

# The Leasing Interview

**NALP** 

NATIONAL APARTMENT  
LEASING PROFESSIONAL®



## **NALP** **National Apartment Leasing Professional**

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### **Acknowledgments**

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## Message to Apartment Leasing Professionals

This education program was developed by Leasing, Operations, Marketing and Training Professionals working in the multifamily housing industry across the nation.

It was developed and revised at the request of Leasing Professionals and apartment association members, like you, who told us what they need to successfully perform their job responsibilities. It was also developed at the request of your managers, supervisors, owners and employers. They asked for this program because of your importance to the industry. They recognize you as the key to leasing, renewing and serving future and current residents of your communities and buildings.

The Leasing Interview course is the fourth course in the NALP program. The other courses, in addition to this course, are as follows:

1. Keys to Success in Leasing
2. Telephone Presentations
3. Leasing and the Internet
4. The Leasing Interview
5. Leasing Demonstration & Follow-Up
6. Rental Policies and Procedures
7. Legal Aspects
8. The Market Survey

For more information about this program or any of NAAEI's education programs, ask your instructor, contact your local apartment association, or contact NAAEI at 703/518-6141.



## Course Objectives

At the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- ▶ Inspect and prepare the apartment community, Leasing Center, and target apartments for daily business.
- ▶ Properly greet prospective residents.
- ▶ Build rapport with prospective residents in order to understand their needs and wants.
- ▶ Apply Fair Housing best practices to greeting and qualifying a prospective resident.

Sample

## First Impressions Make a Difference

First impressions are made within the first 30 seconds. Those impressions are lasting and can be good, bad or indifferent. It is our job to ensure that the impression made from the moment the property comes into view is a good and lasting impression.

### Why is appearance of the community so important?

In the multihousing industry, appearance is so important that we lose customers who never get a chance to see past the obvious. The image you project from the first moment the prospective resident visits your apartment community must be an image of pride and professionalism. This image already has begun to form in the prospective resident's mind, even before they enter the Leasing Center, as they subconsciously evaluate the aesthetic value of each of the following:

- ▶ Curb appeal
- ▶ Signage/Flags/Banners
- ▶ Landscaping and appearance of the grounds
- ▶ Lighting
- ▶ Exteriors of buildings
- ▶ Common areas
- ▶ Leasing Center
- ▶ The tour route, model, and vacants
- ▶ The Leasing Professional

### Which of these items does the leasing team have control over each day?

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## The Importance of Curb Appeal

**“What the public sees when driving or walking by your apartment community.”**

The apartment community's curb appeal makes a definite statement in the prospective resident's mind before you have the opportunity to meet them. Curb appeal can be one of your most valuable leasing tools. The appearance of your community indicates the type of resident you want to attract. If your grounds are littered with debris, the signage is in disrepair and the parking areas are not clean or are cluttered, the statement being made is a clear lack of caring for your apartment community or the residents who live there. This also reflects on your resident profile.

On the other hand, well-manicured lawns, clean windows and clean parking areas tell a different story. They say that you have something special to offer, that you have an excellent maintenance program and that you care about your residents. Good curb appeal will tempt the prospective resident to investigate the apartment community by creating interest and excitement.

The Leasing Professional should critique the apartment community's curb appeal daily.

Many companies spend large sums of money to plant seasonal flowers surrounding the exterior of the apartment community near the Leasing Center and common areas. If a prospective resident is driving past the apartment community on their way to work, they will be attracted by your apartment community's exterior appearance. Your curb appeal should make such a positive statement that it is one of your most effective forms of advertising.

## Signage

Signs are an important component of the apartment community's image. They should:

- ▶ Attract the prospective resident's attention
- ▶ Identify the apartment community
- ▶ Direct the prospective resident to the Leasing Center

Signs should be inspected daily if they are to serve their purpose. A sign that is bent, leaning, broken or faded, indicates neglect. If the sign is lighted, condition and effectiveness should be checked periodically in the evening. Most signs are accompanied by attractive surrounding landscaping, but greenery and flowers should never block the sign itself. Signs should attract attention, identify the apartment community and direct the prospective resident to the Leasing Center.

Sample



## Landscaping and Walkways

Landscape maintenance is an important item, which should be checked daily. If you are in a high-rise or mid-rise building, you may have more limited landscaping, but the tour path to the office from the lobby is just as important. As you drive or walk to the Leasing Center, evaluate the effectiveness of the plantings, landscaping and grounds of the apartment community.

Inspect the following:

- ▶ Grass should be green, edged and cut at the proper level.
- ▶ Flowerbeds or planting containers should be clean and well maintained.
- ▶ Lobby glass should be clean and sparkling.
- ▶ Elevators should be clean and free of trash.
- ▶ Hallways should be clean, vacuumed and well lighted.
- ▶ Curbs should be in good repair and painted.
- ▶ Parking areas and drives should be maintained (no potholes) and striped.
- ▶ All areas should be free of clutter and debris.
- ▶ Carports and garages should be free of dead leaves, oil spots and in good repair.
- ▶ Playgrounds should be clean and equipment maintained.
- ▶ Recreation areas should be clean, organized and maintained.
- ▶ Shrubs and trees should be trimmed.
- ▶ Sidewalks and steps should be clean and in good repair.

