

# Staff Turnover and Home Buyers

Promotions, marriage, new baby, spouse job transfer, health issues, disagreement with company policies, retirement.... or an enticing offer from a competitor. Any of these and many other reasons cause turnover of personnel. When that turnover is visible to home buyers sales person, superintendent, or warranty rep, for example disappointment, worry, or conflict can result. Consider some examples

*Regrettably the diagnosis was cancer and the sales person left immediately to undergo aggressive treatment. Her replacement was vaguely aware of a closing involving first time buyers. Their month end, 2:00 p.m. Friday settlement appointment turned to disaster when their lack of hazard insurance came to the attention of the closing agent. Panic, anger, and tears followed. A frantic call to their insurance agent uncovered that fact that she was in a meeting. Meanwhile, their movers were loading furniture and the husband was to start a new job on Monday. Sometime after six o'clock that evening, all was resolved but only after some virulent memories were created, including a terse discussion between Mr. and Mrs. Home Buyer about which one of them should have addressed this need. (FYI the original sales person was eventually able to return.)*

*Several states away, a disgruntled purchaser returned from a business trip and visited her new home. She shook her head over yet another change order omission. For the second time a change that was approved, signed, and paid for had been left out. The new superintendent explained that his file on the home simply did not have a copy of the change order in question. While reworking the floor plan to accommodate the alteration was possible, at this point the effort would add several weeks to the schedule. The buyer did not want a refund and she was also unable to tolerate the delivery delay.*

*The warranty manager began getting calls from homeowners within days of taking his new position. The story was always the same: His predecessor had promised this, that, or some other repair. When would it be completed? Repeatedly, the files contained no mention of the items, inspection notes documented no such commitments, and no work orders had been issued. Several angry homeowners accused the warranty manager of suggesting they are lying and one even threatened a lawsuit if the promised repair was not forthcoming-- and soon.*

Home buyer complaints resulting from staff turnover occur fairly often. The frustration is long remembered and frequently mentioned on surveys. Remaining company personnel and associates would prefer to avoid the extra drama such problems bring to them as well. Clearly, investing time to develop some guidelines for managing turnover is worthwhile.

If the turnover circumstances are less than friendly, some of these steps may be impossible due to lack of time or lack of willingness on the part of those involved to communicate. Come as close as you can. The less cooperation you have from the departing person, the more attention you will need to invest in the transition in order to forestall problems.

Your goals in a turnover situation are to

- \$ Maintain your home buyers' comfort levels.
- \$ Establish trust in the new person.
- \$ Provide adequate support for the replacement person.

- \$ Prevent confusion or omissions that lead to mistakes.
- \$ Forestall less than honest customers from playing the departee off against the new staff person.

To accomplish these objectives, consider the following suggestions<sup>B</sup>

- Assuming amicable relations and time to do so, conduct a thorough exit interview. Once the <sup>A</sup>last day<sup>@</sup> is known, schedule needed meetings and site tours to review the status of each customer affected.
- When possible, ask the departing person to prepare status notes on each active file or issue. In that way the new person has documentation to go back to. This can be especially useful if the replacement has not been identified prior to the original person leaving.
- Plan to walk job sites (the departing employee, the replacement if known, and a manager) to help reinforce and clarify information for the replacement staff person. Many situations can only be understood when conditions--the home, the drainage, or fence, for instance--are seen. This visit can also jog the departing individual=s memory, resulting in still more background information being discussed.
- Address the turnover with buyers. Depending on the number involved, you can do this with a letter or phone call. Notify all buyers currently under contract or recently closed. Make the announcement as positive as possible and provide information about the person who will be taking over.
- If the turnover involves sales or construction--and especially if you accept a large number of changes--offer to meet with each of the buyers currently under contract to review their plans and selections. While the contract documents may be in excellent condition, time invested in confirming that none of the details will be overlooked is worthwhile.
- More important still is the comfort level this effort provides to buyers. Having met the newcomer, buyers will feel less as if they have been set adrift. (Depending on the circumstances, some buyers may be glad for the change.) Note and follow through on any questions that could not be resolved at the meeting to further reinforce trust and confidence.
- As a manager, arrange for some extra support for the newcomer. Whether the novice is new to the company or just new to the site, recognize that it will take time to become acclimated. Minimally arrange a predictable time to check in for questions and a method for the newcomer to obtain immediate help if needed.
- Expect some surprises. Even in an amicable turnover situation, some details are likely to be overlooked. Build some free time into the schedule to address erupting issues.
- Obtain contact information from the person leaving. Discuss the best day or time and the preferred method to get in touch if a question arises. For the first few weeks, a set weekly time to talk can make this communication easier for everyone.

Anticipating issues and preventing problems is much desired in working with customers. Planning and attention *before the fact* can preserve good opinions and save you much valuable time later by preventing corrections, crisis, or conflict.

Turnover of staff may be inevitable, but turnover of customer satisfaction can be avoided.