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The 3 Pillars of Community Strength

Get Rid of Budgeting Stress

Board Meetings

The Top Traits

"Yeah, but..."

and more . . .

Second Quarter 2013
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By Julie Adamen

Getting Rid of Budget Stress
By Julie Adamen

Small HOA’s Solution to Delinquent Dues
By Richard Slater

Board Meetings and Chaotic Nature of the Human Element
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By Julie Adamen

“Yeah, but …”

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By Mitchell H. Plumka, P.E., CGP, RS - Nico F. March, CFM, RRP

Disasters
CAI Library
Message from Your President:

Here we are six months into 2013. Great things have happened for the South Gulf Coast Chapter of CAI. Our Trade Expo in February was probably the best we have ever had. Over one hundred booths, a Food Court, and an outstanding attendance by managers, board members, and those living within a community association. We look forward to 2014 and an equally great exhibition of service providers to all managers and community association boards.

Our seminar season has gone quite well with some disappointment in the participation of our over two hundred manager members. Hopefully we will see in the coming fall an upswing in attendance with the excellent seminars the chapter has for continuing education credits.

In this issue on page thirty-six is the balance of this years seminars. We will be adding some new seminars near the end of this calendar season and we look forward to your participation. Along with page thirty-six on pages fourteen and twenty-one we have our Networking Social registration for September and November. Our Networking Socials have had good attendance and we look forward to these events growing in popularity. Plan to attend these two events you are provided a free cocktail and food plus a chance to win a free dinner for two and two cocktails at Cypress Lake Country Club.

We thank the many Chapter Partners that the South Gulf Coast Chapter of CAI have, For their dedication and support to the continuing education of our CAM manager membership and their active support to the Networking Socials that I just outlined.

Our Fall Classic Golf Tournament will once again be played the 11th of October. Many of the teams that played in our May Annual Golf Tournament have already signed up for the Fall Classic. This is a great day for companies to thank that employee, business associate or customer to a great day of golf, prizes and the opportunity to play Fort Myers’s oldest private golf club. Registration for this event will be going out soon so look forward to registering as soon as you can to guarantee a place in this October’s field of golfers.

Have a GREAT summer and let us hope the weather will be good to us.

Regards,

Valerie Hoover
President
South Gulf Coast Chapter of CAI

Footnotes:

1. This process should be undertaken by qualified industry counsel only.
2. Yes, Rules and Regulations are not written in stone.
3. Paraphrased quote said by hundreds of Board members.
5. In a chaotic system, the ability of miniscule changes in initial conditions (such as the flap of a butterfly’s wings) to have far-reaching, large-scale effects on the development of the system.

Don’t be stressed!

Managers, stress at budget time is almost wholly within your control if you utilize some basic time management tools. Plan ahead, start early and drive the process to conclusion while staying fluid enough to work on issues contingent to the budget AND your “day” job. Like so many things in our business, if it doesn’t get handled when it should or earlier it will go from snowball to avalanche in short order. Procrastination is the enemy, especially when it comes to budgets.

Healthy, successful career in community management.

1.2 Rod Serling

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Footnotes
Death and taxes have long been considered life’s twin inevitabilities. But for community associations there may be a third: pets. Pets inevitable? Absolutely. In 2005, there were 88 million more pets than people in the U.S. According to the American Pet Products Manufacturing Association (APPPMA), 81 million American households counted a four-legged friend among the family (43 million dogs and 38 million cats) in 2005. Just how many pets is that? Nearly 376 million (including all pets, not just cats and dogs) according to the APPMA’s 2004 National Pet Owners Survey. By comparison, the U.S. population was around 290 million people in 2005. And the numbers are increasing rapidly; APPMA’s 2000 survey reported the U.S. population was around 200 million households in 2000, and Larry Wildman, DMV, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), most people believe that dog waste does not contribute significantly to water quality problems, when, in fact, “nonhuman waste represents a significant source of bacterial contamination in urban watersheds.” Noted dog trainer Barbara Woodhouse is on to something that you should bear in mind: “It takes teaching its owner takes much longer. Woodhouse is on to something that you should bear in mind: “It takes teaching its owner takes much longer.”

Problems arise when the ferret slips out the front door and chews through the common-area wiring in the hall, or when the snake is a 12-foot python. These types of pet problems are more subtle and harder to regulate than the Alderdale’s accidents or Polly’s inessential squawking. Admittedly, most community association pet problems tend to be in the more common dog-and-cat category. Or, perhaps more accurately, the dog-and-cat owner category. But regardless of the species in question—dog, cat, bird, pig, snake, ferret, wallaby—enacting workable and reasonable pet rules, encouraging compliance, and enforcing those rules are the primary challenges. Pressure to meet those challenges is increasing as federal regulators crack down on associations to reduce ground water pollution caused by pet waste. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), most people believe that dog waste does not contribute significantly to water quality problems, when, in fact, “nonhuman waste represents a significant source of bacterial contamination in urban watersheds.” Noted dog trainer Barbara Woodhouse is of the opinion that there are no bad dogs, just ignorant owners. She claims she can teach a dog anything in five minutes, but teaching its owner takes much longer. Woodhouse is on to something that you should bear in mind: “It takes teaching its owner takes much longer.”

Which got me to thinking about Boards of Directors, and their decision-making process. How many decisions are affected by either a casual comment such as the one above, or are made formally without thinking about the long-term ripple effect? My experience, and yours, says: Many, and not necessarily for the good. Yet, it is a reality of the business. The challenge for associations is to harness those good ripples and mitigate ripples that are negative. To do so, a community needs the following: 1) a strong foundation of governance keeping them on the path of community well-being, consisting of good governing documents, 2) a good fiscal policy and 3) a strategy for positive communication between the Board and the homeowners. They are what I call the Three Pillars of Community Strength. Not only must they have each of these Pillars in place, every Board must review, adjust where needed and maintain these “pillars” so communities will reap long-term benefits from good decisions and suffer as little damage as possible from bad ones.