## Lighting

Lighting is not simply a decorator item. Its placement and effectiveness are an important part of your community's safety precautions. Outside and inside lighting fixtures should be checked on a routine basis for proper illumination.

All outside, inside hallway and/or stairwell lights should be in working condition, not only for the overall appearance of the apartment community and curb appeal, but for the safety of the residents as well. If the lights are not working properly, the apartment community may be vulnerable to litigation in case of an accident or criminal incident.

## Exterior Building Appearance

Both prospective and current residents see the condition of your buildings as a reflection of the overall effectiveness of the management staff.

Take note of the following as you tour or inspect your community. Be certain to make note of any repairs that are necessary.

1. Are gutters and siding painted and well maintained?
2. Are windows clean and in good repair? (No broken or cracked window sills.)
3. Is brick work/siding in good repair?
4. Is outside caulking checked routinely?
5. Is building lighting working properly?
6. Are railings and decorative trim painted and in good repair?
7. Are steps and sidewalks in good condition?
8. Are building addresses visible, clearly marked and well maintained?
9. Are resident's windows covered in neutral colored blinds or draperies?
10. Are balconies neat and tidy, not full of furnishings, bicycles, etc.?



## Amenities and Common Areas

Common areas are those shared by all of your residents. They should be included in your tour of the apartment community with the prospective resident.

The following questions should be addressed:

- ▶ Are floors clean and in good repair?
- ▶ Are hallways and stairwells free of clutter?
- ▶ Are railings secure?
- ▶ Are mailboxes/mailbox rooms clearly marked and well maintained?
- ▶ Are walls in good condition?
- ▶ Are individual doors clearly marked by number or letter?
- ▶ Are package rooms neat and orderly?

Items that should be inspected include:

- ▶ Flooring (clean and in good repair);
- ▶ Furnishings (clean);
- ▶ Kitchen facilities (clean and organized);
- ▶ Restrooms (in good repair and clean); and
- ▶ All recreational facilities clean and in good repair, including swimming pool, tennis courts, exercise rooms and other amenities.

When your apartment community offers residents and prospective residents an amenity, it is your responsibility to verify that area is clean and in good condition. Any repairs should be handled immediately upon discovery.

## The Leasing Center

The Leasing Professional must realize that surroundings, furnishings and organizational atmosphere set the mood of the office and establish the level of professionalism. Make sure the office appeals to the five senses.

**Sight:** How can you make sure that your leasing office is appealing to the eye?

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**Taste:** How can you make sure that your leasing office appeals to the sense of taste?

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**Touch:** How can you make your leasing office appeal to the sense of touch?

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**Sound:** How can you appeal to the sense of sound in your leasing office?

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**Smell:** In what ways can your leasing office appeal to the sense of smell?

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Remember that organization is the key to the success of your apartment community and you. Investigate and inspect each model apartment before demonstrating it to prospective residents. On the next page is a sample of a Leasing Center Standards Checklist.

## The Leasing Center Standards Checklist

Every day, each Leasing Professional should take a moment to view the Leasing Center as a prospective resident would upon entering the office for the first time. Please complete the following checklist on your office and perform it mentally whenever you walk into your office.

How does the office appear to the prospective resident?

	<b>Yes/No</b>
1. Are all desks free of clutter with minimal personal items and stocked with leasing materials?	_____
2. Is the bathroom clean and neat, stocked with tissue items?	_____
3. Are the trash baskets clean and not overflowing?	_____
4. Are the floors free of clutter?	_____
5. Are all empty drink containers disposed of and not present throughout the office?	_____
6. Is the carpet vacuumed?	_____
7. Is the kitchen area clean and tidy?	_____
8. Is all the dusting completed throughout the office?	_____
9. Are all windows and glass doors throughout the office clean?	_____
10. Do all team members have a "professional" appearance?	_____
11. Are all entrances to the office clean and orderly?	_____
12. Is the office supply and storage area neat and orderly?	_____
13. Is there quiet, easy-listening music in the background?	_____
14. Are all plants healthy looking and devoid of dead leaves?	_____



## The Tour Route, Model and Vacants

The tour route should be inspected each day to ensure that the route is free of trash and neat. Are your apartments rent ready? Each apartment and model available to show must be inspected each day to ensure that the apartment homes:

- ▶ Are clean.
- ▶ Have working lights.
- ▶ Have working mechanicals.
- ▶ Are stocked with leasing tools.

Keep in mind that the model should appeal also to the five senses: **visual, sound, touch, smell and taste.**

## The Leasing Professional: “Personal” Curb Appeal

Property Management is a service oriented business and the Leasing Professional must maintain a positive mental attitude at all times. As the saying goes “You are the community!” Your image and overall attitude that is conveyed to the prospective resident will determine whether or not the prospective resident leases an apartment home from you. You can have the best product in the market, but if you do not project an attitude of enthusiasm, achievement and professional image, the lease will be lost before the model is even shown.

Project an attitude of achievement by:

- ▶ Being positive and enthusiastic;
- ▶ Being a goal setter;
- ▶ Believing in your company;
- ▶ Believing in your community; and
- ▶ Believing in yourself.

