

RENTALS

Landlord-tenant relations: How to make communication work

High-touch or low-touch, communications between landlords and residents are most valuable when there's a solid relationship backing them



Image by: Brian Wangenheim / Unsplash

BY [LILLIAN DICKERSON](#)

Today 10:26 A.M.

The rental market has been particularly [hard hit by the pandemic](#), with renters more likely to have high-contact jobs that have seen some of the worst of the pandemic’s economic fallout.

During this uncertain time, many renters have relied on CARES Act relief measures or flexibility from property managers, making communication between property managers and their residents paramount as residents navigate the uncertainty of how to pay their next month of rent, among other new worries.

“We intentionally went lower tech in the last year, and we went higher touch,” Tony Julianelle, CEO of Atlas Real Estate, told Inman during a phone conversation. “If you think about it, someone who’s experiencing job loss and the distress that comes from that, the opportunity to feel cared for by their property manager is very real.”

In response to the pandemic, Atlas Real Estate, which operates an investment brokerage and property management company, decided to create a new position on its team called the “Resident Resource Manager.”



Tony Julianelle | Credit: LinkedIn

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That individual was essentially dedicated to helping residents get access to relevant resources during the pandemic, including help on applying for unemployment and finding local nonprofits that provide housing assistance. They also sent notifications about actively hiring industries, explanations about the eviction moratorium and generally offered a listening ear.

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“Honestly, it just gives us an opportunity,” Julianelle said. “A lot of stories came out of that of challenges that people were facing and their ability to just talk through them with someone.

“Think about it, you probably have someone in your life that you call when you just want to talk through [something], and that’s hard to do when you’re facing financial distress or a job loss. You need kind of a safe place to go and have that conversation. We intentionally made that not their property manager so that they weren’t talking about [renegotiating leases](#) and things like that.”

Julianelle explained that Atlas made the resident resource manager available to make on-demand phone appointments through a scheduling tool called Calendly and made sure residents knew about the new resource through regular texting and email newsletter communications.



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But, Julianelle said, once a few residents started connecting with the resident resource manager, word traveled fast.

“What we found was, a lot of people were telling other residents in the building,” he said. “Like, ‘hey, I had a call with this person, it was amazing. You should call [or] you should email them and get the help you need.’ We found that to work well for us, and it fit our company culture and ethos really well.”

Landlord-to-tenant communications haven’t changed too drastically among many of the properties that operate under Boston Pads on a day-to-day basis, CEO Demetrios Salpoglou told Inman. But, he did say that because of the strong relationships that already existed between many landlords and their residents pre-pandemic, residents have become proactive about offering to help managers market their property if they need to move elsewhere as a result of the pandemic.



Demetrios Salpoglou | Boston Pads

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“[What’s] been very, very interesting is how amazing and cooperative the tenants have been in helping us with assistance of their marketing should they be leaving the property,” Salpoglou said.

“Having good dialogue with them has been tremendous. And one of the things we’ve noticed is, instead of people coming over to look at the property, what a lot of the tenants are willing to do, is kind of clean up their interior, make it look nice, and take the pictures and the videos [themselves] of their unit and send it to us and market it on Boston Pads.”

“[So] there’s less human interaction of showing the property, and you may have a tenant moving out or a lease break, or they want to get it rented because they want to move out of the city ... they’ve been highly cooperative because they also want to reduce the amount of showings,” Salpoglou added.

“As long as you keep your communication high with your tenants and you’ve done a great job managing their properties, been a great landlord or just professional as a broker, this isn’t that big an impediment, and communication flows.”

Salpoglou couldn’t speak to how many individual landlords made an effort to communicate periodic updates with the [CARES Act](#) to tenants or other COVID-related issues. Still, he noted that each tenant has a unique situation that landlords take care to address as needed.

“For what we do, we manage properties, and we rent the properties, and we take care of the issues regarding the property and the communication and make sure that’s flowing,” Salpoglou said. “When you run into certain particular situations, I think you deal with them specifically to each specific task.”

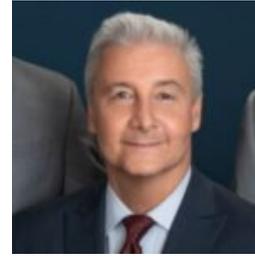
Overall though, Salpoglou stressed that taking care of relationships with tenants is critical.

“I think it’s what you put out into the universe comes back at you,” he said. “If you’re doing a great job, you got great tenants, they’re working with you, you’re all on the same page, we all have the same goal, and it works out. So, a lot of what you reflect on the world comes back ... that’s what we’ve noticed so far.”

In a recent post written for [Forbes](#), David Crown, CEO and founder of L.A. Property Management Group and Crown Commercial Property Management, stressed that even with vaccines now available and a possible end to the

pandemic in sight, property managers must keep up communications with tenants for business to thrive beyond the pandemic.

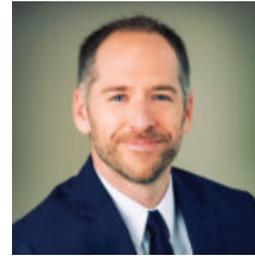
“I’ve seen smart property managers show compassion for their tenants by hearing them out and listening to the details of their hardships rather than setting a precedent of zero tolerance,” Crown said.



David Crown | L.A.
Property Management
Group

“I’ve seen understanding tenants meet them as best they could. It all starts with both parties being able to speak freely to one another. At our company, we’re on better terms with our tenants than ever before, and I know we’re not the only ones. That’s why we don’t plan to simply revert to the way we did business before all of this; we’re going to maintain the level of communication we’ve achieved with our tenants.”

Each tenant’s adaptability and sensitivity to the pandemic at this point will no doubt vary widely. However, it’s essential for property managers to remember that many tenants might [still feel like their situation is a precarious one](#), financially or otherwise, so periodic check-ins — whether they’re needed or not — will still be welcome.



Tanner Montgomery |
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“I have checked on all of my tenants to see how they are doing and if they need any help with anything,” Tanner Montgomery, CEO and founder of Skyhawk Custom Homes, told end-to-end landlord management platform [Avail](#). “So far, everyone is just hunkered down at home, but they appreciated getting checked on.”

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