Pillar 1: Good Governing Documents CC&Rs and By-Laws. CC&Rs and By-Laws provide the overall definition of the community and the basis for its government. You can have the most beautiful house on the block, but if your foundation is weak, the rest of the house will crumble.

The other day I was relating to a colleague the story of why, way back in the day, I wasn’t a member of the large-scale managers group, HOAPCO. It was all because a member of that group made a causal comment to the President indicating that I shouldn’t be eligible because although I did manage, on site, 1000+ units and a $5-5M budget, I worked for a management company (horror). With that simple comment, I was rendered politically ineligible to join. In response to this tale, my colleague said, “I wonder how many dumb decisions are made by just such a casual comment?” Yes, indeed, how many?

Rules & Regulations. Rules & Regulations provide the structure within which the community operates on a day-to-day basis and in a safe and sane manner. That is, if the following were never said by an early Board member: “Let’s not get too complicated with our Rules, because there’s only a few here. If there’s a problem, we’ll just knock on that person’s door, and discuss it neighbor-to-neighbor.”

Pillar 2: Mitigate the Negative

Non or poor-existent Rules lead to innumerable problems, not the least of which is overt micro-management. The Board becomes the judge and jury for every detail of community life, as actions that typically would be handled by the manager must be raised to the Board. Simple issues such as, Should we send a letter on Mr. Brown’s barking dog? Should that owner get two parking spaces? Should we foreclose on Mrs. Smith, but not on Dr. Roberts? This level of micro-administration is very costly, immensely labor intensive and destructive. Here’s why:

The sheer volume of work is exhausting for the Board. The manager lacks clear direction, putting him or her squarely in “no win” situations leading to manager turnover. Micro-administration will make the Board deeply unpopular as each decision rendered “for” one owner will be “against” another. There will be little-to-no corporate memory for decisions made, as they were not based on a formal rule, guideline or procedure. As time goes on the Board becomes the judge and jury, even if well-thought-out, will become fuzzy, allowing for all kinds of interpretations by subsequent regimes, some of whom may have less common sense. The community will have a very difficult time finding and keeping volunteer Board members. A hardy mess that started way back when some early Board member made a casual decision mistakenly hoping to avoid too much structure.

Updated, reasoned Rules & Regulations[2] will make the day-to-day lives of the Board and management much easier well in the future by providing a means of rational and equitable decision making that can be articulated to, and accepted by, the community.

Architectural Guidelines. The Guidelines execute the Design Review process that are in the CC&Rs, but they also must be written in such a way that allows reasonable interpretation of community aesthetics, as well as a common sense application. Some Boards and ACC’s (Architectural Control Committees) think (again) they don’t need too many “rules” or “guidelines” when it comes to architectural issues. They believe decisions can be made without the restraints of reasoned principles. That sounds good, except for these inevitable two occurrences.
Well, here we are and six months of this 2013 has nearly come and gone. Activity within our chapter has been quite busy with continuing education being an important part of our education program. It has come to many of us that as providers of continuing education to CAM managers our own Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation has gotten itself into the continuing education business. Unfortunately they may have been sold a “bill of goods” in this regard.

Resurfacing are some of our own members going along with a new program under a new name. I guess this is all fair when some of these very own business providers are in fact providers of ceus to southwest Florida managers. The DBPR requires CAI chapters of Florida and other networking social entities in southwest Florida the requirement of a license that we pay for to be a provider. Then they get hoodwinked into going along with a continuing education program series that was created for benefitting not the DBPR. Where was your local chapter in all of this? We pay the DBPR to be providers, why were we not asked to participate? Fortunately the DBPR has or will be pulling away from this ill informed practice and without a doubt this will pop up under a new name with the same vendors participating and losing some credibility in the meantime.

We had a great Annual Golf Tournament on Friday, May 10, 2013 at Cypress Lake Country Club. The foursome of Greg Frith, Gene Pigot, Joseph Navas, and Jessica Paulman won with a great scramble score of 54, being 18 under. Second place went to the Goede Adamczyk DeBoest team of Richard DeBoest, Mark Adamczyk, Hal Adams, and Neil Scott with a score of 59, 13 under, and third place went to Dawson of Florida with Matt Bevins, Jim O’Donnell, Stephen Kirby, and Graham Norcombe with a score of 60 being 12 under. The Fireservice Disaster Kleenup four-somes have won our annual Spring event four time since 2002.

Look forward to you all having a safe, and healthy Summer

Regards

Robert J. Podvin
Executive Director
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Getting Rid of Budgeting Stress

By Julie Adamen

Preparing the preliminary budget
Plug in time to work on your budgets just as if they were a meeting or appointment. Close your door (if you have one) let your calls go to voicemail and let email sit in your in-box. They’ll survive an hour or two without you.

Format. An excel spreadsheet is the optimal budgeting tool for you to use because as the numbers inevitably change you’ll be able to plug them in and they will be calculated quickly and accurately. Not to mention it prepares you for next year’s budget.

Reserve contribution: The managers’ budget conundrum. Assuming you have a reserve study in hand... It’s really your duty to plug in the recommended amount unless you (and the Board) know for a fact that it is inaccurate. That said... Plugging in the recommended amount and then presenting only that as a preliminary budget to your Board committee will likely give them heart failure. Try this: Prepare two budgets, one with the recommended reserve contribution (you’ve done your duty) and another with what the committee or Board wants to work with (unless your management company has a differing policy regarding this issue).

Budget Presentation
Presentation format. What can you do to make understanding and absorbing the budget easier for your committees and Boards? Submit your budget with a pie chart (or bar chart) and insert a picture of the community as a part of your excel spreadsheet. The chart will give a great visual of what money is going where, so they know at a glance that the management contract is not the biggest line item (far from it). Inserting a picture of the community brings home the fact that the budget is not an abstraction; it truly has meaning and impact on those who reside within.

