



MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS  
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Condominium communities are comprised of people from all types of backgrounds who hold an array of values. As a result, it is not difficult to envision conflicting views and expectations arising on almost any issue. While one may consider it neighbourly to knock on a new resident's door and welcome him/her to the community, another may consider such behaviour entirely inappropriate and an intrusion of privacy.

Dean McCabe, Past President of the Association of Condominium Managers of Ontario (ACMO) and Vice President of Operations at Wilson Blanchard Management Inc., has suggested that the removal of one simple word from the province's condominium legislation will solve a good deal of conflict. Dean believes that the word "reasonable", rather than reflecting a concrete, objective criteria, fuels conflict and lines the pockets of lawyers. Why? Because what is reasonable to one person may not be reasonable to another.

In mediation, a tool that I often use to assist parties engaged in conflict involves re-visiting the intention behind key actions or events that contributed to the emergence of the dispute. Many times, one's intention and the impact of their actions are two very different things. Someone negatively impacted might benefit from an understanding of how the "road to hell" was paved. Such insight can go a long way in removing obstacles formed by negative misconceptions and assist in mending relationships through shared understanding.

Last November, the Residents' Panel assembled to assist in the initial phases of the Government of Ontario's legislative review submitted their final report in respect of the Condominium Act. In this report, the panel shared:

*"The members of the Residents' Panel understand that a condo corporation is at its core a set of relationships. Regulations and rules can help create healthy behaviours and structure appropriate checks and balances. But in communities, no system of rules can solve all problems. The Residents' Panel believes that the quality of relationships in condos communities will in large part determine whether unexpected problems are addressed appropriately or are left to fester." [emphasis added]*

The condominium setting is comprised of a multitude of relationships with varying dynamics. To manage such relationships and get the most out of them in recognition of the fact that differing views and conflicts will naturally emerge, it can help to consider the following:

1. **Know What You Want & Why You Want It.** It may seem simple, yet often we do not take the time to think about why we want something. “Why?” can be a very powerful question to ask yourself. Taking a firm position without appreciating the reasoning behind it can stifle the process, put a strain on relationships and risk you not realizing that you do not want what you think you want until you get it. Take the time to think before you act, identifying your underlying interests and your priorities in the process.
2. **Understand What It Takes.** Considering how to get what you are after is important; as is understanding what accomplishing your goal looks like. Particularly when tasks feel overwhelming, breaking them down into a series of smaller steps and focusing on one item at a time can pay dividends. While you have no guarantees that everything will proceed exactly as you set out and you may need to be flexible, the exercise of mapping out what it takes will re-affirm that you have identified what you truly want and are clear on how you can get it.
3. **Define & Be Reasonable.** Applying Dean’s point about the subjectivity of the term “reasonable”, consider defining what reasonable means to you and establishing shared expectations with those you are working with. There is nothing wrong with setting lofty goals; however, expecting the impossible out of yourself or others is setting yourself up for disappointment. Be realistic. This can involve seeking additional information or advice to truly understand your choices and be certain that you select your best path.
4. **Set Measurable Goals.** Establish a gauge that allows you to check in on your progress and check in frequently. By setting a series of mini-goals and a means of measuring your accomplishment of them, you can keep yourself on track and identify when you may need to adapt your approach. It can also be encouraging to get a step closer to your goal.
5. **Focus On What You Can Control.** It is not uncommon for others to have a hand in what you are trying to accomplish. While you cannot always control what others will do or how they will react, you can narrow your focus on what you want and what you are able to do to get it. By taking your best course of action toward achieving what you look to accomplish, you best position yourself. This includes making intelligent choices in respect of communication. By way of example, firing off an e-mail when you are overcome with negative emotion may not best position you to achieve what you would like.

Relationships in the condominium setting can be complex, political, personal and even unsolicited. They can be difficult to navigate, ever changing and unpredictable. They can also be greatly rewarding, satisfying and even sought after. Take the time to ensure that you are clear on what you would like to accomplish and take the best course of action to do so.

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Marc brings unique insight in mediating condominium conflict through the knowledge and experience he has gained as a condominium director, resident and law clerk. His mediation practice is focused on condominium disputes.

Marc sits on the Board of Directors of the Toronto & Area Chapter of the Canadian Condominium Institute and is a member of the ADR Institute of Ontario; the ADR Institute of Canada; the Toronto & Area, Golden Horseshoe, Huronia and London & Area Chapters of the Canadian Condominium Institute; the Association of Condominium Managers of Ontario and the Institute of Law Clerks of Ontario.



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