

End Points

Ginger Long, Greenwood, Ind.

10 Things

That Have Changed Since I Began My Career

1. Computer Technology. When I started in this industry, we didn't even have computers. We used ledger cards for tracking rent payments. And how many of you remember the data machines we used to do a credit check? With things being updated and changing daily, I feel fortunate to be working in this century.

2. Advertising. The only advertisement sources available were a print book and the local newspaper. This made it easy to track traffic—I documented prospects on index cards that were stored in index card boxes kept by our desks. Today, there are many ILS sites, print books and then there's social networking, making it possible for us to advertise globally.

3. Demand for Amenities. Then, the only amenity I had to offer was a pool. But with the way we threw pool parties back then, it was all you really needed! Today's market demands fitness centers, cyber cafés, tanning beds and in-unit washers and dryers. This being said, I am still a true believer that excellent customer service is the "hottest" amenity we can offer!

4. Commissions. I worked on a draw system, meaning I had to make my salary (\$785 per month) before any commission was earned. After I leased 10 apartments, I received \$10 per lease for any sold beyond that. The sad part is: I thought I was rolling in the dough!

5. Work Ethic. Because I did not have access to today's great technology tools, I relied on true selling methods such as following up with personal phone calls, hand-written thank you notes and constantly keeping my current residents happy. These were my top priorities. If I didn't do my job and do it well, I didn't bring home that \$100 in commission! I was lucky that I had great mentors who taught me how important it is to have a great work ethic.

6. Dress Code. Suits, hose and heels—that is what I had to wear back then. I remember traveling up three flights of stairs in my suit, hose and heels during a 100-degree day. This not only was very uncomfortable, but often made my typically perky personality a bit on the grumpy side. Thank goodness our office dress code eventually became "career wear." Logoed polo shirts, khaki Bermuda shorts and TENNIS SHOES! This surely helped my closing ratio sky rocket!

7. Multi-tasking. Today's onsite staff members perform many duties that go beyond their position's job description. This helps apartment firms to promote from within and it keeps employees engaged in their jobs. When I began to move up the corporate ladder, there were no training opportunities available before landing a new role. You simply were promoted and then were shown how to do the job. This often was a problem for folks who proved not to be a good fit in their new role.

8. Educational Opportunities. Associations back then did not offer classes to gain higher knowledge about our profession. We learned purely through on-the-job training. Today, there are so many classes through apartment associations, Web-based programs, international conferences and training and marketing books that not only keep you informed on changes in our industry, but advance your knowledge.

9. Selling Strategies. The market was in great shape when I entered the apartment industry. We did not offer or need to offer concessions to keep our communities full. But today, we do what we have to do to close the deal.

10. Social Networking. Twitter, Facebook, My Space, YouTube, Flickr, etc.: We did not have these then, and I still am not convinced we need them today.

If you would like to be considered for a future *End Points* column, please contact Jeff Lee at 703/797-0647 or jeffreylee@naahq.org.



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