Charts. Time to present: August. Yes, it seems early and you are going on vacation and much of your Board is as well. Again, it’s not a surprise and vacation schedules are usually made at least a month or two in advance so these commitments should be factored in. In fact, you did that by starting your budget prep in June, right? So talk to the committee or Board members, and schedule a meeting as soon as possible.

Follow up. If you can’t get an August meeting scheduled, at least email the budget out and follow up individually with Board/committee members for their feedback. This way you will have an idea where each association is going with the process and you can schedule your time accordingly. Does it look like smooth sailing? Then you can let this one week and pick it up again in September. Problems? Issues? Have a rogue Board or committee from hell? Better to know now so you can allot the amount of time you’ll need to see it through to approval and still give yourself enough time for distribution. Remember: Even though the budget may now be in the hands of others, it is still up to you to drive the process through to the finish.

What executives can do to help
Budget seminars. How about a nice wine and cheese budget seminar for all your Boards of Directors? A local CPA would likely be happy to speak to association budgets, and executives could speak individually to Boards whom the managers think will be problem children this budget cycle. These meetings are good use of executive time, shows the Boards that the company cares, is great marketing and helps the managers and the Boards by giving expert input in to an individual association’s budget process.

“...continued on page 45"
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Small HOA’s Solution to Delinquent Dues

Homeowners Associations with small annual assessments are now turning to a new measure to recover their dues—credit reporting. Many HOAs have assessments ranging from $150 to $300 a year. Spending five hundred to seven hundred dollars to recover such small amounts doesn’t make sense. Even when the Board doesn’t pay the collection costs, adding large fees to small assessments only makes it harder for their neighbors in these close-knit communities to catch up.

What some HOA Boards have discovered is that one of the first things a homeowner will let go when financial difficulties arise is their association dues. In fact, many families in arrears may still pay their cable bill and other minor luxuries instead of their dues. These Board Members have learned that early in the delinquency cycle—after late notices fail and before the delinquency becomes a big problem—homeowners still have a chance to right themselves. In fact, data across fourteen states proves families recover from these early stages of delinquency about 35% of the time. And the solution only costs $20.

When families stop paying their dues obviously something has changed. Their natural response is to hide the bill or at least when money gets short communicate it. However, none of the myriad of reasons diminishes the fact that these people aren’t aware the dues have increased. Some are owners who just have a gripe, and withholding dues is how they communicate it. However, none of the myriad of reasons diminishes the fact that these people are not paying a legitimate bill. Some are owners who just have a gripe, and withholding dues is how they communicate it. However, none of the myriad of reasons diminishes the fact that these people are not paying a legitimate bill. Some are owners who just have a gripe, and withholding dues is how they communicate it. However, none of the myriad of reasons diminishes the fact that these people are not paying a legitimate bill. Some are owners who just have a gripe, and withholding dues is how they communicate it. 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If you are new to the community management business, Board meetings can be very stressful. If you've been in the business for years, Board meetings can still be stressful. Also, they are a fact of life; you must attend them. It's where association business gets done (or not). It's where you receive direction (or not), and it's where you develop a working relationship with your Board. The experienced manager can have all of their ducks in a row. Action items completed, Board packs out on time, financial statements all in order and still, in the back of their mind have nagging doubts. First: Did I forget something?
No, not at all. Every item on the check list complete. Second: What bombshell is going to be dropped? This is the "Next stop, The Twilight Zone" of the human component, and "This high-way leads to the shadowy tip of reality..." "Take heart! You are not alone. These "bombshells" are common experiences and they fit into five categories. All have maneuvers to minimize their psychological impact on you, yet let you be empathetic to the concerns of your clients.
Blindsided by a Board member. You are at a meeting, and everything seems to be going fine, until...A Board member hits you between the eyes with an off-agenda topic you are unprepared to discuss or are unaware of its existence entirely. This blindsides may be innocent or clearly made to embarrass you, however; whatever the agenda your response should be the same. The maneuver: Respectfully state you are unprepared to discuss the subject at the time and were unaware it would be a topic of discussion at today's meeting. If the member would like to discuss it further, you are happy to do so (after the meeting, the next day by phone, etc.). Remember - you are not required to know everything, all the time.
Board member "Gotcha!" This tactic is a politically motivated trap deliberately set to better the Board member's (political) position at the expense of the manager. The Board member lures you in with a seemingly innocent question, waits for your response and then WHAM! Very publicly lists you know where and why you are wrong. How do they do it? They have information you do not. Many a manager has been left red-faced, incredulous, indignant or in tears because they are so stunned someone would use them in such a jaw-dropping fashion. It's painful and can be very embarrassing, but when this happens remember you can still control your reaction. The maneuver: Take a deep breath, count to 5, then acknowledge what they have said and apologize for the error. If you can, thank them for bringing this to your attention with something like "Good catch," and move on. Always remember, "Gotcha!" says volumes about that person and your reaction says volumes about you.
The irate resident. A very common occurrence, the irate resident shows up at a Board meeting intent on getting exactly what they want (more flowers, warmer spa, late fee waived, etc.) by trying to publicly humiliate the manager through yelling, stomping, lying and being gener- ally unpleasant. The maneuver: Don't be sucked in to responding in kind or, just as bad, defensively. They will have won the day and you will only look bad and feel miserable. Remain atten- tive, yet detached from emotion. Don't hide by looking down while the rant goes on; make eye contact with a neutral expression and put your mind in a peaceful place for a few seconds. Periodically, take notes (this visibly shows your concern) and don't worry. After the rant, thank the individual for their input. The Board is usually empathetic to your plight, (but was glad it wasn't them) and understands through experience that the person is nuts, a jerk, or both, as do most normal people.
Conflict among the Board members. It's pretty stressful for managers when there is conflict among your (several) client bosses and there is always the danger of a blow up at a Board meet- ing. The maneuver: The best advice is for you to remain as neutral as possible in and outside the meeting. No matter how much you strongly agree with any one or more members, you must let them know you respectfully decline to take sides. Your job is to help execute their policy and deci- sions, not take party to sides in a dispute. There is no quicker trip into The Twilight Zone and ab- ject misery than taking sides while a Board is infighting.
Conflict within the community. Eventually you will have a Board meeting where people - a lot of people - show up because something big is going on and they are uniformed, confused, just plain angry or want to find out more and express their feelings. It could be anything from litigation to new paint colors to a special assessment. The maneuver: There are plenty of indications as to what meeting they will show up at, so it shouldn't be a big surprise. Your job is to be prepared.
Bring extra agendas, a sign in sheet and plenty of pencils and service order forms. Be helpful and "appear" to be helpful, to the members by action and attitude. These meetings seldom are simple or clean so emotional preparation is im- portant as well; Remember, this is not about you, it is about process, not take party to sides in a dispute. There is the danger of a blow up at a Board meeting. The maneuver: The best advice is for you to remain as neutral as possible in and outside the meeting. No matter how much you strongly agree with any one or more members, you must let them know you respectfully decline to take sides. Your job is to help execute their policy and deci- sions, not take party to sides in a dispute. There is no quicker trip into The Twilight Zone and ab- ject misery than taking sides while a Board is infighting.
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--- continued from page 5 ---