## Professional Appearance

**“You must first sell yourself before you sell anything.”**

Good common sense should be applied when considering your personal appearance. The image projected by the staff reflects the level of professionalism. A professional appearance is one of the most important parts of the lease. You must be aware of how you look and sound.

How can this be achieved?

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You may be required to wear formal business attire or business casual. Depending on your situation, always make sure that your appearance is neat and your outfit is well pressed.

Each day complete a personal inventory of your appearance:

- ▶ Are my shoes shined and heel tips in good shape?
- ▶ Are my clothes neat and pressed?
- ▶ Are hair and fingernails well groomed?
- ▶ For women, are my makeup and jewelry appropriate for the leasing environment?
- ▶ Am I dressed for success or for a night out on the town?
- ▶ For men, have I shaved?

**You are the product—are you rent ready?**

## Understanding the Prospective Resident's Reason for Moving

Your knowledge and understanding of why people move (in other words, their needs and wants) will help you in selling your apartment community.

The prospective resident may have several reasons for moving, however, your job is to clearly understand the purpose of the move in order to gain valuable insight that can be used to find the perfect home for the prospective resident and to prepare for a successful close.

Based on a 24-month survey conducted in 2002 by SatisFacts, the four major reasons why people move are:

1. To buy a house
2. Rent Increase
3. Relocation
4. Moving home

To understand the above mentioned reasons, you must understand that each of the reasons can be categorized into four major categories:

1. Family
2. Finances
3. Prestige
4. Physical well being



## Family

Some factors may have changed in the prospective resident's family—recent marriage or a new baby, and the need for more space; a divorce or death and the need for less space; and the residents' grown children moved away, resulting in a need for less space.

## Finances

The prospective resident may have received a raise and can now afford a more luxurious apartment. Perhaps an extra source of income has been cut off and the prospective resident needs to economize or some financial change has occurred, making a move either necessary or desirable.

## Prestige

Some apartment communities and styles are symbols of success so a recently promoted prospective resident moves from an efficiency to a one-bedroom apartment with a study.

## Physical Well Being

An apartment community allows more time for leisure activities than does a single family house. The prospective resident may be searching for a more stress free lifestyle with recreational facilities and the time to use them.

The prospective resident may have one of the above reasons or a combination of several reasons that have prompted a move. By establishing the purpose of the move, the Leasing Professional gains valuable insights that can be used for a successful close.

Research completed by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) shows that the four major reasons why current residents selected their current apartments are:

1. Monthly rent amount
2. Location/Neighborhood
3. Immediate availability
4. Lifestyle/ Image/ Safety

In addition to seeking apartments with more square footage and more bedrooms, residents favor these amenities:

- ▶ Full size washers and dryer.
- ▶ Sufficient hot water.
- ▶ Soundproofing and entryways with some degree of privacy.
- ▶ Extra safety measures such as intrusion alarms, controlled access and closed circuit television monitors.
- ▶ Larger windows.
- ▶ Extra parking spaces.
- ▶ Larger mailboxes.
- ▶ Gardens, balconies or patios.

Sample



## Be Prepared and Knowledgeable

The prospective resident is relying on you to help them make a good decision about their new apartment home. They view you as an expert in the multifamily industry.

This gives you the lead with the prospect; they already view you as a leader before you have even said a word. Seize that moment and build your presentation around this trust that has been placed in you. This credibility will continue to build if the following occurs:

As a Leasing Professional, you should:

- ▶ Have complete knowledge of your product/market.
- ▶ Assemble a Leasing Notebook and properly use it.
- ▶ Understand how to develop a “Show List” and use it to your advantage.
- ▶ Determine the benefits of all the features in the community to be better prepared to “sell” your product.
- ▶ Develop a thorough knowledge of other communities in your area so that you understand how your community competes with them. Insert information and brochures into your Leasing Notebook about other properties.

As a Leasing Professional, you must have the confidence required to perform your job and have thorough knowledge of your product. To be effective in your role, you will need to know:

- ▶ What your competitors are doing and/or offering.
- ▶ Community/neighborhood conveniences, businesses, etc.
- ▶ Room sizes, square footages.
- ▶ Quality/construction features.
- ▶ Brand names/types of appliances.
- ▶ Familiarity of all amenities (i.e., pool, tennis courts, etc.).

- ▶ Lease terms.
- ▶ Rental rates/ Deposits/ Policies.
- ▶ Energy efficiency features.
- ▶ Apartment features (i.e., vaulted ceilings, fireplaces, etc.).

The Leasing Notebook has several uses and selling benefits. Listed below are two of these benefits:

1. It shows the guest you are prepared and ready to show the community.
2. It becomes a good resource when the guest asks a question.

## The Leasing Notebook

The Leasing Notebook is a resource tool that helps the Leasing Professional avoid memorizing vast quantities of information. By having information about the community organized and readily available it assists in answering the prospective residents questions on the spot which assists in closing the lease.

Getting started you will need:

1. A three-ring binder containing inside pockets to include all blank leasing forms, Welcome/Guest Cards, Rental Application, Bond paperwork, floor plans, etc.
2. Set of tabs.
3. A three-hole punched zipper pocket containing pens, business cards, a tape measure, calculator, stapler, highlighter, etc.

