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# Pearls of Wisdom

*130 Cultured Gems for Community  
Association Living—and Leading*

**H. Jackson Brown, Jr.**, wrote *Life's Little Instruction Book* to provide his son with wisdom he could refer to as he lived his life. In that same spirit, CAI leaders throughout the years have shared their advice and pearls of wisdom for better community association life. Here then are 130 tips to guide you and to ensure that your community association experience enhances your life and your community.

### BE A GOOD HOMEOWNER

1. Review the covenants, conditions and restrictions (CC&Rs) and other association documents before you buy a home.
2. Read them again when you move in.
3. Pay your assessments—on time.
4. Attend the annual meeting.
5. Read the newsletter and the minutes of association meetings.
6. Follow the rules.
7. Serve on a committee.
8. Serve on the board or, at a minimum, attend board meetings.
9. Don't expect someone else to do it for you.
10. Help organize a community event—a food drive, holiday gift drive, or social event.
11. Vote in community-wide referendums.
12. Volunteer to serve your community.
13. Consider how your particular knowledge, skills, and experience can help the community.

14. Remember that you are a member of the community association. What is good for the association is good for you.

### BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR

15. Curb thy dog.
16. Keep televisions and music at reasonable volumes.
17. Park in your own space(s).
18. Don't be a six-car family.
19. Take care of your property.
20. Help form a neighborhood watch.
21. Walk softly.
22. Share a smile with a neighbor.
23. Offer to lend a hand.
24. Welcome new neighbors into the community.
25. Nurture relationships.
26. Talk about problems. Direct conversation is more effective than sending a letter or banging on a wall.

### BE A GOOD BOARD MEMBER

27. Serve because you care about your neighborhood, not because you have a hidden agenda.
28. Use CAI courses and information to learn how to run a community association and work most effectively with others in your community.
29. Study the documents before you enforce them.

30. Conduct a reserve study and update it on a regular basis.
31. Let the manager manage.
32. Focus on policies, plans, and objectives.
33. Communicate, communicate and communicate some more.
34. Seek the advice of qualified professionals.
35. Make decisions with the common good in mind, not self-interest.
36. Educate residents.
37. Stay on top of association management trends.
38. Build alignment and consensus within communities.
39. Anticipate and prevent conflicts.
40. Remember your fiduciary duty to protect, preserve, and enhance the value of the property.

### BE A GOOD LEADER

41. Provide community leadership.
42. Establish and articulate goals.
43. Define clear expectations.
44. Don't put things off.
45. Set high standards.
46. Make thoughtful and timely decisions.
47. Do what is right, not necessarily what is popular.
48. Ask others for help and input.
49. Plan and save for the future.
50. Say thank you—send a note, make a call.
51. Say please.
52. Build consensus.
53. Be an advocate.
54. Encourage strategic planning.
55. Execute with excellence.

### HAVE PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS

56. Distribute materials—financial reports, agenda, etc.—to board members at least a few days before board meetings.

57. Review this material.
58. Prepare a timed agenda and follow it.
59. Use the rules of parliamentary procedure.
60. Don't let meetings turn into non-productive social events.
61. Listen.
62. Be polite.
63. Hold open meetings, where all owners can attend.
64. Include an open forum on your agenda.
65. Make sure a quorum is present.

### **WORK WITH COMMITTEES**

66. Define the committee's purpose.
67. Support and encourage committee members—remember they are your future leaders.
68. Keep in touch with them.
69. Seek their opinions.
70. Ensure that they follow the rules of parliamentary procedure.
71. Work with committees to establish realistic objectives and deadlines.
72. Remember, committees typically offer recommendations, not solutions.
73. Offer them praise and acceptance. Cheer, thank, and recognize them.

### **DEVELOP A SUCCESSFUL BUDGET**

74. Obtain input from owners, board members, committees, and management.
75. Conduct research to ensure the budget is based on accurate information and projections.
76. Develop a month-by-month evaluation—don't just divide by 12.

77. Talk with service providers and professional suppliers to estimate costs.
78. Be realistic.
79. Raise assessments when necessary, and explain clearly why this is necessary.
80. Communicate the budget to members in advance of the new fiscal year.
81. Look for ways to control expenses, but don't reduce the level or quality of services without seeking input and advising the owners.

### **SEEK COMPLIANCE WITH RULES AND DEED RESTRICTIONS**

82. Give residents a voice when creating a rule.
83. Communicate the rules to residents.
84. Make rules specific and reasonable.
85. Review the rules—new ones may be needed, old ones may need to be discarded.
86. Make the first contact with violators informal and in person if possible.
87. Never “look the other way.”
88. Offer compromises.
89. Hold a hearing.
90. Try arbitration or mediation.
91. Hold public meetings on controversial rules.
92. Be consistent.
93. Be reasonable.
94. Give clear and proper notice.
95. Practice due process.

### **TENANTS AND KIDS, PARKING AND PETS**

96. Tenants are not outcasts. Involve them in the community.
97. Publish a tenant's handbook.
98. Invite children to help organize events.
99. Give children a place to play.
100. Tow cars only as a last resort, and after you have given notice.
101. Place parking signs where they can be seen.
102. Give pets a place to walk.

### **WORK WITH DIFFICULT PERSONALITIES**

103. Remember, constructive criticism provides impetus to positive change.
104. Be diplomatic.
105. Listen.
106. Be interested.
107. Remain calm.
108. Work together – two people cooperating are more effective than one person telling another to change.
109. Never complain about complainers—your words will get back to you.
110. Invite them to volunteer.

### **FOSTER COMMUNITY SPIRIT**

111. Recruit new residents to volunteer.
112. Promote volunteerism as a positive experience—and make it a positive experience.



- 113. Be enthusiastic.
- 114. Publicize the association's accomplishments.
- 115. Recognize volunteers.
- 116. Give awards.
- 117. Meet people.
- 118. Hold social events and "meet your neighbors" nights.
- 119. Offer motivation for serving.
- 120. Invite people to volunteer via the newsletter, in-house bulletins, and through face-to-face contacts.

- 121. Print a community t-shirt.
- 122. Recognize children in the community who are on honor role, in sports, or for other special achievements.
- 123. Conduct surveys to gauge community opinion and solicit input.
- 124. Use e-mail and a Web site.

- 127. Make yourself available to new board members.
- 128. Continue to read the newsletter.
- 129. Pat yourself on the back.
- 130. Share the positive rewards of volunteering.

### KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO GO

- 125. Check your blood pressure.
- 126. If you're burned out, get out. New volunteers can offer new energy and ideas.

# pearls

## Community Associations Institute (CAI)

Founded in 1973 as a multidisciplinary, nonprofit alliance serving all stakeholders in community associations, CAI is the only national organization dedicated to fostering vibrant, responsive, competent community associations.

CAI is regarded as the national expert in educational programs and publications about community association governance, operations, and management. CAI's members look to us for information about educational opportunities, technologies, and better ways to run their communities.

CAI has more than 15,000 members in 55 chapters throughout the United States and in several foreign countries.

To learn more about CAI member benefits, services and products, visit [www.caionline.org](http://www.caionline.org) or call (703) 548-8600, M-F, 9-5 ET.

*We thank all members and staff, past and present, who offered pearls of wisdom reflected here.*

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