1) The current ACC and its corporate memory is replaced by another group with no corporate memory, and 2) The ACC (and association) finds itself embroiled in a lawsuit due to incon- sistent, arbitrary or lack of enforcement of archi- tectural guidelines. Why do I say "invatable"?

Typically, the Architectural Control Committee (ACC) has jurisdiction, through the CC&Rs and the guidelines, over the look and feel of the community's common areas and limited common areas, from the color of patio furniture to the carpets in the common hallways to exterior fini- shes - you name it. More so than Rules issues, architectural issues can become very personal to the owners affected, who look at that carpet (or paint, or patio furniture) every day of their lives and feel some connection to its aesthetics. In the best of times, members of the ACC can find themselves embroiled in controversy every time they make a decision based on published guide- lines, let alone when they make them while flying by the seat of their pants.

Just as important and many times far more visi- ble than Rules and Regulations, well thought-out and well-written Architectural Guidelines provide communities with visible, long lasting effect. For the ACC to be a successful instrument for design review it must have a documented basis for its decisions, taking in to conformity and consisten- cy with allowance for common sense. Adoption and execution of those Guidelines by the Board with ACC input will go a long way towards not only keeping the community harmonious, but in making the jobs of the volunteer committee members easier now and on down the road.

Pillar 2: Fiscal Responsibility
Reserves. "If we fund the reserves this year, we'll have to raise assessments, and that will make us very unpopular. Let's table it until next year." [3]

Reserves are the association's savings account for repair and replacement of the common ele- ments. And just like your own savings account, it's very easy to justify not funding it. The big difference being, of course, that your savings account is yours. An association's is - every members'. If Boards don't budget to fund re- serves, there will be hell to pay when the roof fails or the pools require new plaster. It's easy not to fund reserves (but not wise and possibly not legal) while the developer is still involved and/or the association is new. As time marches on the problems grows exponentially as the common areas age and the fixes become more urgent and expensive. Each subsequent Board elected is faced increasingly grim choices: 1) Do nothing like past Board members and hope and pray it doesn't fall apart of their watch, 2) Get a loan and risk the ire of the populace, 3) Raise assessments and risk the ire of the populace, 4) Special assess and raise assessments and risk... Well you folks get it.

Each choice is rife with political danger when things are going relatively smoothly, but the choices become even more restricted and the political danger more acute when the inevitable crisis occurs and that unucky Board must act. Then - out come the torches and pitchforks as the masses react to the notice of a dues in- crease and a special assessment. All could have been avoided if earlier Boards had made the decision to not only 1) Contract for a realistic reserve study (and updates as required), 2) De- velop a plan to communicate, and expand sup- port for, the needs and financial requirements of the reserves to the community, and 3) Make the decision to fund properly documented reserves, and not kick the can down the road.

Community associations are like families: When there is no money to pay the bills, unhappiness occurs. Sound financial planning makes for happy families and happy communities. No- where will the long-term ramifications of a short- term decision be felt more keenly than by an association with underfunded reserves.

Pillar 3: Communication and Consensus De- velopment
"If communication from the association is more like a stick than a stroke, then all the members are going to feel is that they are being beaten. A positive perception of the association will result in accomplished and rules compliance, more timely as- sessment payments, a more educated and in- formed resident base and a more respectful attitude towards the Board and Management." [4] - Mike Pierson

Key ingredients for great communication:
Consistency, relevance and a positive spin. We live in an instant information society. If you want an answer to just about anything, you can go online and find it straight away. Associations stifle, if anything different. When Boards make it a policy to communicate relevant information regu- larly and in a positive fashion via regularly pub- lished, well-written newsletters and updated websites, they are making a decision to bring the owners to in the process of administering the community. Good people want to be a part of

--- continued on page 45 ---
Great Boards focus on macro-issues. Boards should be spending their time continually reviewing and refining the Big Picture (Vision Statement) for the community. To do that effectively, the Board must have a Mission Statement and then set clear policy for all aspects of community administration — and stand back and observe if that policy is being carried out through management and on down to the vendors and the community at large. For example, the Board may set a policy of "continual aesthetically pleasing landscape conditions within budgeted figures." This is a broad statement which gives management direction and authority to carry out that policy administratively and financially. The Board who adopts this type of stance does not worry itself with the exact number of flats of flowers, or their color, nor how they are planted. Esthetically pleasing? Within budget? This is a macro-focused Board thinks about.

Great Boards don't enable philosophers or pontificators who drag meetings out for hours after unproductive hour by suffering in a silent torpor while the ego-driven "Starship Steve" goes off to explore strange, new worlds holding everyone hostage. Great Board members assist the Chair in keeping control of the pontificator/philosopher by calling for a "point of order" when he starts moving in to the Crab Nebula. Great Boards don't wander off the agenda by bringing up new business that isn't on that agenda. They stay focused on the matters at hand, carefully considering the information and moving forward as they are trusted to do by the membership. Focus, enforced through adopted parliamentary procedures, brings clarity of thought and purpose and the result is credibility in the eyes of the membership.