**NOTE:** Clip the Guest Card to the front of the Leasing Notebook for handy reference during the leasing presentation to have the card easily available for recording additional information such as apartments shown, etc.

- ▶ **Availability Ready List:** Each day you should prepare a list of apartments that are ready for show. This means that the apartment was walked TODAY by a member of the staff to determine that it is in ready condition.
- ▶ **Floor Plans:** If your individual floor plans are smaller than 8½" X 11", you should attach them to a regular sheet and insert under this section. On a separate sheet of paper, list rental rates, room sizes, square footages and security deposit amount for each floor plan.
- ▶ **Floor/Building Layout:** If you are in a high-rise or a mid-rise building, you will need to know what floorplans are available on what floors, as well as pertinent information such as their view and primary exposure.
- ▶ **Site Plan:** Include a site plan with all amenities, pools, clubrooms, mailbox areas, or any outstanding features highlighted. This will allow you to determine the direction a particular apartment home faces, as well as its view.
- ▶ **Community/Building Information:** Keep a list of benefits that match the features of your building or community. It is also a good idea to keep a copy of the community's building addresses handy as well as a current Market Comparable Study.
- ▶ **Community/Building Convenience List:** This includes a standard list of businesses in the area such as schools, hospitals, libraries, post office, shopping centers, grocery stores, cleaners, etc. You might also include a city map of your area with points of interest indicated on the map.

- ▶ **Photos:** It is recommended that photographs be taken of amenities, the model or scenic areas of your community and used to show prospective residents. These will be particularly beneficial during winter months or rainy days. For high-rise buildings, photos of night time views are an excellent leasing tool. Also include pictures of the onsite team, particularly the service team.
- ▶ **Moving Information:** This section contains moving convenience lists and handy Web sites that assist with moving.
- ▶ **Leasing Overviews:** A leasing overview is a simplified explanation of your lease agreement. Include a copy of the leasing overview so that you will always feel at ease when explaining the lease. You can easily refer to this section when explaining the lease to your guest. Be careful to follow state and local laws regarding what contractual items can be reviewed by you and which should be handled by the manager.
- ▶ **Miscellaneous:** Other items you might want to include are: corporate apartments, furniture information, newsletters, calendar of events and resident activities. Site maps of the region, the city, and the local community each with the apartment community noted (may be obtained from city or county planning office), a note pad to jot down questions that need follow up or to note service request needs of an apartment demonstrated.

All of this information should be carefully organized in your Leasing Notebook so that you maintain a professional appearance.

## Avoid Industry Slang—Activity

While it is important to assure the prospect that you are an informed Leasing Professional, use of slang and industry-specific terms can be confusing and even irritating to a customer. Substitute words, which have a positive connotation for those with negative connotations. Creating a positive image, for both future and existing residents, is the foundation of sound resident relations.

As a group, brainstorm alternatives for the industry team.

Industry Term	Use These Words Instead
Unit	
Tenant	
Complex/Project	
Leasing/Leasing Agent	
Landlord	
Rules and Regulations	
Office	
Hold	
Work Order	
Maintenance Man	
Traffic/Pieces of Traffic	



# The Leasing Interview

Participant Guide

National Apartment Leasing Professional

Security	
Security Gates	
Security Intercom	
Problem	
Gym	
Laundry Room	
"I don't know."	
"We can't do that."	
"I disagree."	
"No, that's not included."	
"You'll have to..."	
"But..."	
"Hang on a second."	

Sample





## How Should a Prospective Resident be Greeted?

Before serving a prospective resident, you must be prepared with the right attitude. Remember that you are here to take care of the prospect's needs. Offering a warm and friendly greeting conveys this message. A proper greeting is the first step in establishing personal rapport with the prospective resident. Prospects are not an interruption of your day, but rather why you are there...to help them find a home. Your goal is to make prospects feel comfortable so that they will communicate their needs and wants which will allow you to find the perfect apartment home for them.

Remember that research shows that they have already been through this process an average of nine times already! It is your job to greet, re-assure, inform and close!

There are a number of ways to express sincerity, to show the prospective resident that they are important:

- ▶ Use positive facial expressions;
- ▶ Have a friendly tone of voice;
- ▶ Stand, smile, and immediately acknowledge the prospective resident;
- ▶ Give the prospective resident your undivided attention; and
- ▶ Acknowledge the prospective resident even when you are occupied with another person or on a telephone call.

1. Make eye contact immediately.
2. Stand and eliminate physical barriers between you and the other person. Come from around your desk and head toward the prospect to welcome them.
3. Smile. A smile always conveys a warm welcome.
4. As you walk toward the person, greet them with warmth and enthusiasm. Extend a handshake as deemed appropriate.

A word about handshakes, especially for women: A University of Alabama study has proven a firm handshake correlates with positive personality traits. Researchers found a firm handshake was related positively to extroversion and emotional expressiveness. For women, it was also related positively to openness to experience. A firm handshake pays off!

Recall from the Telephone Presentations course to be respectful of the variety of cultures represented by our population today. Offer the handshake, but be prepared to accommodate a cultural preference NOT to shake hands.

