaged and be aware of what challenges are unique to that person.

■ **Hold periodic social functions.**

Events like lunches or golf outings can help foster a team culture and allow managers to network and decompress.

■ **Look for ways to broadcast managers' success to the entire office.**

"We encourage employees to ask clients to put a good review on Google or Yelp," says Weinhold. "When the reviews go up, the employee who was talked about positively gets a car wash gift certificate."

■ **Include managers in the hiring process.**

By taking part in hiring the latest team member, managers are more invested in the newest recruit's success. "When we hire, it is a cooperative effort," says Weinhold, who adds that training a new hire is an immense undertaking.

"The ramp-up is long and requires a lot of support from fellow employees. When a new employee is hired, that new hire truly has the support of everyone in the office."

■ **Increase efficiency with online tools that can eliminate time-con-**

suming administrative tasks and allow managers to devote more time and energy to customer service.

According to Ridlehoover, two innovations in particular—Smartwebs, which provides virtual maps, GPS navigation and color-coded house icons that represent activity for each property, and StrongRoom, which processes paper

and electronic invoices remotely—have increased SCS managers' efficiency and created more streamlined communications between the front and back offices.

Managers who know you have their best interests at heart will be the most productive—and the most loyal.

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