Great Boards protect against liabilities by keeping rogue Board members in check. Great Boards don't allow a single Board member to put the community in jeopardy by making racial, ethnic or sexual comments at a meeting. Too many times I have heard Board members say something they would never think to say in a "regular" business meeting without anyone — including the Chair — calling them on this improper and risky behavior.

By using insured vendors and subcontractors. Great Boards know they have a duty and responsibility to the community to utilize only professional services. And they don't deny the existence of liabilities. Great Boards never wear blinders when it comes to the existence of liabilities. They have set a policy on dealing with potential and evident liabilities, and they deal with them quickly and surely. Great Boards don't wander off in to the weeds when examining their liabilities, either. They obtain information and direction from insurance, legal and management experts to guide them on this path. Great Boards understand, and never shy away from, risk management.

Great Boards know and understand they are making decisions as fiduciaries for the community, not as buddies, friends or neighbors. Boards must base their decision on logic and reason, not on emotion or fear, giving the Board and the community credibility and integrity for the long-term as they occupy that place of special trust and confidence.

Great Boards never allow themselves to be bullied into making a decision. They must always be aware they are a deliberate body which makes decisions based on solid input. That solid input should include their own experience, facts, data, standard of care and standard of the industry, precedents set before them, and expert opinion. Great Boards (try) never to make decisions simply to quiet a "squeaky wheel."

Great Boards acknowledge staff and volunteers publicly, privately, in the newsletter and on the website. Great Boards continually acknowledge all contributors to the administration of the community. "Spin the halo," as one of my old Board members used to say. This crucial aspect of leadership is often overlooked by Boards because they simply don't realize this positive form of communication to the membership about one of their own fosters a positive and successful image of the community administration. Why? See below:

Great Boards know they can't do it alone. They know they need more folks to volunteer, so they create an atmosphere that fosters volunteerism. One of the ways to create that atmosphere is to publicly and regularly sing the praises of those volunteers and staff.
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You hear it all the time, from your spouse, children, friends, co-workers and sometimes from your boss. The most annoying time is when you hear it from your Boards. Why? Because we are fixers!

“Yes, but… If we fund reserves we’ll have to raise assessments.”

“Yes, but… If we enforce the collection policy it will be mean spirited.”

“Yes, but… If we paint the unit a different color, it may be updated but the older residents won’t like it.”

Every manager has had the experience. You bring forth an issue which needs to be addressed by the Board and then you get the “Yeah, but…” ("yabuts"), meaning they acknowledge the issue; however, it’s likely not going to be addressed any time soon. Note I said “likely not.” Being fixers, though, we get sucked in because of the affirmative “Yeah,” and our ignoring of the “but…”, which then proceeds to cause us to spin our wheels needlessly involved in a project that has no hope of accomplishment.

How do you determine whether or not you should spend time pressing forward with the issue (one you assume you can help fix it), or move on to other pressing issues that can be resolved in a timely manner? First, you need to determine why your Board is giving you the “yabuts.” Then you can appropriately and intelligently triage issues for your time.

Why the “Yabuts”?

Political paralysis. For those who have little experience in the public arena, just having a position on the Board can be uncomfortable. A more difficult step is requiring this member to make any tough decisions that will actually affect their neighbors. This makes any tough decisions that will actually affect their neighbors, it is simply untenable to them.

Increased workload. Any change that is going to cause a disruption in the normal daily discourse of the community association will by its nature increase the workload of the BOD. Phone calls, emails, being hailed and stopped at the mailbox or the elevator by owners wanting to band lean on all take time. New Board members are usually in shock over the amount of time it takes to be a Board member anyway, let alone when something controversial comes down the pike. Can you fix this? No. They have to accept the workload, and that acceptance may, or may not, come.

Not enough information on which to base a decision. Perhaps the issue came up at a Board meeting a little early in the process. Or, perhaps the manager was traveling at Mach 10 and the Board at 55mph, and the manager expected the Board to make a decision based simply on their recommendation without back up documentation. This is where you come in, managers. Information is your strong suit. Can you fix it? Yes. Better information planning and delivery is the key. Ensure your Boards are informed with appropriate and timely information.

They are in denial that there is a viable solution. You’ve brought the Board three different solutions to mitigate a problem and yet they simply will not acknowledge the viability of those solutions (You know it when you hear the “yabuts” followed by mumbled words and/or incoherent reasoning). Essentially the Board is abstaining from decision making. Denying that there is a viable solution to a particular problem keeps the Board ‘safe’ from reality, but not responsibility or from liability. Making decisions means taking responsibility, managing risk and hopefully mitigating liability. Can you fix it? Maybe. However, your real fix is to help the Board grow. Encourage your Board to attend industry functions where there are other Board members. Once they know they aren’t alone, and that their issues have been faced by others who lived to tell the tale, they may be more inclined to make decisions.

They don’t want change. I find that most people are uncomfortable with change and Board members are no different. “Yabut” keeps things just as they are. Acknowledging there is a solution, or a different course of action to be taken involves doing things differently from the current entrenched methods. Not everyone can deal with it. Can you fix it? No. Keep your head down and do what you can.

The Board (member) is being realistic. They know any change or fix of the problem would never make it out of committee, or past the entire Board. Or, they know whatever change or fix of the would cause so much upset among the populace that action simply isn’t feasible. This is crucial for you, the manager, to understand because the cause the Board member has an entrenched perspective that the manager cannot have (because you don’t live there amidst the social politics of the community). But you can glean this perspective if you are paying close attention. This “yabut” was legitimacy. Can you fix it? No, it is what it is.

"Yabuts" and time management: Check your list

Listen and understand. When faced with “Yabut…” listen carefully to the reasoning the Board (or Board member) gives you. Are they resistant to a particular solution because of something you can fix, such as they don’t have enough, or the right information? Or is the Board entrenched in a position due to political paralysis, or simple denial? Understanding their reasoning will allow you to walk away from issues you cannot affect and focus on those you can.

