



Landlording in San Diego

Volume II

Your guide to becoming a better landlord

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Tips for Getting the Best Tenant for Your Rental Property

When you rent out your property, you want to attract tenants that will take good care of your home. You don't want anyone that will damage your property or cause a problem for your neighbors. After all, this is likely your biggest investment.

A lot of people think getting a good tenant is up to chance, but there are a number of things you can do to increase your odds of getting a better tenant. At Good Life, we are experts at finding qualified tenants for our owners. We know how important it is to be confident in who is occupying your home. Here are some tips for selecting a tenant for your property.

Keep the Property Clean

The best thing you can do for your property is to keep it clean. Clean properties tend to attract clean tenants. It will likely get your home rented faster, too. Messy tenants may be more likely to overlook a property that isn't professionally cleaned.

Keeping the property maintained also sets the standard for how the home should be kept during the tenant's stay. If the prospective tenant sees the home in top condition, they'll try to keep it in that condition. If the home is in disarray when they move in, they won't care about making a mess. The same goes for maintenance once the property is leased. If the tenant brings a problem to your attention, fix it quickly. This not only beneficial for yourself, but it keeps the tenants happy and they'll be able to rely on you.



Have the property move-in ready for the prospective tenants. This means everything should be good to go once you put the property on the market. It should be professionally cleaned and all of your personal belongings should be cleared out. Showing the property while projects such as painting are underway, or pointing out things that are going to be fixed, may turn prospective tenants off.

Keeping the property clean also applies to the exterior of the home. Curb appeal is vital to renting your property, especially if you want a good tenant. Make sure that the yard is well-kept, with no dead plants or trees leaning across the property line. Don't forget areas that might not be visible at first glance. Common areas tenants look that are often overlooked by owners are inside kitchen cabinets, windows and screens, and garages.

Price the Property Right

Many people don't think about how the price of their home will affect who applies to it. Oftentimes, they think pricing it higher than average will get them the best tenant. However, this is not the case.

Overpricing a home is a risky move because typically those that are not as qualified for the home will be willing to pay more. They understand that there will be less competition for pricier properties and will take advantage of this. If you price your home at \$200 over what similar homes are in the neighborhood, why would a good, qualified tenant pick yours?

When you price the home competitively, you'll get more applicants, which means more people to choose from. When you have a wider pool of applicants, you can select the most-qualified person and be confident in your choice. Our owner, Steve Welty, did a Facebook live on our Max Rent Pricing strategy that can help you get the most profit and the happiest tenants.

A qualified tenant is typically someone who has a good credit score, great rental references (i.e. no late payments), and can move in within 2-3 weeks. People that fit this description are unlikely to cause problems for you or your property.

Have a Strict, Written Rental Criteria

Sticking to a set written rental criteria allows you to treat all applicants fairly. If you don't have a specific criteria, you might end up making exceptions for people, i.e. allowing a tenant that had a poor rental reference or low credit score.

You should always run a credit check on each applicant. Good credit is usually 675 and above, whereas poor credit falls below 624. This doesn't mean you, under any circumstances, shouldn't rent to someone with a slightly lower score. Consider requiring a higher deposit, instead. It's also good to look at the trade lines on the credit report. They might have had a past short-sale or past due student/medical loan debt. These types of negative trade lines are not necessarily indicators of a bad tenant.



Checking rental references is an important step as well. You'll want to know if the applicants trashed their last place or were difficult to work with. References might not be the deciding factor, but they help you figure out how their stay at their last place of residence went.

You'll want proof of income from the applicants, too. Most landlords or property managers usually require 2.5x the monthly rent, give or take. You can give them the option of a cosigner as well. This person typically needs to make 3x or higher, depending on the status of the applicant.

Sticking to this criteria is highly important and will get you the best tenant. If someone asks if you can make an exception, the answer should be no. You want to be fair to all applicants and you don't want to create problems for yourself down the line.

You'll want this criteria written because of fair housing laws, too. Tenants might claim you discriminated against them without this. If your criteria is not written, it's hard to defend and prove you treated everyone the same.

Another thing to consider is allowing pets on your property. It's understandable to be worried about a pet damaging your home. However, you can always charge a pet rent or pet deposit. The money garnered from this fee will cover the costs of any minor damage the pet does to the home. Roughly 50% of renters in San Diego have a pet, so opening yourself up to them can greatly increase the amount of people that apply for your home.

