

Why fill out the guest card yourself? Why wouldn't you?

I teach fair housing classes all over the nation and I am still amazed at a question I receive nearly every time – why should we, the leasing consultant, fill out the guest card ourselves? Why not let the prospect fill it out? Of course, I answer quickly with “aside from it being *your* job, and not the prospects?” This can sometimes get a blank stare. The fair housing ramifications of not filling out the guest card yourself are only one potential problem with this approach, there are four other important reasons. Consistency, rapport, security – all sorts of big issues play a part in this task. The bottom line, the gist of it, is that a good leasing consultant that is doing their job fills out a guest card themselves. A poor leasing consultant, one who isn't doing their job, doesn't.

The first reason for completing the guest card is that it can potentially put you into jeopardy for a fair housing complaint or even a lawsuit. Consistency is crucial in dealing with your prospects, and the only way to be consistent is to do the same thing each time. When you pull out a guest card, ask for a prospect for their ID and work your way through these questions, you are insuring that you are doing things the same way. The problem with letting the prospect complete the card is they may not fill everything out. You are still responsible for the information being completed, regardless of who writes it down. When your cards aren't consistent; some questions complete and some not, some workplaces recorded and others not; you fail the test of consistency. These are the types of things HUD investigators look for. Just say for the sake of discussion that all of the guest cards you received from white prospects were completely filled out – every question answered. Another stack of cards, these from a minority group, aren't filled out completely. These cards don't have any answer for place of employment or telephone number. HUD can assume that your community was discriminating against these minorities – that you assumed they didn't have jobs or even home telephones. Your argument that you didn't fill out the cards, you

had the prospects do it, won't hold water. It's your job, not theirs. You're on the hook, not them.

Second, why would you want to trust these folks with your success, when you have known them about five minutes? Your success depends on these cards being complete. Many of the questions included on your guest cards are there to assist you. How are you going to follow-up with this prospect? When do they need the apartment in question? Do they work for an employer that we offer a discount to? We have all seen prospects who don't answer these questions for the sake of brevity or maybe even privacy. Those cards do you no good when trying to follow-up, inform a customer about a change in availability, or sending out a thank-you. Getting the answers gives you resources. People don't usually avoid direct questions, but they can easily skip over a few spaces on a guest card.

Third, why would you trust them with your security? I tend to call things like I see 'em and something I tell people in my classes is that if someone comes in to your office and doesn't want to show you their photo ID or answer a couple of questions on a card, they are either one of two things. First choice is a complete idiot. Second is a terrorist. We live in a different world and you and your community need to be aware of who you are dealing with and be cognizant of your safety. When you see the photo ID and write down details like the spelling of their name and address, there is less likelihood of something going awry. Many don't realize that some of the 9/11 terrorists were able to obtain apartments in South Florida because they were never asked for identification, never filled out cards or applications and paid for their apartments in cash. Another problem is that young female leasing consultants have been assaulted in model apartment homes – if there is no guest card, this is no record of the attacker. If they fill the card out themselves, who knows what they may have written? Most professionally run apartment communities have enacted policies to help prevent

these things from happening – the guest card is one of the most crucial steps. Your protection is important and the guest card is one of your defenses.

Fourth is rapport -you cannot establish rapport without it. Your prospects realize that you have to get through the questions together. You also are more likely to remember details and learn pronunciations when you ask them and then record the answer. You can even pull the card out and joke about it – “we’ve got to get through a couple quick questions in order to go take a look.” Their answers to questions can open the door to all sorts of conversation. “Where are you moving from?” “The Kansas City area.” “Oh, I love Kansas City – all of the fountains. My sister went to school there.” Filling out the card is not just a question and answer session – you aren’t conducting an impersonal survey here. Your goal is to establish rapport, and a conversation gets you there.

The Fifth reason is that having them fill out the card actually wastes *their* time. Plus, why are we putting these people to work? I have seen many prospects get exasperated when leasing consultants ask them the same questions that they just wrote down answers to. The leasing consultant welcomes the prospect, hands them the card and goes back to their busy work. First off, this doesn’t exactly show the prospect that they are important to you when you are off working on some other task. Then the consultant collects the cards, grabs the model keys and is off with the prospect. While they walk, invariably a conversation begins: “So, where are you moving from,” she may ask. “Well, Pittsburgh. We wrote that on the card.” “Oh, of course. What size apartment were you needing?” “A two bedroom, two bath. We wrote that on that card.” “When were you needing to move?” “October.” “Do you have any pets? “Hey - why did we fill out that stupid card if you were just going to ask us the same questions?” Why, indeed? The only way you can know the answers to these important questions is to ask them yourself and record the answers. That is doing the job of leasing consultant. They may look for a portion of the commission. Don’t let the prospect do your job!

The job title of “leasing consultant” isn’t just an industry and politically correct term – it is something you *are*. A consultant ask questions, gets to know a prospect, establishes rapport. Any clerk can accept a card and hand someone a set of keys. A professional leasing consultant fills out a guest card completely, every time.



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