Getting the Most out of Crappy Landlords

by Robert Forrest

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As in every industry, there are bad actors. That is no exception for landlords. Youâ€™ll come across good ones, mediocre ones, bad ones, and just plain awful ones.

It is ultimately incumbent upon the tenant to make sure that they donâ€™t overlook the details when dealing with landlords -- whether good, bad, or ugly.

Sometimes, landlords and property management types will prey on the inexperience of youth and/or recent out-of-town transplants to improve their bottom lines.

That is why you need to do everything within reason to protect yourself from a potentially exploitative situation that would surely work to your disadvantage.

Consider the following recommendations when dealing with a new landlord and/or property manager:

1. Document. Document. Document. Document Again.

Take out a pad of paper to document anything and everything that catches your attention. Make a list with detailed descriptions of all that is wrong with your new apartment -- from the stain on the countertop to the crack in the bathroom mirror to the skid marks on the hardwood floor in the living room. Jot it down whether it can be fixed or not. The documentation of your placeâ€™s various flaws will help you in the long run, especially if you end up in a dispute over your security deposit when you move out.

When inspecting your new apartment, be sure to remember the following:

a. Check your apartmentâ€™s main living areas for past repairs that appear to have been made. If something hasnâ€™t been removed, mention it in your report. If any of the fixtures or baseboards or tiles are in a state of disrepair, note it. If the carpet looks like it hasnâ€™t been replaced since the late 1970s, write it down. Make sure the peephole in the door hasnâ€™t been painted over. If it has, put it down. Ensure that all windows close properly and lock.

b. Inspect your kitchenâ€™s stovetop by testing all the burners and ensuring the actual oven beneath them works. Make sure all the cabinets are in good shape -- that they close adequately and drawers are easy to use. Take a close look at your major appliances for any dents, discoloration, or damage of any kind.

c. In your bathroom, take a closer look at the toilet to ensure it doesnâ€™t leak and still flushes and fills correctly. Look out for mold and serious soap scum in the shower and tub. Make sure all faucets and drains are in working order and that the toilet paper dispenser works well.

d. If youâ€™re lucky enough to have a balcony, ensure that itâ€™s safe, in good repair and solidly attache For rooftop decks, make sure they are surrounded by stable fencing that prevents people from jumping or falling off the building by accident.

2. Keep A Calm Demeanor

When all hell breaks loose, grace under pressure is the best way to go. Stay cool and collected

when dealing with your landlord or property manager. Hysterical behavior or screaming never solves anything, so be as friendly and straightforward as possible.

Even if your landlord starts getting angry, stay professional. Itâ€™s the only way to achieve a mutually acceptable objective. When this doesnâ€™t work, calmly pursue other options that more forcefully compel the people who own your apartment to do the right thing.

3. Develop A Good Repartee With Your Maintenance Person

A little appreciation and courtesy will go a long way with your local maintenance professional. Tips will too. Donâ€™t forget them at the holidays. They could be of great help in a pinch when the landlord isn't available or is reluctant to comply. Because they know your face and have had friendly interactions with you, they will be more willing to help you out. You could probably go directly to them without having to deal with the landlord, if you're willing to put some work into the relationship.

4. Don't Be Afraid To Be Persistent With Your Landlord About Complaints

Being a low-maintenance tenant is one thing. Being a pushover is a whole other issue. If you ask your landlord politely to do repairs and they don't oblige, keep on them until they do.

Review your lease and see what you can do. Send a letter to the property owner or management company that explicitly states how many times you've requested your landlord to make repairs and when you asked for them and when your requests were denied. Send it by certified mail to assure yourself that they received it.

Allow them 30 days to remedy the issue. If that doesn't work, send the letter again but give them 15 days to respond. If that doesn't work, send it again but allow only seven days. When that doesn't work, just take them to court.

With a little diligence and detailed record-keeping, you can protect yourself from dodgy and/or lazy landlords and property managers if you are unfortunate enough to encounter them.

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Robert Forrest - About Author:
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