5. Tell them your name and obtain their name. "My name is Jenna Lee and your name is...?"
6. Repeat their name back to them, to help yourself remember it and to ensure that you are using the correct pronunciation. Then make sure you use their name occasionally throughout your presentation, but be careful not to overuse it.

Your first words of greeting and your expressions are vital to the positive impression you are attempting to give.

Write down the greeting you will utilize:

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## Greeting FAQs

### **What if I am on the telephone speaking with another prospect and I am the only one in the office?**

If you are speaking on the telephone when prospects enter, acknowledge the prospects by looking up, smiling and offering a gesture indicating that you will be with them in a moment.

Prospects do not mind waiting after they have been acknowledged and when they understand that you are with another customer. People generally do not expect you to immediately terminate a business conversation, but they do expect you to be aware of their presence.

On the other hand, if prospects see that you are merely passing the time of day with a friend or an acquaintance, or if you are conducting a personal telephone call, they will become irritated by your unprofessional attitude.

### **What if a prospect enters and I have a report due to my supervisor immediately?**

Always put the customer first no matter what type of report or paperwork you are completing. Although you may find yourself hard pressed to meet report deadlines, you must delay them temporarily to greet prospects, even if they are not those with whom you have a special interest.

### **What if a prospect enters and I am already with another customer?**

If you and the prospects are conversing during a particularly busy time and another person enters the Leasing Center, politely excuse yourself, greet the visitor, and explain that you or another person will assist them momentarily. Invite them to be seated or view the display area.

## Fair Housing Implications

### What are the Fair Housing implications involved in greeting a prospective resident and conducting the Leasing Interview?

A lengthy review of Fair Housing laws is available in the Legal Aspects portion of the NALP course. We will review only briefly the practices most involved in greeting a prospect and conducting a leasing interview.

It is important to greet and interview every applicant in the same way. You must greet each person equally, extend the same courtesies of every person, and ask for the same information from everyone.

#### **Be consistent! Treat everyone the same!**

The Leasing Professional must use common sense.

- ▶ Make no statement or perform any act that implies that any protected class is more/less desirable than another as far as neighborhood composition, personal safety, or quality of schools.
- ▶ Do not tell jokes regarding protected classes to a prospective resident, another employee, or anyone who may be in a position to report the remark to others.

## How can the Leasing Professional avoid the risk of being accused of discriminatory housing practices?

- ▶ Complete a Guest Card for all prospects.
- ▶ Document the leasing interaction.
- ▶ Ensure application requirements are the same for all.
- ▶ Apply policies uniformly.
- ▶ Give everyone the same information and use the same interview questions.
- ▶ Ask everyone the same questions based on the same circumstances.
- ▶ Know how to respond to requests for reasonable accommodations or modifications.
- ▶ Present facts to prospective residents without comments that may discourage them from living in your apartment community or that steer them toward a particular section or building.
- ▶ Take all prospects on the same tour route.

### Reminder! The Golden Rule of Fair Housing always applies:

- ▶ Be consistent!
- ▶ Treat everyone the same!

## Conducting the Leasing Interview

**“Relationship selling is the state-of-the-art today. It means custom-tailoring information to individual people.”** Brian Tracy, Motivational Speaker

Our customers are more sophisticated and educated than ever before. In fact, they understand when they are being “closed”. The customer of today wants to do business with a Leasing Professional who is knowledgeable, enthusiastic and genuinely cares. In order to display these attributes to your prospective resident, you must realize the importance of getting to know your customer and establishing a rapport that allows the prospective resident to feel comfortable sharing information with you.

The Leasing Interview is not an interrogation or a robotic routine but instead, a productive question and answer time to share conversation, build rapport and discover needs and wants that will ensure you the opportunity to find the appropriate apartment home for the prospective resident. If you spend more time discovering the needs and wants of your customer, it will be easier to find the appropriate apartment home and lease to them. The key is to relate to the customer. Building rapport is a vital feature of the leasing interview. Strong listening skills and properly reading body language contribute to successful rapport building.

## Building Rapport

Successful business people understand the longevity of their business depends on the relationship and bond that is built with clients, vendors and prospective customers. Rapport is the key to relationship-building and the following represent the five most effective ways to create instant and lasting rapport, as reported by Paul Montelongo, CGR, a nationally recognized speaker and consultant.

1. **Express a genuine interest in the other person and in what is important to him or her.** Ask questions in order to find things in common. Use their personal name. Make mental or actual notes about important events or activities in the prospect’s life. When you show interest, not only will people be more likely to open up, but they are also more likely to listen and trust you.
2. **Create physical rapport.** This is sometimes called matching, mirroring or parroting. Try to match body language, vocabulary and tone of voice of the prospect. As different as we are, we tend to have the same body language for what we are feeling. This shows respect and adds validity to what the other person is saying.

3. **Be an active listener.** Discussed earlier in the Telephone Techniques course, listening four times longer than speaking is the mark of a strong communicator. Listening attentively allows you to repeat and paraphrase to check for understanding. People love to talk more than listen so the listener controls the conversation.
4. **Seek agreement.** It is easier to move from agreement to agreement than from disagreement to disagreement. Search for a way to reach similarities. Look for beliefs and opinions you can share. If there are none, the agreement to disagree can sometimes build enough respect for opening a relationship. Agreement may require an adjustment on your part, but even the slightest detail of agreement brings a base for relationship establishing.
5. **Be genuinely friendly.** There is no substitute and no way to fake it. A smile and pleasant disposition can diffuse any level of tension. It doesn't mean that you have to be bubbly. A sincere smile, a warm handshake, good manners and strong eye contact go a long way.

