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Apartment Searches: Lose the Rose-Colored Glasses First

By dan the roommate man

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If you're getting ready to rent, don't do what this editor did once ... a long, long time ago.

Don't walk into the unit — particularly if it's not the same unit you're getting ("It's pretty similar," you'll be assured, but don't listen) — nod, and let that affordable rent lure you into blurting out, "I'll take it!" (That exclamation is often fueled by that familiar lust for freedom that new twentysomething college graduates experience. The fear of another year under Mom's and Dad's roof is a powerful motivator, and suddenly, a box under the nearest bridge seems to offer an attractive ambiance when you tilt your head to just the right angle.)

I've learned a few things since then. For instance, if the leasing agent mentions that they're considering replacing the carpet in your home-to-be, that means they don't have any plans to do so — certainly not before you move in, and after you're there, well, it's simply too much trouble to make the effort then. It's too late at that point; they'd have to move your furniture.

This isn't to say that property management companies universally are deceiving their tenants. Not true. Today's multifamily housing market is more competitive than ever, and complexes left and right are extending themselves in an attempt to provide the best services within their means. But that's due partly to the latest generation of consumers. We're educated, we're inquisitive, and many of us are online. In short, we're dangerous. If Complex A can't give us what we want, we'll cross the street to Complex B, or wait for the dust to settle on Complex C, which is still under construction. (Of course, leases already are being signed on Complex C, even though the units aren't finished.) That's the reality of today's apartment market.

Before you sign anything, walk in armed with a list of questions. Fire away, and don't be afraid to press for answers — particularly if you're not getting straight answers. And if your prospective complex passes with flying colors, and you decide to become a resident there, hang onto your list. It will serve as a handy resource if your landlord or management company fails to live up to the claims initially made — whether those be related to maintenance issues or various services.

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You may want to consider doing a little investigative journalism, as well. Beyond straight Q&A with a leasing agent or landlord, take a look around the property in question, taking notes of what you observe. And talk to tenants; they're perhaps the best resource of all, and nine times out of 10, they're only too happy to talk. In addition, you may want to review your state's sanitary code, which should then serve as a basis for comparison when you're checking out the conditions in an apartment.

Here's a list of questions, divided by category, that serves as a good starting point when you begin your apartment search:

Rent and fees:

1. What is the monthly rent?
2. Is a security deposit required? If so, how much is it, and under what conditions is it held?
3. Does the landlord require payment of last month's rent in advance?
4. Do you pay extra (and if so, how much?) for utilities, storage space, air conditioning, parking space, late payment of rent, etc.?
5. Does the lease indicate that the rent can be increased if real estate taxes are raised, the prices for sewer and water assessments are increased, or for any other reason?

Facilities and services:

1. Assess the maintenance services: Is there a resident superintendent? Are maintenance hours restricted? How is emergency service handled?
2. How is trash disposal handled? Are facilities accessible? Is recycling available?
3. Laundry facilities? How many available? Security?
4. Building lobby: Is it clean and well-lit? Security?
5. Entrance and exit: elevator? Are stairs well-lit? Fire exits?
6. Hallways: Clean and well-lit?

Rental unit conditions:

1. Are there signs of insects present?
2. Bathrooms: clean? Plumbing in good working order? Tiles sound?
3. Kitchen: Is sink in good working order: Stove? Refrigerator?
4. Air conditioning: good working order?
5. Wiring: Are there enough electrical outlets? Is the wiring sound?
6. Does the heating system seem to be in good working order?
7. Is there a fireplace? Check to see that it is clean and operates well.
8. Windows? Are any broken? Do they all open? Storm windows? Screens? Locks?
9. Floors: Are they clean?
10. Ceilings: Are they clean? Cracked? Water-stained?
11. Walls: Are they clean? Is the plaster cracked? Paint peeling?
12. Telephone: outlets present? Convenient?
13. Is ventilation adequate? Is there an exhaust fan in kitchen?

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14. Lighting: Is it adequate? Are fixtures in good working order?
15. Security: Does the door have a dead-bolt lock? A security chain?
16. Storage space: Is it adequate? Kitchen and bathroom cabinets?
17. What is the noise level in the area around the rental unit? Traffic? Neighbors?

Source: The University of Massachusetts Commuter Services and Housing Resource Center

Throughout all of my apartment searches, the best lesson I learned came from a leasing agent who told me upon my first visit to his complex that "If you told me you were ready to sign a contract today, I'd advise you not to. Look around. Come back at night, and see who your neighbors are going to be. A complex at night is very different from a complex during the day." I've come to realize that's sound advice. Don't sign right away. Don't be scared into thinking that apartment won't be available tomorrow. Mull it over, do your homework, and get the answers you need before signing on the dotted line.

Since 1989 dan the roommate man has helped 1000's of people find roommates. Need help? Contact him at 800-487-8050 or www.roommateexpress.com

Being Optimistic v. Wearing Rose-Colored Glasses

By Susan Dunn

DEFINITIONS

Being optimistic – Believing the doctrine that this world is the best possible world; having an inclination to put the most favorable construction upon actions and events or to anticipate the best possible outcome

Rose-colored glasses – Putting the most favorable construction upon actions events and people and expecting the best possible outcome when common sense dictates this isn't possible or the reality is that it isn't happening. Refusing to take action when you should and just hoping for the best. Denying what you're experiencing.

COMPARISONS

Taking action to make things change vs. Hoping things will change

Demanding respect vs. Wishing someone would treat you better

Making your dreams come true vs. Just dreaming

EXAMPLE

Randolph approached his sales job with optimism and enthusiasm. He expected to close sales and didn't let rejection get him down. He considered each rejection one step closer to a sale. If he didn't get

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a sale, or had a big disappointment, he distracted himself, did something fun, and didn't consider it anything personal about himself or his capabilities. Then he tried again. He attributed a failure to something not personal, not permanent, and not pervasive. He had an optimistic attitude, especially in performance situations, but he worked on his skills too. He was in touch with reality.

When Melanie got sick, she just hoped it would go away and didn't see a doctor. When someone mistreated her she wished it away, or convinced herself that she was misperceiving, or pretended it wasn't happening. When it became apparent her company was failing and that most would be fired, everyone started to interview for a new job except Melanie. She kept thinking it wouldn't happen and everything would work out well. This was flying in the face of reality.

KEY POINT

"Attitude is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than what people do or say. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill." ~ Charles Swindoll

BENEFITS

When you use learned optimism instead of rose-colored glasses you know when to continue and when not to. Learned optimism is the facilitator of all the emotional intelligence competencies and makes your life work better. Wearing rose-colored glasses keeps you out of touch with reality, and unable to be proactive or responsive when you need to.

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Contact Lenses: See The World Through Different Lenses

WHEN CAN YOUR LANDLORD ENTER YOUR APARTMENT?

Contact Lenses Or Glasses?

Examples of Emotional Intelligence from Popular Songs

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