Effective Marketing

Good tenants are going to be attracted to good homes. The way you market your home can affect who will apply to it. If your photos are dimly-lit or you don't have photos, you aren't doing yourself any favors. The photos you choose to put on Zillow, Craigslist, etc. are what initially draws people in. If they don't like how the home looks in pictures, they won't waste time viewing it in person. Less people scheduling viewings means less applicants to choose from.

You don't need a DSLR to photograph your home, but each room should have adequate lighting and showcase the dimensions as best it can. Highlight cool or important features. Are the appliances stainless steel? Are there modern light fixtures? Be sure to take pictures of those.

Make sure you're marketing on the correct websites. The most common are Zillow and Craigslist. To stay relevant on Craigslist, you need multiple accounts to repost the listing everyday. Along with the photos of the property, you should have a good description of the home and some key features listed. For example, if your home has AC/Heat, a covered garage, etc., be sure to list it.

Common Lease Violations & How to Prevent Them

Everyone hopes that they'll have great tenants when they rent out their property. Unfortunately, at some point you might have a tenant that violates the lease they signed. If you've never had this happen, you might not be sure how to handle it.

As a landlord, it's always good practice to introduce yourself to your neighbors. They can act as a second set of eyes on your property and tenants. They can alert you to possible lease violations such as unauthorized pets and noise disturbances. Even great tenants can commit lease violations. In this article, we'll tell you how to address and handle different kinds of lease violations.

Unauthorized Pets

Occasionally, someone will sneak an unauthorized pet into the home. This could be because the tenant did not want to have to pay a pet deposit or they were not aware that it wasn't allowed. The property may have been advertised to accept pets, so they tenants assumed they could add one at any time without approval. You might find out about this via a neighbor, a contractor, or if you stop by the property. For example, at Good Life, we are often notified by the landscaper or pool cleaner.



You should have a separate section in the lease that clearly outlines the pet policy. Most management companies charge a large fee for an unauthorized pet and disclose this in that section of the lease. This fees helps deter tenants from having an unauthorized pet.

It is important to be careful when approaching a tenant for an unauthorized pet. In some situations, the animal may not be a pet but a service animal or emotional support animal. These are protected and are not considered unauthorized pets. They may have forgotten to give you a letter from a medical professional stating they can have the animal.

Unpaid Rent

Chances are, you've had a tenant that has paid rent late or refused to pay rent. You can prevent unpaid rent by having a good tenant screening process. This would include a credit check as well as income and rental history. You should offer them convenient ways to pay their rent, such as online, accepting payments in person, or even direct deposit. You should also charge a late fee for delayed or unpaid rent. This fee should be clearly outlined in the lease, i.e. when rent is due and what the late fee is.

Unauthorized Tenants

An unauthorized tenant is someone that has been residing at the property for an extended period of time (typically defined as 14 days over a period of 6 months). Most landlords require all persons over the age of 18 to submit an application and be listed as a financially responsible party to the lease.

The lease should distinguish what the difference between a resident and a guest is. Most leases outline what a guest is and at what point they have to leave. You should charge a fee if an unauthorized tenant is discovered. Signs of an unauthorized tenants could be additional beds in the home, specifically beds in living areas or garages.

Landscape Maintenance

Sometimes, landlords choose to leave landscaping and gardening upkeep to tenants because they don't have (or don't want to pay for) a landscaper. Unfortunately, this often leads to unkept yards because tenants forget or don't care to keep up with it.

The best way to prevent issues with landscaping is to hire your own landscaper. Oftentimes when it's left to be the tenant's responsibility, it gets neglected. In the lease agreement, be clear on who is responsible for landscape maintenance or landscape watering. Although you may be paying the landscaper to maintain the yard, the tenant should always be responsible for the landscape watering.

To prevent damage to your landscape due to lack of water, clearly state the tenant's responsibility to water the landscape. This will minimize the chances of the tenant turning off the water to the sprinklers, changing the watering schedule, or reducing the water usage to the landscape. You can drive by the property on occasion to see if they are keeping up with this.

Not Allowing Access

At some point, you might have a tenant that is difficult when vendors or agents need to enter the home. Having a good relationship with the tenants and open communication can prevent any violations or problems. If you understand your tenant needs, they're more likely to work with you when it comes to needed maintenance and things like that.

How to Resolve a Lease Violation

Some landlords prefer to give their tenants a warning when they violate a lease. They might tell them a set date that the problem needs to be resolved by or negotiate new terms. If they skip a warning or want to take more action, the primary method to handle a lease violation is a 3-day notice.