## Listening Skills

Dr. Larry Barker and Dr. Kittie Watson, co-authors of the book "Listen Up: How to Improve Relationships, Reduce Stress and Be More Productive by Using the Power of Listening," conclude that there are enormous benefits in strong listening abilities. Such skills enable you to:

- ▶ **Control the dialogue.** Listeners can draw out others to get information.
- ▶ **Uncover people's desires.** You cannot please someone if you do not know what they want.
- ▶ **Reduce stress.** When people feel that they are being heard, their stress levels fall and they are more cooperative. Think of what it does for you!
- ▶ **Put yourself in demand.** Attentiveness makes others feel special so you will be a desirable contact.
- ▶ **Improve business performance.** Listening rewards you with ideas to enhance products and services.

Research shows that the average person on the job spends 40% of his time listening, 35% talking, 16% reading and 9% writing. How you maximize the 40% is essential to your success as a Leasing Professional. Follow these laws of listening to make the most of your interviewing skills with prospects, as well as your communication with residents, vendors and co-workers.

1. **Listen to understand, not to reply.** So often we think about what we want to say—or in the case of prospect interviewing—what comes next in our questioning. Give prospects all the time they need to speak. Listen for what is being said and how it is being said.
2. **Make eye contact.** This is a key skill, even with prospects whose cultural background suggests a downward glance. Looking anywhere but at your customer tells them that something else is more important. Even if you are taking notes or completing the Guest Card, do so with occasional glances back at the prospect. Use your eyes to communicate non-verbally with the customer—widening, showing surprise, etc. Let your expressions show that you are building a trustworthy relationship with the speaker.
3. **Ask questions.** Good listening requires you to interpret what the speaker is saying and reading between the lines. You must make sure there are no misunderstandings. Do not interrupt, but at a time of pause ask pertinent questions or re-phrase their point just made to show you are seeking understanding. Your prospects will appreciate that you are trying to clearly identify their needs. Plus if they go off on a tangent, your questions can redirect the conversation.
4. **Repeat important points.** Reviewing what you have determined to be the most important issues serves several purposes: First, it shows customers how well you listened; second, it ensures that what YOU thought was important is what the prospect thought was important; third, repeating the speaker's own words goes a long way to ensuring understanding is occurring—how can the speaker refute his own words? Do not try to take verbatim quotes, but jot down key terms.



5. **Look out for obstacles to good listening.** Interruptions, your prospect's speaking style and your own experiences can get in the way of understanding. Simply be aware that they can intrude and concentrate on keeping them to a minimum. If the speaker is monotone or the office is continuously interrupting, take steps to move, or use self-discipline to keep your mind from wandering.
6. **Keep your composure.** When prospects object to some part of your units, amenities, pricing or specials, you will need to stay cool to close the sale. Avoid taking negative comments personally. Be sympathetic and understand that the prospect is showing you he needs your help. By staying calm, you also have a better chance to think and through questioning, steer the conversation toward resolution. Restrain yourself from answering each assertion with a "but" or raising your voice.
7. **Listen actively.** To absorb everything, you must keep your brain engaged as you listen. You can think a lot faster than your prospects will talk, so you will have a chance to analyze the words they speak. Think about how their needs match your property and how you have helped other prospects with similar needs.

Your prospect's words hold the key to your sale so LISTEN carefully!

## Body Language

If you know what to look for, you can learn a lot from a prospect's body language. When the body language is consistent with what they are saying, you can have reasonable confidence that they are going to be honest and open with you. But when their words say one thing and their body language another, there is a good chance there is a problem. Here are a couple of tips for you as a Leasing Professional and for reading your prospect as you listen to his or her needs:

- ▶ **Make a good first impression** with eye contact, a smile, a greeting and open body language. Unbuttoning the jacket of a suit, an extended hand in greeting, arms outstretched and open are all positive signals to the prospect.

- ▶ As you listen to the prospect, continue to **show your interest by tilting your head and body toward the prospect**. Turning your head slightly to one side notes your eagerness to listen, to hear. If standing, encourage the prospect to sit—much more casual and meaningful conversation occurs when people are seated. If you remain standing, refrain from standing in a “power” stance—weight evenly distributed, slightly bent backwards, chest out, arms crossed. This posture is one of closed power and will interrupt communication.
- ▶ **Synchronize yourself with the other person**. Is he crossing his legs or talking softly? Does she tilt her head. Mirror the language subtly. If you study this process, you will find that you may do this already in conversations with your close acquaintances. It is a natural reaction that you need to study since you have not yet built the rapport with the prospect.

Be careful not to overdo your mirroring. Anybody that is blabbering flattery while thrusting her heart at you and imitating your movements would easily be detected as a phony!

## The Ultimate Question – Activity

Listening and use of body language are both effective ways to connect with your prospect. With a successful leasing interview, you can turn that prospect into a loyal customer. Let's look at the “Ultimate Question” when it comes to profits and “promoters”.

