

Gables Engages In Relationship Leasing and Customer Service A Match Made in Heaven!

Though the phrase “relationship selling” may be a bit overused, most Leasing Professionals and their companies have become entrenched in this non-manipulative, people-oriented approach to leasing. The idea is that to make a lease you must first make a friend.

Relationship leasing is built on the foundation of mutual trust. The Leasing Professional does not trick or force the prospect to lease. Rather, the decision to commit is collaboration between salesperson and prospect who together explore the benefits of leasing at a certain community. The key concepts are trust, openness, and a non-manipulative leasing style. Customer Service based leasing is not about leasing “customer service”. It is about using basic customer service concepts and fundamentals as key forces in a persuasive and direct leasing presentation.

“The same key concepts in our leasing and sales training are key concepts in our resident service training modules,” says **Greg Gasior**, National Director of Training for Gables Residential. “The first encounter with our associates can set the prospect’s mood for the remainder of their visit or stay at our community.” Both sales and customer service are all about relationship and respect. These two concepts share many of the same elements. Gables Residential monitors their customer service skills through their ongoing shopping program. Gasior explains that the Gables Leasing Associates are trained to treat each customer as they would a friend or family member. “We want our customers to walk away with the feeling of trust and a sense of friendship with our sales professionals.” He continues, “Our associates strive to build a rapport with each customer they encounter.” This kind of relationship goes beyond simply sales. Measured by their shops, these issues are customer service principles!

Jana Muma, Gables Residential Vice President of Training tells us, “First and foremost, we develop a relationship that is warm and inviting. Whether online, by phone, or face-to-face, the Gables Residential Leasing Associates will strive to connect with the prospect in a way that implants the idea of renewing from the very beginning.” Muma’s company does even more to entice future renewals and long-term residency by introducing the Gables “Great Rewards” program in the initial sales presentation.

With the “Great Rewards” card, all new residents get immediate discounts to major retailers and service providers such as AMC Theaters, Linens & Things, Costco, and AirTrans. Yet, the Leasing Professional also explains the added bonuses as residents celebrate their first, second, and each additional anniversary at the Gables community. After one year’s residency a resident receives a carpet shampoo, for two years a free patio detail, for four years a full carpet replacement, and so forth. Muma continues, “By selling the Great Rewards program in our leasing presentation, we communicate our expectation that the prospect will want to renew in the future as they anticipate the benefits and rewards they receive as a Gables resident”. This program also promotes brand loyalty since it is transferable to any other Gables community nationwide.

Gables also employs a *Ritz-Carlton-like* performance standard called the ***12 Pledges to Customer Service***. This service promise is framed in each office for every staff member, resident, and rental prospect to see. Not only does this assurance of “service above and beyond” define the core teachings of the Gables Residential new employee orientation, it is also part of every sales presentation. Demonstrating customer service and showcasing the many resident services offered by the particular Gables community IS the most powerful sales technique.

By *servicing* rather than hard-selling, a strong connection is made and a relationship established with the rental prospect. This leads to a natural trust level making it easier for the rental prospect to commit. Many of the Gables Residential ***12 Pledges to Customer Service*** are strategically incorporated into the sales presentation. For example, pledge #4 states, “Professional Communication Etiquette is Essential.” Proper diction, grammar, communication skills, and social graces are a part of Gables’ core leasing training. They also incorporate pledge #6, “Each associate is a goodwill ambassador for the company,” and #8, “Cleanliness is the responsibility of every associate.” These are customer service fundamentals that truly enhance the sales experience!