In California, standard lease violations are resolved with a 3-Day Notice to Cure Breach or Perform. This means that the tenant has 3 days from the day the notice is served to stop doing what they are doing, i.e. having an unauthorized pet. They either have the option to comply or to vacate. If they still refuse to comply, there are legal measures you can take. The next step would be to start the eviction process by filing an Unlawful Detainer.

Service Animals & Emotional Support Animals: What You Need to Know

When screening your tenants, you may run across an applicant who notes they have an emotional support animal. Whether it's an emotional support animal, service animal, or assistance animal, they are all protected by law. The most important thing you need to know is that they are not pets. These are animals that work. They provide emotional or additional assistance to people with disabilities.

Disclaimer: Please check with your attorney regarding all matters pertaining to assistance animals. Our advice is general in nature and should not be relied upon without checking with your attorney.

Emotional Support Animals vs. Service Animals

People often assume that these two animals are the same. While they are both protected by the law, there are important differences to note. Emotional support animals are therapeutic animals, usually a cat or dog, and are there to provide support for those that suffer from things like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, etc.

Service animals are animals that have been trained to assist a person, typically with something physical. A service animal is always a dog. Common reasons for a service animal include blindness, wheelchair-bound individuals, or being prone to seizures. You might recognize a service animal by the vest they are wearing, usually labeled "service dog" or something similar to that. Service animals are allowed entry anywhere that their owners are, provided that it is safe. Emotional support animals have more restrictions in public spaces. Both, however, are protected by housing laws.

Support Animals & Housing Laws

Because emotional support animals and service animals are not considered pets, you cannot charge a pet rent or pet deposit. Even if you don't want pets in the home, you must allow for service animals and support animals. You also cannot discriminate against specific breeds.

The only circumstances in which you may deny a support animal is if the animal would be a threat to the health and safety of others. We don't recommend using these reasons, however. Disability complaints are one of the most common complaints the fair housing office receives and it's very unlikely that things will work out in your favor. You could end up having to pay heavy fees for unreasonably denied service animals.

Occasionally you might do a walkthrough inspection and find an animal at the property, even though there isn't one listed on the lease. The tenant might tell you it's an emotional support animal. California law says the tenants are not required to disclose their need for an assistance animal. You can request a verification letter any time, so if this should happen, ask for the letter from a qualified professional.

Verification of a Service Animal

If the disability is visibly apparent, no verification is needed for the service animal. Do not ask the tenant what their disability is if this is the case. If a person says that they have a service/emotional support animal but there is not an obvious disability, you may ask the tenant for written verification.

The letter simply need state that the person in question is required to have a service animal. People that can verify this need are as follows:

- Doctor or health professional
- Peer support group (such as Alcoholics Anonymous)
- A non-medical service agency
- Reliable third party (caregiver, family member, etc.)
- Self-verification

The Housing and Urban Development and Department of Justice have not clearly outlined what self-verification entails. Essentially, should a disabled person provide a letter written by themselves for verification, this letter should be able to stand up in court.

For example, if a person provides a statement that says something along the lines of "I have a medical condition and require a service/emotional support animal," they should be able to verify that in a court of law.

Verification could be the doctor's name that diagnosed you and when you were diagnosed. We recommend that if a tenant provides you with a self-verification letter, seek additional verification and speak with your attorney.



Common Questions About Service Animals

Can I contact the tenant's verification source directly?

No, this violates fair housing laws and HIPAA privacy laws. If the tenant provides you with a letter from their therapist, you must accept it as is. You can request that the tenant get their therapist/doctor/etc. to provide a reasonable accommodation form. You can learn more about that here.

Can I ask the tenant about their supposed disability?

No, you cannot directly ask the tenant why they need a service or support animal. They will be required to provide their verification letter as their reason. Should you feel the letter is not legitimate, you can seek further verification with a reasonable accommodation form.

Does the animal need to be formally trained?

No, they do not. While most service animals are formally trained, a landlord or property manager need not confirm this. They do, however, need to be registered/certified as a service animal. Emotional support animals do not require training.

My tenant has a restricted breed as a service animal. Can I deny them?

No, because a service animal is not a normal pet. The rule that you will not accept specific breeds (i.e. husky, American bulldog, etc) does not apply to them. The HUD states that breed, weight, and size limits do not apply to service animals. If you feel this animal would cause harm to those around it, you can deny it. We strongly advise against this.

