





# Work Smarter

Training and a touch of creative thinking can help improve the efficiency of your on-site maintenance team.

By **MARK CUKRO**, Service Team Training

**C**onsidering the current state of the economy, every decision we make or have made recently is under a greater microscope, and everyone is looking for more new and creative ways to cut costs and reduce expenses.

While most companies are battling lay-offs, vacancies and concessions, we are expected to deliver the same or better customer service with fewer resources. If a company or property is unable to increase its resources to complete service requests and makereadies, focusing on efficiency is an effective way to save time and money. Continual training of the service team is not only important but absolutely necessary to keep expenses under control.

## EFFICIENCY AND THE BOTTOM LINE

Having an asset-minded service team that operates efficiently and makes sound decisions is what every owner or manager wants. Historically, the training for operations has been inversely proportional to the training provided to the on-site maintenance teams, and the results of that are inefficiency, high turnover and a shallow talent pool. The most successful companies and owners understand that training service personnel to look for ways to increase efficiency is not only necessary but critical to generating revenue through lease renewals and keeping expenses at a minimum.

When maintenance supervisors and technicians have received training in time management and are enabled to make efficiency changes to help them



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keep a clean and organized shop, they will spend much less time searching for parts buried in boxes and avoid making unnecessary purchases due to the inability to locate a part or piece of equipment. They will also be more aware of new products and tools that will help them work smarter. Time really is money, and saving time means being able to complete more service requests per day and do more projects to reduce capital expenditures.

#### TIME- AND MONEY-SAVERS

Some products, such as automated light controls in common areas that operate by motion, offer a great way to create tremendous savings. Every second a light is on and not needed, it is wasting money. What types of light bulbs are used in common areas, restrooms and the model? Are you certain that the most efficient bulbs are being used? There are lights that are even more efficient than fluorescent bulbs, and depending upon the application, can be a better choice.

A very effective way to reduce vacant electric costs is by installing a model minder, which is wireless and turns the lights on when someone enters. The length of time the lights stay on is adjustable, and not only are they very reliable, they last for years. No more light accidentally left on all night. The average return on investment is less than a year.

Additionally, several products will measure power consumption at the meter and predict utility bills such as the common electricity for a building. This will help you objectively determine the effectiveness of upgrades and retrofits. Not only will these products save money, they can help your property truly become a little environmentally greener.

Take a further look at some of the services used on a property. Do you have trash containers scheduled for routine pick-up or emptying? It is not uncommon to see trash containers lifted over a truck only to see one or just a few trash bags fall into the garbage truck. Can a trash container that is hardly ever full be relocated to a different location or be eliminated entirely with little to no effect on the cleanliness of the property?

#### KNOW MORE, SAVE MORE

Every year, new products enter the industry that provide new and improved solutions and help make repairs in less time, which allows more time for other tasks. By attending training sessions and trade shows, maintenance technicians can learn what new products are available and how and when to use them.

Now more than ever, it is important that your team is operating efficiently and only replacing parts that are needed. Training associates is hands-down one of the best ways to be sure that they are making timely and cost-effective repairs that are done correctly the first time. Eliminating or reducing callbacks is a great way to save time and valuable resources.

For example, two additional service requests per day per property can easily equal up to 250 additional requests per year. Training reduces the guesswork associated with troubleshooting. Think about it: Simply saving the cost of one HVAC system and one appliance and eliminating the turnover of one employee per property per year will have a tremendous impact on your bottom line. Imagine how much more profitable your company and communities will be when you've created a culture that multiplies those savings by many systems, appliances and well trained technicians.

Technicians can develop troubleshooting skills that eliminate guesswork and reduce time spent on tasks through training as well as pick up customer service tips that may result in more renewals. The cost of training is always less than the results of no training at all. The habits that you train are the habits that you gain, so be sure to train good habits and always seek improvement! 📌



*Mark Cukro is the founder of ServiceTeamTraining.com and a frequent presenter for the Houston Apartment Foundation. For more information, visit [www.serviceteamtraining.com](http://www.serviceteamtraining.com) or contact him at [markcukro@aol.com](mailto:markcukro@aol.com) or 704-363-6236. Learn more about ways to go green and save green with Cukro at our maintenance seminar at the 2009 Education Conference & Expo on May 20 (see Page 53 for details).*