## Objective of the Leasing Interview

Gather information that will assist you in identifying what the prospect wants most in their new apartment home and take that information and match the appropriate apartment home with the prospective resident.

It is easier to prepare for the prospective resident who has made a telephone inquiry and allowed you to determine qualification in advance. In these cases, you will greet the prospects when they arrive for their appointment and, after exchanging greetings, confirm the information that was gathered previously with the prospect and ask any further questions to identify their needs and wants.

This is especially effective if you have used the Guest Card during your telephone conversation and already have pertinent information on it.

## The Welcome/Guest Card and Beginning the Interview

Most apartment communities have a specific form known as a Guest Card. There is a sample Guest Card at the end of this section. The Guest Card helps qualify a prospect and then serves as a way to begin collecting information about a prospect's wants and needs. The information collected on the Guest Card aids in evaluating the results of advertising and promotional efforts. In this section, we will discuss the use of the Guest Card for the personal interview understanding that the card may already have been started during the telephone interview.

The Welcome/Guest Card also helps the Leasing Professional to:

- ▶ **Develop:** \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **Obtain:** \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **Establish:** \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **Identify:** \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ **Document:** \_\_\_\_\_

Sample



The Welcome/Guest Card should be completed by the Leasing Professional. Talk with the prospective resident for a few minutes before you begin completing the Welcome/Guest Card. This builds rapport and you will more likely get more information from the prospective resident. Your opening line could be “How long have you been looking for a new home?” Or “Tell me about the special things you are looking for in your new home.” Keep it conversational.

There are disadvantages in having the prospective resident complete the Guest Card.

- ▶ A prospect may be offended when asked to complete the card unless you explain the purpose. Even then, the prospect may feel the questions are unnecessary and irrelevant.
- ▶ Many times, the prospect's handwriting is illegible, making the information on the card impossible to use for follow-up purposes.
- ▶ Prospect's often do not complete the card in its entirety, choosing instead to fill out only their name or a few blanks of their own choosing.

A sample Guest Card has been provided on the following two pages.

Sample



## Welcome Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Fax (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Names of others who will be living with you: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear about us? \_\_\_\_\_

- Referral    Apt. Publication    Apartments.com    Locator    Drive-by  
 Realtor    Relocation Co.    Newspaper ad    Realtor    Internet  
 Employer    Community website  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_ If Internet, which site? \_\_\_\_\_

What size apartment best suits your needs? \_\_\_\_\_

- Studio    1-bedroom    2-bedroom    3-bedroom

What floor do you prefer? \_\_\_\_\_ Price Range desired \_\_\_\_\_

What features are most important? \_\_\_\_\_

Move-in date desired? \_\_\_\_\_

Why are you moving? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any special needs or desires for your new home (i.e. room size, storage, work space etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_

What specifically attracted you to our community? \_\_\_\_\_

We are a pet-friendly community. Do you have a pet?  No  Yes, I have a \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Pet's age: \_\_\_\_\_, Weight: \_\_\_\_\_, Breed: \_\_\_\_\_)

Leasing Professional: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_ Day: \_\_\_\_\_

*(This side to be completed by the Leasing Professional)*

1<sup>st</sup> contact: Date   /  /   How?  Phone  In-person  e-mail  other \_\_\_\_\_  
Results \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> contact: Date   /  /   How?  Phone  In-person  e-mail  other \_\_\_\_\_  
Results \_\_\_\_\_

3<sup>rd</sup> contact: Date   /  /   How?  Phone  In-person  e-mail  other \_\_\_\_\_  
Results \_\_\_\_\_

Model(s) shown \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_

Vacant(s) shown \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_

Why did not show \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail thank you \_\_\_\_\_ date   /  /  

Guest's needs and wants \_\_\_\_\_

Hot buttons \_\_\_\_\_

If guest did not lease, why? \_\_\_\_\_

Sample



## What is your opening line to begin the Leasing Interview?

Make sure questions are asked in a conversational manner rather than an interrogation. A great way to begin is by asking: “In order to help me find the perfect apartment home for you, I need to ask you a few questions, all right?”

If a prospective resident opposes giving you the information, politely explain the importance of the information in determining their specific wants and needs. The Leasing Professional can convey the impression that these questions are important, in which case the prospect will probably want to answer them as completely and accurately as possible. After all, this is part of the Leasing Professional’s objective—to establish a good relationship with the prospect.

These are the basic leasing interview questions that need to be covered in order to assist the prospective resident in finding the perfect apartment home.

### Interviewing Basics

Avoid questions that may be answered with a “Yes” or “No” by asking open-ended questions that begin with:

- ▶ Who; What; When; Where; Why; and How

**Bonus Open-ended Questions** produce an abundance of information about the prospect:

- ▶ What specifically are you looking for in your new apartment home?
- ▶ Where are you living now?
- ▶ Help me understand what prompted your decision to move?