Home Warranties for Landlords

People hear the phrase “home warranty” and assume that they should probably have one for their home. After all, a warranty itself is defined as “a written guarantee, issued to the purchaser of an article by its manufacturer, promising to repair or replace it if necessary within a specified period of time.” Sounds great, right? You want to protect your biggest investment.

Home warranties can be great if you’re the person residing in the home. However, using a home warranty on your rental property can actually create more problems for you and cost you more money.

What is a Home Warranty?

Many people aren’t quite sure of the difference between a home warranty and home insurance. Think of a home warranty as a service. You use this service to repair or replace certain items in your home. Home insurance covers damage from an accident or disaster, such as a flood, fire, etc. While home insurance is strongly encouraged, a home warranty is not.

Most people have never heard of a home warranty. They are typically marketed to persons involved in a real estate transaction. Often the seller of the home will include a home warranty in the purchase, similar how a car dealer includes a warranty with a car purchase. Typically the warranty period is for one year. Home warranties are designed to cover things that your insurance won’t. If your air conditioner breaks down, your home warranty may cover a replacement unit. Home insurance, on the other hand, would only cover extensive damage to the home that came as a result of the machine failure.



This is why home warranties entice many owners. Who wouldn’t want more coverage on their home, their biggest investment? While home warranties seem like a good idea on the surface, they can actually end up costing you money.

What Does a Home Warranty Cover?

Home warranties typically cover fixtures in the home such as lights and ceiling fans. They also typically cover major appliances and home systems such as heating and air conditioning units, plumbing, and electrical. They can also cover appliances like dishwashers, refrigerators, and microwaves. Make sure you read your policy or the policy you’re considering purchasing to be clear on what the warranty will cover.

How Does a Home Warranty Work?

Let's say your dishwasher breaks. The first thing you do is file a claim under the warranty. This requires a \$65-100 service request in order to start the claim process. The home warranty then assigns the claim to a local vendor. In this instance, a local appliance repairman will be assigned to diagnose, and in some instances, repair the dishwasher.

If the dishwasher cannot be repaired or the repair exceeds the value of the unit, the vendor will notify the home warranty. Depending on the warranty provider, they may offer a cash settlement, or they will purchase a new unit, again using one of their vendors. This process usually takes 7-10 days and often will not include installing the new appliance or hauling the old one away.

Why Home Warranties Are a Problem for Rentals

Home warranties aren't always a bad thing. If you are the person living in the home, they can be beneficial. The warranty is designed to fix issues in your home in a somewhat timely manner and save you money. If you recently purchased the home, a warranty offers peace of mind, especially if the warranty was paid for by the seller.

However, in an investment property, you have to cater to your tenants. Going a week or more without a functioning toilet or microwave isn't an option for them. The longer they have to wait, the more likely they are to request a rent credit, costing you more money.

Another issue is that home warranty companies typically work with subpar vendors. Their online reputation reflects this. If you Google or Yelp the vendors they use, you'll usually find that they have between 1-2 stars. So now not only has your tenant waited too long to get their problem fixed, but the work likely was not done as well as it should have been. If the owner would have just sent a good vendor from the start, it would have been resolved much more quickly, resulting in a happy tenant and money saved for owner.

What to Consider Before Renewing Your Tenant's Lease

Property owners often have many questions about lease renewals. When should they ask their tenants to renew? Should they raise the rent, and by how much? Renewing a tenant's lease can save you a lot of money and time. You won't have to spend money on vacancy costs or waste time marketing your property.

Sometimes you might not want your tenant to renew, especially if you have issues with them paying rent on time. In this article, we'll go over everything you'd want to know about renewing a lease and what is involved in the process.

Benefits of Renewing a Lease

Renewing the lease with your current tenants has a number of benefits. For one, you won't have to worry about finding a new tenant. Whether you have a property manager or are managing the home yourself, replacing a tenant can be a time consuming process, especially depending on the time of year.

This is especially beneficial if you have a great tenant. It's reassuring to know that you're able to keep the tenant that pays on time and takes care of your home. When you have to replace them, you run the risk of getting someone that might not be so courteous.

Current tenants will also know the rules of the community and your home. If you have plants that are watered by your tenants, you won't have to worry about enforcing that with new tenants. If the property is part of an HOA or other community, you won't have to inform the tenants of these rules or obligations.

Another major factor in lease renewals is the cost. Vacancies can cost an owner anywhere from a couple hundred dollars to a couple thousand. This includes a leasing fee (if you work with a property manager), repairs, marketing, etc. Not to mention that during the vacancy period, you won't have any rent coming in. By renewing your tenant's lease, you save all that money you would have spent to get your property re-rented.

