

Complaint Management

A Guide for Cooperative Boards
Making “LITE” of Complaints

Listen: Who is speaking—who is bringing the complaint to the Board?
An owner? A customer? A director? A staff person?

What is being said?

Practice respectful listening:

“There’s a kernel of truth in every complaint”

Be able to restate what you are hearing:

“I hear you saying...”

Be able to express gratitude for the information:

“Thanks, I heard you.”

Inquire: Ok, what now?

What is the issue?

What do we know about this issue?

What has the Board already said about these kinds of issues?

Are there policies in place? Prior decisions?

What process is in place to address this issue?

Whose job is it to address this issue? The GM? The Board?

Take Action:

Always be sure that SOMEONE (Board or GM) RESPONDS!

Show that the complaint was heard.

Never jump to conclusions!

Assume the person responsible made a good faith effort to do a good job.

- .Don’t just do something: sit there!
 - Just because it was directed to the Board doesn’t make it Board work.
 - If it’s delegated to the General Manager, then pass it on: Have a system in place!
- Don’t just sit there: do something!
 - **“SIT”**: Evaluate **S**everity, **I**mplications, **T**rends of complaint.
 - If everything complained of were true, how serious would this issue be?
 - If it’s potentially severe, illegal, persistent, or otherwise violates board policy: Monitor the policy, or investigate the complaint **while maintaining role clarity**.
 - Ask the GM to account for the information the board has received. Internal reports from the GM supported by adequate data are often all that will be needed
 - Outside/external investigator critical where the GM’s integrity is questioned or illegal conduct alleged (consider legal counsel)
 - Direct inspection by the Board can be used with caution: don’t use it if professional expertise is needed or if internal review by the GM will suffice.

Evaluate:

What have we learned from this complaint?

Are policy changes needed?

A successful approach to managing complaints uses a good process:

Focus on the process not the outcome.