(See “The 20% Solution”).

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- plywood installations and removals
- pre- and post-storm photos
- irrigation shut off

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- plywood installations and removals
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Great Boards suffer no illusions. They know if they receive three bids for a particular service and one of the three bids is substantially lower than the two, it is reasonable and logical to assume that there is something to question within that bid. Maybe the contractor read the RFP wrong. Or, maybe they simply low-balled the bid. Great Boards are seldom fooled by this tactic. They know that if they want a Mercedes, they don’t get it for the price of a Chevy Malibu.

And know that if they do accept the low bid, there is a cost to managing that low bid. Sometimes even Great Boards accept the lowest bid. Accepting the lowest of qualified bidders can be a legitimate strategy when the Board acknowledges there will be a cost to managing that low bid - it is in their own time, staff time or having to have another contractor come in and finish the job or clean up the mess.

Great Boards stick together like family. Think of Boards as disparate personalities thrown together by an act of God (or a freak of nature), trying to accomplish goals, maintain sanity and still speak to each other in a civil tone. What sets Great Boards apart is that they know there will be disagreements, they know they don’t each think alike - yet, once the votes are cast they move forward together - speaking with one voice to the membership. This is crucial for any Board, but particularly those who have seriously disgruntled folks in their midst. Any chink in the armor of the Board will be exploited by those with agendas that are not within the current Board’s policies, goals and objectives. Great Boards stick together and show a united front to their members, creating credibility and integrity.

Great Board members release personal agendas and move on for the betterment of the community. Many Board members get elected on a narrow, and often times emotional, platform - “Lower dues by 20%!” “Fire the management company” ad nauseam. After the election, that Board member often finds out the platform on which they ran is based upon misinformation. A Great Board member realizes quickly things were not as they thought, releases their personal agenda and moves on. The Board is now able to progress as a group to address the issues facing the community.

Great Boards bring new Board members with contrary agendas in to the process - fast and furious. Despite the fact that the new Board members may be a total turn off to the rest of the Board and staff due to their contrary agenda, the only (potential) remedy is for the Great Board and staff to immerse this person in the process as soon as possible. An office or project with much responsibility. If that person is open-minded, nothing fits the agenda vacuum, focuses the new Board member’s energy faster or gives them a look at what it’s really like behind the curtain than be given a position of importance and responsibility. It allows them to save face, become a part of something larger and to release their personal agenda and move forward.

Great Boards are proactive about information. They don’t hunker down in the Cone of Silence until their term is over; Great Boards seek out information on all aspects of community administration and maintenance as it applies to them. Sometimes, it’s information they don’t want to hear, yet, Great Board members listen anyway as they know they must always gather information as it is part of their duty. Whether by reading websites, industry publications, or by attending workshops, forums and networking with other Board members. Great Boards know they do their jobs best by being informed, and they strive to stay that way.

Great Boards communicate regularly and positively with their residents. Great Boards know there are ways to still say no, but in a positive fashion. For example: “No walking dogs on the park from 8am to 12 noon,” can also be said this way: “Dog walkers are encouraged to take their pets to the park from 12 noon to 6pm for sunshine and fresh air seven days a week.”

The importance of regular (monthly or bi-monthly), upbeat, professional-looking newsletters, updated websites and other forms of communication is never lost on Great Boards. These forms of communication create a sense of openness and confidence for the outflow of positive communication among the community. They also create Board credibility, and they do so by fostering a positive attitude while still giving the membership needed information and reminding us necessary truths. Because people want to be a part of something successful, upbeat and positive, a community with this image is one which fosters volunteerism.

Great Boards have a sense of humor. We can be a very negative industry. I believe that is born from an overall lack of appropriate communication on matters at hand, very poor advocacy and communication skills on the part of individuals, and virtually no consequences for obstructionists. Add ego, frustration, plain bad manners, and certain psychological disorders, and you have all the ingredients for a negative experience for well-intentioned volunteers. Where’s the humor in that?

Great Boards see all the problems and challenges as something with which to be handled with a healthy sense of reality and a big dose of humor. Why? Great Boards know three things: 1) It’s not IBM, it’s an HOA, and 2) The smaller the stakes, the pettier the politics and 3) It’s not personal. Great Boards have a sense of humor because they maintain perspective, giving much of what they do, see and hear a very humorous aspect.

Great Boards Value Integrity and Credibility above all else. Integrity and Credibility are what we all look for and respect in friends, family, school, church, work, business and what we want to see in Board members and in any Board as a whole. Boards that don’t get mired in minutiae, that are consistent in their decisions, assist new members in adjusting to their roles and create a polite atmosphere in which to volunteer. Boards that are serious but not take themselves or the situations too seriously demonstrate they are mature and responsible in their actions. These Board members are Credible. They have Integrity. And they are the best of the best. They are what make Great Boards.

Is your Board Great?

Board members serve as part of their civic duty and all they really want is to know how to meet that end with intelligence and grace and be appreciated for the difficult job they perform as volunteers. All Boards are potentially Great Boards. By determining which of the Top Traits can be incorporated in to your Board, you can achieve outstanding service for the community and a satisfying experience for each Board member. Taking your good Board to Great takes true Vision, and the will to serve yourselves and the community at the highest level.

... continued on page 17

The second word is the most key because when we say “Yeah, but…”, it’s in our nature as good Type “A” people to make positive things happen. The very words “Yeah, but…” draw us in, because one-half of the statement is positive: “Yeah” acknowledges what you have brought to their attention as a reality. The second word is the most key because when you hear “but…” think, ‘MASSIVE ROADBLOCK HERE’. Only occasionally can you find your way around this roadblock. The key is to understand whether or not you can overcome the root cause of the “yabuts.” What needs to be done may not be possible at this time for that Board. You, and they, should move on to what is possible. Give the floor to you a break, and make better use of your and your time. Be ultimately more productive by affecting what you can,
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Connections 21
Death and taxes have long been considered life’s twin inevitabilities. But for community associations there may be a third: pets.

