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Good Neighbour Gone Bad

Anyone who calls a condominium home has likely heard of the problems that can come with having a bad neighbour. The unlucky have experienced firsthand the negative impact of someone who seems to have no regard for others. Typically, though, a condo dweller realizes that they have a bad neighbour soon after encountering that neighbour for the first time. This makes it all that more curious in circumstances where a good neighbour turns "bad".

To better understand how to identify, explain and deal with such a transformation, it can help to consider how the change came about...

Change in Lifestyle / Evolution of the Culture of the Community

Let's face it – people change. As they mature and otherwise live their lives, your neighbours cannot be expected to stay the same forever. As time passes, we all grow and mature... well, at least grow!

An obvious example of a nuisance emerging from change is a newborn crying in the early morning hours, yet real life examples easily and often extend to include the result of an altered work schedule or a previously single neighbour now finding a partner and engaging in boisterous sex. There is no shortage of ways that our lives can invade the lives of our neighbours in a condominium setting!

Even someone who does not feel that they have changed over time can find that their lifestyle within the community has. You might not have minded the rambunctious lifestyle of your wild neighbour Larry five years ago but you do not appreciate it now that you have settled down.



As many condominiums have experienced a demographic shift in recent years through the growing number of families embracing condo living, someone living a stereotypical bachelor lifestyle may not be appreciated around young children... and vice versa! While such a situation has all the fixings of an '80s "fish out of water" situational comedy, the amusement factor is lost on those experiencing a clash of lifestyles in real life.

The bottom line is that both people, and the communities that they come together to form, evolve over time.

Case Study: The Tale of a Yappy Dog

Two neighbours – let's call them Monica and Joey – lived across the hall from one another for years. They were not exactly the best of friends but exchanged pleasantries daily, often engaging in small talk about things like the weather.

One day, Joey got a dog – something that was allowed in their community. Monica loves dogs. She, in fact, had one herself. With something new in common, it would seem that the neighbours could only get closer... except for one problem.

When Joey left home, he would leave his puppy free to roam his unit. The dog would stay by Joey's front door, sniffing under it and barking every time it heard a noise. Whenever someone came near Joey's unit – even just to pass by it - the dog would release a high pitched tirade of barks lasting no less than 15 minutes at a time.

Monica, and others in her community, quickly grew irritated at Joey's dog, though no one bothered to inform Joey of this development. Instead, Joey's neighbours started responding less favourably to him. They started to keep the day's forecast to themselves whenever they ran into Joey – opting instead for silence – but Joey was not the type to easily read between the lines. From his perspective, he had no reason to.

Then, after one particularly long day at work, Monica found her attempt to relax at home thwarted by a barrage of barks from Joey's dog. She was convinced that the dog somehow managed to make itself even more annoying. Monica had reached her boiling point! She stormed off toward Joey's door and let out a large series of expletive insults toward the dog.

Just as Monica felt a little bit of relief through the release of her frustration, she turned around to find that Joey had returned home just in time to hear every profanity-ridden word that had come out of her mouth. Awkward!

Question: Who is the bad neighbour?

As an experienced dog owner, Monica knew that it was best to keep her dog in a cage when she was out or at least locked in a room so that every passing sound would not raise the animal's hopes of her return home.

Would a good neighbour have subtly shared this insight with Joey?

Would Joey ever be able to forget the hateful and nasty things he heard Monica say about a beloved member of his family?

Would it have been better for Joey to have learned about this problem another way?

It can be worth considering if a neighbour bothering you has any idea that they are doing so. The subject matter may be sensitive to raise, particularly if it might be embarrassing for the neighbour or related to something – or someone – they hold close emotionally.

Careful consideration as to how, when, and if it is worth raising the issue can be helpful, as can a good old fashioned reality check into the most likely outcome of each of the different possible ways to address or ignore the situation. Acting following reasonable thought and consideration usually leaves us in a better

place than actions that stem from emotional outbursts.

A key difference

A key difference between a new neighbour causing you grief and an existing neighbour who suddenly becomes troublesome is the rapport that you have already built with the existing neighbour.

You need not be the best of friends or a source of borrowed sugar to one another but you are both part of the community and are familiar faces. Surely there are ways to leverage this that can give rise to a better result than what Monica and Joey got.

An important consideration

As you consider your best approach to addressing an issue with a nuisance neighbour, particularly if it is a neighbour with whom you have comfortably co-existed in the past, an important consideration beyond assessing if they are even aware that they are disturbing you is why their behaviour may have changed. Mental health challenges and aging struggles are two issues that are becoming increasingly prominent within our condominium communities. Nuisance behaviour may serve as a warning sign and present an opportunity to help.

There is no question that the impact of nuisance in a condominium can be significant, develop very quickly and be quite personally invasive; however, there may be times where offering consideration of others is the neighbourly thing to do. This is not to suggest that problems should be ignored, rather that there is a role for kindness and empathy in the handling of a good neighbour gone bad.

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