How to Renew a Lease

If the owner wants to offer a lease renewal, the first step is to decide on the rent increase. We recommend a 2-5% increase to keep your home just below market. The reasoning for this is so your tenant has the incentive to stay. If your home's rent increase too high above market, they'll likely look for another place that has more upgrades for a similar price.

Once you (or your property manager) decides what the new rent price will be, you should inform the tenant. This should be done at least 60 days prior to their lease expiration. At Good Life, we begin discussing a lease renewal with the property owner 90 days prior to the lease expiration. That gives them plenty of time to make a decision and if they choose to vacate, you'll have time to fill the vacancy. Send the tenants a letter stating that their lease is expiring and they have until said date to resign the new lease. Oftentimes the tenant will try to negotiate the price, especially depending on what the increase is. It's up to the owner on whether or not they will lower the rent or will stand by their initial offer.

Keep in mind, agreeing to negotiate the renewal offer is not always a bad thing. Say the tenant wants a \$30 increase instead of a \$50 increase. While on the surface you might think this isn't worth it, the cost of a turnover is much higher than the \$20 a month you'll be losing.

Reasons You Might Not Renew a Lease

If your tenant has lived in the property for less than 2 years, you don't need a reason to terminate their lease. Simply mail them a letter and inform them that their lease is expiring on said date and they must be moved out by the end of that day. If they have lived in the residence for less than one year, you can give them a 30-day notice, but best practice is 60.

If you have a property manager, they'll be handling lease renewals and in this case will likely recommend terminating the tenant if they feel it's the right decision. While keeping a tenant is beneficial for keeping vacancy costs down, it's best to take the advice of the manager if they feel they tenant will cause you problems and cost you money in the future. Typically they will strongly recommend a termination if the tenants become a liability.

Other reasons a termination might be a better option is if the owner wants to do extensive upgrades to the home that would prevent the tenants from living there. However, If the tenant has lived in the property for over 2 years in San Diego, it falls under the just cause eviction law. This means that your reason for terminating a lease must be one of the following:

- Nonpayment of rent
- Violation of obligations of tenancy
- Nuisance
- Illegal use
- Refusal to renew lease
- Refusal to provide access
- Correction of violations
- Withdrawal of residential rental structure from the rental market
- Owner or relative occupancy

Rental Property Repairs: Owner vs. Tenant Responsibility

If you're a first-time landlord, you may be unsure of what type of repairs you need to cover for your tenants. Or maybe you are the tenant and you don't know what repairs the homeowner covers and which ones are your responsibility. The last thing either party wants is to be surprised by an unexpected charge at the end of the month.

Your lease should lay out what the tenant needs to maintain and what repairs the owner has to cover. We've written this article to give you a quick idea of what to expect for your rental property.

Tenant Responsibilities

Standard leases typically require their tenants to cover basic maintenance. This includes changing light fixtures, changing HVAC filters, and changing water filters. If there is damage to the HVAC unit due to tenant neglect, the tenant will be responsible for the cost of the repair. If the tenant rekeys the locks, they must cover the cost and provide copies of the new keys to the landlord/management company.

Tenants are also required to keep the premises clean and sanitary. This means properly disposing of garbage and waste. They are also required to operate all electrical, gas, and plumbing fixtures in the way they were intended. If something malfunctions, they should notify the landlord or management company immediately.

Some owners allow tenants to make minor repairs to the home and then deduct the cost from that month's rent. At Good Life, we don't recommend this for a couple reasons. First, there is a liability issue with having unqualified tenants do repair work on the home. They could injure themselves or further damage the property. Second, because of their lack of experience, they will likely perform unsatisfactory work. You'll end up having to do it yourself or hire a contractor anyway.

Tenant Responsibilities

Generally, owners are responsible for everything that is not stated in the tenant obligations section of the lease. The owner is responsible for keeping the property in habitable condition. Habitable condition is defined as working plumbing, gas, and electric. It also covers things like pest infestations (we'll get to that soon).



Property owners should also keep appliances in working order. Some owners choose to list appliances “as is,” but this is not best practice for appliances that are regularly used. For example, if the washer/dryer or microwave breaks down, it should not fall on the tenant to replace those items. If a tenant chooses to replace it, they will have to figure out where to store the old one. It’s also a customer service issue. Tenants are not usually expected to replace major appliances. It’s likely that they will be highly dissatisfied, which can result in uncooperative tenants.