Pets inevitable? Absolutely. In 2005, there were 88 million more pets than people in the U.S. According to the American Pet Products Manufacturing Association (APPMA), 81 million American households counted a four-legged friend among the family (43 million dogs and 38 million cats) in 2005. Just how many pets is that? Nearly 378 million (including all pets, not just cats and dogs) according to the APPMA’s 2004 National Pet Owners Survey. By comparison, the U.S. population was around 290 million people in 2005. And the numbers are increasing rapidly: APPMA’s 2000 survey reported that Americans owned 62 million dogs and 64 million cats, in 2005, those numbers jumped to 74 million dogs and 90 million cats!

Community associations already have their hands full dealing with everyday domesticated animals; but, in the meantime, homes with exotic pets (pythons, servals, monkeys, wolf hybrids) that he’s seeing has exploded in recent years. Even the pot of cats that Woodhouse is on to some-what of the species in question — dog, cat, bird, pig, snake, ferret, wallaby — is workable and reasonable pet rules, encouraging compliance, and enforcing those rules are the primary challenges.

Pressure to meet those challenges is increasing as federal regulators crack down on associations to reduce ground water pollution caused by pet waste. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), most people believe that dog waste does not contribute significantly to water quality problems; when, in fact, "nonhuman waste represents a significant source of bacterial contamination in urban watersheds."

Not surprisingly, the increase in non-traditional and exotic pets is posing unique challenges. One of the reasons for their growing popularity — particularly in condominiums — is the perception that ferrets, gerbils, snakes, and similar critters are "nice" pets that almost no interest from neighbors or the association. They’re perceived as low-maintenance, perfectly suited to the condominium lifestyle. Your association doesn’t allow cats and dogs? No problem. Inga-ness are interesting, and white cats are a big hit with the kids.

Problems arise when the ferret slips out the front door and chews through the common-area wiring in the wall, or when the snake is a 13-foot python. These types of pet problems are more subtle and harder to regulate than the Aire-dale’s accidents or Polly’s incessant squawking.

Admittedly, most community association pet problems tend to be in the more common dog- and cat category. Or, perhaps more accurately, the dog-and-cat owner category. But regardless of the species in question — dog, cat, bird, pig, snake, ferret, wallaby — is workable and reasonable pet rules, encouraging compliance, and enforcing those rules are the primary challenges.

Pet rules should be consistent with the association declaration, bylaws, local and state statutes, and federal regulations; they should serve a purpose and, above all, they should be reasonable.

- Pet rules should be enforced even-handedly and consistently, beginning with informal and friendly methods. Make use of the Humane Society and mediation for difficult situations.

- Associations should encourage compliance with pet rules by involving residents in their development, publicizing rules frequently, communicating with nonresident owners, being a resource for residents, and handling neighbor complaints using standard procedures.

Pet rules should be enforced even-handedly and consistently, beginning with informal and friendly methods. Make use of the Humane Society and mediation for difficult situations.

- Associations should focus on behavior — the pets and the owner’s — rather than on size or breed when drafting pet rules.

- The Federal Fair Housing Act requires associations to exempt service animals from pet policies and rules.

- As ground water contamination becomes an increasing problem, local governments are putting pressure on more associations to remove pet waste from common areas in compli-ance the Federal Clean Water Act.

- The number of people keeping exotic pets is increasing constantly. Associations should be aware of the requirements they need to place on these residents to comply with local laws and maintain the safety of all residents.
By the time kids are ready for presentation to the Board, the manager knows this staff inside out and makes their recommendations to the Board, confident that the Board will approve it and move on. Except – it doesn’t happen because the Board just can’t wrap their arms around the magnitude of the project. The manager is crushed, demoralized and stressed because their ego got involved in the “success” of this project. The rejection of the project was not about the Board’s belief in Ro Building. The manager did their job, and did it well. Not being personally invested in it being able to let go quickly and move to the next issue.

When you depersonalize by realizing

It’s not all about you. Your ego need not be involved; thus You are not personally invested in any outcome. You can move to the next stress mitigation technique: Compartmentalization.

Compartmentalization

When we look at people who have stressful jobs – really stressful jobs, like being a head of state, we wonder. How do they rise above an overwhelming barrage of work and worries every hour of every day? How do they think about nuclear weapons, famine, the economy, the book they are writing and their kid’s grades? They are masters of compartmentalizing. Here’s how:

Focus: To avoid being overwhelmed at the thought of the amount of work you have to do, today, this week, this month, or in the next hour, reframe from worrying about those things not yet on your plate, or have left your plate for the time being. It may seem difficult, but it is manageable. As you work on a particular project or sit in a meeting and the next thing coming up pops in to your mind, write it down. Then turn your focus back to the current task. This in turn allows you to be there. This won’t happen overnight – but with practice you can do it. Fake it ‘til you make it.

Be there. When sitting at your desk working some task, or talking on the phone, you must be in the present: What you are doing, what you are saying, what others are saying to you and what you are composing. If you are not fully “in the moment,” there is no way you will ever be able to recognize, analyze and respond to each issue effectively and, hopefully, only once, as being present allows for quick and accurate completion of tasks because you paid sufficient attention the first time. When compart-

mentalizing, multi-tasking is absolutely not your friend unless you are very, very skilled. Be there. Now:

Take each issue as it comes, and put it in its own mental compartment. In the same way that in your com-
munications, one issue does not bleed into another because if they do (i.e., thinking about some-
thing other than what is immediately at hand), the whole product becomes distorted and confus-

ed. To keep those issues in their respective compo-

nents you must be secure in the knowledge you have done the most that you can at this point on time. That security is de-

rived from the fact that you focused all your

energy, at that moment, on one issue:

Compartmentalization: One thing at a time

by being there with focus. Tasks or issues that are

compartmentalized will allow the mind to work on any project using its fullest attention, through focus and being there. This thus allows you to provide the best direction, solution and results for any project with the least stress possible.