Welcome/Guest Card questions can include:

- ▶ What size apartment home best suits your needs?
- ▶ When would you like to move into the apartment?
- ▶ Who will be occupying the apartment home?
- ▶ Furnished or unfurnished?
- ▶ What price range did you have in mind?
- ▶ What preferences (floor preferences [1st, 2nd, 3rd], fireplace, washer/dryer, color scheme)?
- ▶ Any pets?
- ▶ Where are you employed?
- ▶ How did you hear about the community? Or what particularly interested you in our community?
- ▶ Why are you moving? (This is one of your best tools in knowing how to close. Find out what the problem is and solve it!)

Sample





The effective Leasing Professional establishes a prospect's wants and needs by asking well phrased questions and by answering questions from the prospect. You will have already accumulated a good deal of information from the prospect's Guest Card. Utilize the information gathered on the Guest Card to build your leasing presentation.

Complete the rest of the open-ended questions.

Please describe for me:

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Tell me about:

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### Domino Questioning Techniques

This is named after the chain reaction created when a line of dominoes is stood on end and the first one is tipped over. As one domino falls upon the next, one question influences the next. The questions are linked to each other and follow a natural progression of information gathering.

While you will need to focus on asking questions to complete the Guest Card, each subsequent question should not repeat questions on the card but should be phrased to give the prospect an opportunity to talk more extensively about him or herself.

Write two domino questions:

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## Primary Versus Secondary Questions

Primary questions are the questions included on the Guest Card that you must know before the leasing interview begins. Secondary questions utilize the information obtained from the primary questions to draw out more information and clarify the information. A good way to phrase a secondary question is to begin them with **why**. For example, “I see that you would prefer an apartment home on the first floor. Why do you prefer the first floor?” Utilizing a primary question, write a secondary question that will reveal more information.

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## Exploratory Questions

These questions help you explore the prospect’s reasons for moving and his or her particular needs. They help you to develop a road map to close your prospect. By uncovering “hot buttons”—those things that are important to your prospect—you can more easily and accurately match the prospect’s needs with your community.

List several sample hot buttons you might discover from your prospect:

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Exploratory questions should be different than those that are on the Guest Card—they should expand from the Guest Card questions. The more hot buttons you can get from one question the better! As you think about these exploratory questions consider the questions below to help you determine what is important to your prospect and what may be driving their ultimate leasing decision.

- ▶ How large is your present apartment?
- ▶ What will you base your decision on?
- ▶ Do you work in the area?
- ▶ How will you know when you have found the right apartment?
- ▶ What color scheme are you working with?
- ▶ Where are you in your process of choosing an apartment?
- ▶ When does your lease expire?
- ▶ How did you choose your present apartment?
- ▶ What attracted you to our community?
- ▶ What pleases you most about your present apartment?
- ▶ What is most important to you in your apartment home?
- ▶ What are you looking for that you don't have now?
- ▶ What have you liked at other communities?
- ▶ What features are most important to you?
- ▶ What type of location do you prefer in a community?

Write two exploratory questions that you will use to help you uncover those hot buttons:

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## Final Q&A Points

- ▶ **Be prepared to answer all of the prospective resident's questions concerning your apartment community.** Sometimes you may get additional information about the prospect's needs and wants from the questions asked. If you do not know the answer to a specific question, tell them you don't know but you would be happy to research that information.
- ▶ **Questions about the rental rates should be considered opportunities to review or expand on the community's most attractive features.** For example, if a prospect will work near the community, you can remind them of how much money they will save on gasoline and maintenance of their car. Or, they will not have to join a racquet club to get on the tennis courts. Of course, one of the biggest benefits is that they will have you to respond to their service requests.
- ▶ **What if the prospect clearly does not qualify for the apartment home?** They may have a large pet and the community does not allow pets or they may have a lower price range in mind. Always offer to tour a prospect even if you know it is not in their rent range. If you discover a prospect does not meet the rental qualifications, always be helpful in referring the prospect to another community, to a locator, or by offering them an apartment publication to assist them in their search.
- ▶ **Act like a doctor coming up with a diagnosis or think of a friend you have lost track of from high school.** It is this level of care and concern that should be shared with the prospect.
- ▶ **Answer questions thoroughly, clearly and honestly.** If you are unsure of an answer, find the answer later and follow up with them.

By now, you should have all the information you need to plan and conduct a successful apartment demonstration.

## Summary

In summary, you should now realize the importance of creating a positive impression the first time you meet a prospect, through your curb appeal, professionalism, and greeting. Asking questions to determine your prospect's unique needs and wants will develop a relationship and level of trust which will lead to your success as a Leasing Professional.

## Exam

The NALP exam is comprehensive and delivered online. The NALP Exam is 100 questions and timed for 1 hour and 30 minutes. All participants must enroll in the designation program to be eligible to sit for the exam. To enroll in the NALP course, go to the NAA Web site at:

[www.naahq.org/education](http://www.naahq.org/education)

You will need an Eligibility Code in order to sit for the exam. Eligibility Codes are unique to each participant and are the key to unlocking the exam. Your Eligibility Code will be given to you by your instructor or Sponsoring Organization.

The passing point for the comprehensive exam is 70 or above.

You must work individually on the exam. No books are allowed to be used as a reference.

For more detailed information on the exam and to download the Candidate Handbook, please visit the NAA Web site:

[www.naahq.org/education/designationprograms/Pages/OnlineExams](http://www.naahq.org/education/designationprograms/Pages/OnlineExams)