Additionally, they will probably take the appliance when they move out, leaving you with nothing but the broken appliance you started out with. By replacing the appliance for them, you’ll not only have happy tenants, but you will add value to your home.

Problems with Pests

Responsibility can get muddled when it comes to pests in the home. Certain pests can cause a habitability issue, such as a cockroach infestation, rodents, or poisonous insects or animals. When this occurs, it’s on the owner to send and cover the pest control.

Non-habitability issues usually fall on tenant, such as a few spiders or ants in the home. Tenants are encouraged to try household pesticides before requesting pest control. If that doesn’t work, they can request pest control for the issue. The owner can pay for this if they want to, but be careful not to set the precedent that pest control will be paid for every time the tenant sees an insect. If it’s a multifamily property, it’s best to have routine pest control service so all units are covered.

If pest control is needed because of a defect in the home, such as improper seals or doors that don’t shut properly, this is an owner responsibility. If it turns out that tenants were responsible, i.e. there were pests because the home is very unsanitary, the owner can try to collect funds from the tenants. Bed bugs are almost always a tenant responsibility because they tend to come in with the tenants or their mattresses. Termites, on the other hand, are usually an owner responsibility because it impacts the structure of the house.

4 Common Reasons Your Property Isn't Renting

So you've put your house on the market for rent. Weeks have gone by and you haven't gotten any real interest. You see other homes being rented, so what's the problem? If your home isn't renting, there are a number of factors that could be contributing to this. Maybe you priced the home too high for the neighborhood. It could be that your photos don't do a good job of highlighting the property's features.

At Good Life, people often tell us that they've tried managing their own properties and it ended up being more than they could handle, especially when it came to getting the property leased. We have perfected our process of marketing homes and getting them rented quickly. Here are a few reasons why your home might be struggling to rent.

1. You're Charging Too Much

One of the main reasons why homes don't rent is that they are overpriced. Everyone wants to make the most money they can from their property, but if you're not careful it will steer people away.

Homes should usually rent within 2-4 weeks of being posted. If your home isn't getting attention after week 2, you should consider decreasing by 5% each week it's still on the market. People often want to price as high as they can for the financial benefit, but this could end up costing you more than you would be making.

When pricing your home, you need to not only take into account the features of the home, but of the neighborhood as well. If the homes in your neighborhood are going for \$2000-\$2400, pricing it at \$3000 is a stretch, even if you have added features. This doesn't mean your property's features aren't relevant. You can tack on extra for a pool, extra parking, etc. so long as it's within reason.

It's a good idea to search Zillow and Craigslist for other homes in your neighborhood. This will give you an idea of what other homes are renting for in the area. You can adjust your price based on this and the extra features your home has. People assume that a higher price will attract the best tenants, but that can have the opposite effect. A home that is priced too high will struggle to get attention, resulting in the landlord being more lenient with any applicant.

2. You're Not Charging Enough

If you're not charging enough rent, you might be losing out on money as well. Some people want to price conservatively in order to get a tenant in the home quicker. However, if you're not renting your home at a competitive price, you will lose out on income you could have had.

Another downside to pricing too low is that potential tenants might think there is something wrong with your property. If all the 2 bedroom houses in the area are at least \$2500 and yours is \$1700, they might be worried that it's too good to be true. This means that your property is likely being overlooked for homes that are priced more competitively. While you see it as a good deal, they view it as a trap.

3. Your House is in Bad Condition

Another reason your home could be sitting vacant is that many of its features are outdated. These days, most people prefer modern fixtures and colors. If your home has dated wallpaper and vintage features, it might be scaring off potential tenants.

Updating your home before putting it on the market is very important. Both the interior and exterior of the home should be clean and in good condition. If the outside of the house is dirty, has overgrown or dying plants, etc., chances are potential tenants won't even bother looking at the inside.

The inside of the house should be in good condition as well. This means no chipping paint, old wallpaper, stained carpets, or broken light fixtures. These issues will detract from the value of your home. It won't matter if you have a pool or spacious backyard if the inside is falling apart. There are simple fixes you can make to keep your home in pristine condition. Touch-up or repaint when needed. Get the carpets cleaned after each tenant and replace sections when necessary.

4. You Aren't Marketing Correctly

In most cases, people judge a book by its cover. If your home doesn't look appealing in its advertisements, it won't get a second glance. Your home should be listed on all the major websites-- Zillow, Craigslist, and Trulia. These sites get the most views and are your best chance at getting your home seen quickly.