Take care of yourself

Exercise & Sweat. Most of us don’t exercise nearly as much as we should, usually due to lack of time. It’s understandable, we are fast paced society and between work, kids, grocery shopping, laundry, etc., there isn’t much time. It is my sincerest suggestion that somewhere, somehow, you make time to do something physical daily. Start by taking the stairs, park at the end of the lot, not near the office door; take a walk at lunch – anything. And the more vigorous, the better. Nothing lowers stress levels better than a good cardiac work out of your choice.

Eat well. Fast food may be tasty and conven-
tient, but it will wreak havoc on your health (and

now and on the down road. Every now and

then, it eat a little better. Don’t deprive yourself of comfort food, but if you are looking to cope with stress, a salad will do your heart better than French fries and a soda.

Get good sleep. Lack of sleep plays a large role in our failure to manage our stress lev-
ical problems. Unfortunately, it can be a chicken and egg

thing: When we are stressed we often have a hard time keeping sleep, knowing that stress can come.

Our stress. There is a lot of information out there about sleeping and stress, and I urge you to look to it. Just as the two items listed above, our sleep habits and environment are wholly within our control.

Laugh every day.

The community management business is funny – really, it is, if you allow it to be. Where else would you be subjected to so many absurd

situations? Where else would people break down in to near-armed camps over shades of paint color? Where else would you receive an

indignant phone call about naked people in the Jacuzzi at midnight, found by the caller with a
telescopic lens on his camera? Where else would someone complain to you that the grass is too green? Only in community management do we experience these bizarre human contra-
dictions.

Laughing produces the same endorphins that exercise does – the ones that make you feel

great, the ones that can get you through a rough meeting, or a pile of service orders. Paul E. McGhee, PhD says, “Your sense of humor is one of the most powerful tools you have to make certain that your daily mood and emotion-

al state support good health.” Michael Miller, M.D., says, “The old saying that laughter is the best medicine” definitely appears to be true when it comes to protecting your heart.” So what’s so funny out there? Try:

The Wrap up

The number one defense against stress is to stop being in denial about how we oper-
ate. Disorganization and procrastination are wholly within our control and can be fixed right now; however, the darkness still lurks. Stress is out there, a part of life and a reality of the busi-

ness. Take your personal self out of the equa-
tion, deal with things as they come and let go of the result. Eat well and get quality sleep: Every-
thing looks better in the morning. This is about you: Your mental health and physical health and well-being, because all of us want you to be healthy and in this business for the long run.

Four Steps to Cut Your Stress

By Julie Adamen

Newflash: The life of a community manager can, at times, be very stressful.

Job-related stress comes in two forms:

Self-inflicted stress is wholly avoidable stuff you do to yourself. In my experience, most of this type of stress for community managers is caused by disorganization and procrastina-

tion. Another great stressor is giving yourself too much importance in any given situation. Self-inflicted stress is in one form or another ac-

countable for about 50% of all stress managers feel.

Work-inflicted stress is caused by the sim-

ple realities of the job. Those realities include,

but are not limited to, continual negative input, un-measurable success of service, lack of

acknowledgement of service, a over-full

work-load (especially right now) and the never end-

ing stream of deadbeats.

Of course, the non-job related stress of family, health and finances, etc., contributes to and

amplifies overall stress. These stresses, com-

bined, will wear a person down at best and make them unhinged at worst.

What do we want to control and manage our

stress? Number one is health: Physical and mental. There are many studies on this cause and effect relationship. Stress over long periods of time will cause your health to decline. Cop-

ing with work-related stress is the key to staying minimally perturbed and continually productive in the business for the long term.

Unfortunately, there isn’t one magic bullet to managing stress, but there are some success-

ful coping methods that will get any stress-

stricken manager back on track to better health. As the title suggests, these coping methods can be summed up in four words. Depersonalization, compartmentalization, exercise and laugh.

Final thoughts

Every situation isn’t all about you. It seems

counterintuitive because after all, you are in-

volved. But any manager can remove their personal self (personal thoughts and feelings) from a stressful situation. Whether it’s community man-

agement (ugly phone call) or cumulative

stress (bad week) remember those situations are not all about you. Other people with their own personal agendas as well as events be-

yond your control played a major role. Yes, your very own clients, and sometimes even your employer bring on the circumstances for your stress. Understanding this fact as part of the job will mitigate certain amounts of self-

induced, self-important stress because you are accepting you have no control of what is brought to your desk for service for real or im-

agined reasons. You only have control on your reaction.

Give up ego: Never become personally in-

volved in the results. Becoming personally invested in any specific outcome or result is a set up for unnecessary stress. A brief exam-

ple: A community needs re-roofing. The man-

ager works closely with a roofing consultant puts together the specifications and the Re-

quest for Proposal (RFP), and due to under-

funded reserves puts together a plan for special assessing and loan procurement.

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Executive Director Approval

The Council began the meeting by approving the new Executive Director, Daniel Biggins.

Reactivation of Continuing Education

The CAM Council motioned to open Rule 61E14-4.004, Reactivation Continuing Education for development and approved the new language provided by staff. This is the same language previously approved in 2012 to bring the rule into compliance with the Chapter 455 change to continuing education requirements. The Chapter 455, Florida Statute change was passed in the 2012 session.

Financial Statements

Executive Director Biggins confirmed the CAM Council is running a deficit. The Council expressed concern and asked Mr. Biggins to bring revenue projections and solutions to raise revenue to the August 2013 teleconference.

Department’s Continuing Education Letter

The CAM Council discussed a letter issued by the Department on April 15 that listed nine vendors offering continuing education courses. The letter received criticism as it appeared to endorse specific vendors. The Department is aware moving forward that it cannot appear to endorse specific vendors.

Counsel Report

The Office of General Counsel reported on the number of complaints, investigations and citations in the State of Florida. No received criticism as it appeared to endorse specific vendors. The Department is aware moving forward that it cannot appear to endorse specific vendors.

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