The description of your property should be as detailed as possible. How many bedrooms are there? Is a washer/dryer included? Are pets allowed? These should all be answered in the description so you don't lose out on anyone that doesn't want to waste time asking.

Photos are a key part of successful marketing. It's best to take the photos once your (or a previous tenant's) furniture has been removed and carpets have been cleaned. People like to be able to picture their own items in the home. You don't necessarily need a DSLR camera to take the photos, but they should be good quality. They should not be grainy or blurry. You want to get shots of each room and of all the appliances as well. Listings that don't show each room tend to get much less attention.

Problems With Befriending Your Tenants

Whether you are managing your own properties or working with a property management company, meeting your tenants is never a good idea. Some owners like to know who is residing in their homes, but we'll explain why this can create problems for you.

If You Hired a Property Manager...

Creates a Triangle of Miscommunication

When multiple parties are involved, the tenant might not know who to report to. They may even tell the owner one thing and the property management company something else. Even if they only report to the owner, the owner could relay incorrect information to the property manager.

Additionally, the tenant usually feels that the owner is higher up on the totem pole. They often won't bother with the property manager once they establish a connection to the owner. This creates a problem for the owner because they aren't in charge of tasks and problems for the property manager to get the tenant to communicate with them. If the tenant and owner have a line of communication, the tenants may try to sway the owner into a smaller rent increase or no increase at all. This is detrimental to the owner because their home needs to rent for market rent (or slightly below) in order to make renting worth it.

You Hired a Buffer

The reason you hired a property manager is because you didn't want to manage the property yourself. Along with handling maintenance and leasing the home comes tenant relations.

The property manager is there to communicate with tenants on behalf of you. Things are much more efficient when you are hands-off. If the tenant is able to communicate with both you and your property manager, why would they bother running anything by the manager? They will feel that you hold the power and send complaints or requests to you instead.

This is a problem because you might agree to something and then have to report back to the property management company. The property manager should be the one responsible for determining necessary repairs and how to resolve them, not the owner. Things can get messy when these paths cross.



If You're Managing the Property Yourself

Befriending the Tenant

If you're managing your own property, you will likely meet your tenant since you don't have a buffer person. This relationship should be kept on professional terms so you don't run into future issues.

When you develop a friendship with your tenants, they will treat you as a friend and not an authority figure. They may ask for leniency when it comes to late payments or lease violations. You'll be tempted to give in to their requests as to not make things awkward.

This will only cause more problems for you. You won't want to cause friction with the tenants, but you could lose out on necessary fees. It'll be hard to tell when you should draw the line once you allow them to break a rule.

Should You Rent to a Friend?

You might think it's a good idea to rent to someone you know, such as a friend or relative. However, these situations can quickly turn sour. These tenants might be more relaxed about maintenance issues or repairs, but when it comes to issues involving money, be prepared for problems to arise.

Let's say you send them a bill at the end of their tenancy regarding their security deposit. You say that it will cost \$500 (taken from their security deposit) for needed repairs and cleaning, but they don't want to pay that. They'll likely ask for leniency or a "discount" for being a friend. This will only cost you money and make you resent them for asking for favors.

Keep in mind, you should be treating all tenants the same if you have multiple properties. You could get into big trouble if you're allowing late rent from your friends and being strict with other tenants.

5 Life-Changing Tips for Becoming a Better Landlord

In this day and age, it can be difficult to be a good landlord when so many of the laws set in place favor the tenant. Many landlords struggle to see their job as a part of a rental business, leading them to make mistakes and diverge from rules they should be adhering to.

Contrary to popular belief, being a landlord is a time consuming job as well. You can't just sit back and relax once your tenant moves in. You're always on call for your tenants, which can be tiring if you already have a full time job. This can lead to less profit for you.

However, there are ways to make your job as a landlord easier and better for your tenants. At Good Life, we meet a lot of landlords that end up overwhelmed, stressed, and in need of advice. Luckily, there are 5 things you can do to be a more efficient landlord.

Keep It Professional

The best tip for being a successful landlord is to keep your relationship with tenants professional. Oftentimes landlords can develop friendships with their tenants, which can lead to potential problems. It may seem like becoming friends with a tenant is a good idea. After all, wouldn't you want a good relationship with them? While you don't want any issues with them, being good friends with them only leads to problems.

When you become friends with a tenant, they can start to take advantage of you. For example, one month they might be late on rent and ask you to waive the late fee. The next month they might ask for leniency on rules or pets. It's harder to say no when you consider yourself friends, and your tenants know this. This doesn't mean you have to be distant and rude to your tenants. Think of it as a business relationship. You should be cordial, polite, and responsive. If a tenant is late on rent, follow the rules that are set in place.

Be Prepared for Maintenance Issues

It's important to be prepared for any kind of maintenance issue. You don't want to have a tenant's faucet break and have no funds to handle it. Not only that, but you'll want to do routine maintenance as well to keep the house in good condition.

Some landlords choose to do some of the maintenance themselves, but you should only take on tasks that you are equipped to handle. If a pipe bursts in the middle of the night, it might be best to leave it to a qualified plumber.

Consider compiling a list of vendors to use for repairs. Research a couple of each type, i.e. a few plumbers, cleaners, painters, etc., so you will be prepared if one of them is booked out for the week. You'll want to set aside funds for these potential maintenance problems as well. It should be at least 5-10% of the rent, that way you won't be caught off guard if a bigger problem arises.

As a property owner, you should expect to spend money to maintain your home. Your home is a valuable asset that should be kept in good condition. Should you choose to sell eventually, you'll already be a few steps ahead with the routine maintenance you've done.

Don't Show the Property While Occupied

One of the biggest mistakes a landlord can make is showing their property while it's occupied. This is not only bad for you, the owner, but for the prospective tenant as well. When you show a property while occupied, the prospective tenants will have a hard time picturing themselves living in your home. It's difficult to get a feel for the place when the current tenants have their stuff and/or moving boxes everywhere. It makes it hard to see all the features or problems with the home. There could be furniture covering marks on the walls, paint chippings, or damaged carpet. Furniture also obscures the layout of the room and may lead to the next tenant realizing they don't care for it.

It's also easier for you to see what repairs and touch-ups are needed prior to renting. If you show it occupied and tell prospective tenants that it will be ready for rent in a matter of days and then realize it requires hefty repairs, you'll be in trouble. Additionally, you are going to have to rent your property at a lower price because it won't show as well. As a result, you'll get a lower quality tenant because the best tenants only apply for the best properties. This leads to more risk at move in because people assume property will be brand new when they move in.

However, they will likely experience issues with the home that have been overlooked, which leads to laundry list of things that need to be fixed. Because of this, they likely won't want to renew. Showing the home once vacant provides a much better experience for everyone. Empty rooms allow viewers to picture themselves living there and picture their own furniture in the rooms. It makes the showing of the property much easier as well.

Know the Laws

As a property owner, it's extremely important to know the laws regarding landlords and tenants. Some states, California included, lean more tenant-friendly and it can be tough to navigate the waters with so many laws in place.

This is especially true when it comes to tenant selection. Let's say you decide that you would prefer to not rent to college kids. You might not think this is a big deal, but this violates fair housing laws. Same goes for not wanting to rent to families, couples, etc.

San Diego specifically has a just cause eviction law. This means that if a tenant has lived in your property for 2 years or more, you must give them a just reason for why they are being evicted. This can include nonpayment of rent, lease violations, illegal use, and more.

Another law to be aware of is the notification of entry. You can't just show up to your property without giving the current tenant 24 hours notice. This is not only against the law, but will likely cause friction between you and your tenants. Not knowing landlord and tenant laws can be very costly. If the tenant chooses to take you to court over a broken law, you'll have to pay hefty legal fees and it will take up time in your already busy schedule. For a detailed breakdown of landlord and tenant laws, read the California Tenants Guide.

Keep the Property in Good Condition

One of the best the best things your can do for yourself and your property is keep it in good condition. People are attracted to clean, well-kept homes and the better condition your home is in, the better your tenant will be. Your ideal tenant is inclined to rent a home that looks presentable and has clean, working appliances. If your home has appliances that haven't been updated in 15+ years, it might be time to invest in new ones.

Another thing to look out for is HVAC maintenance. You should be changing the filters on this frequently and keep an eye out for any minor issues because they can worsen quickly. Landscaping is another thing that tends to get overlooked. Make sure there are no trees leaning into a neighboring property. Dying plant should be removed and replaced as well. The initial curb appeal of your home is what pulls people in, so keep that in mind when making updates.

You should always do a walkthrough of the home when one tenant moves out and before the next moves in. Check for any chipping paint, scuff marks, damaged carpet, etc.

About Good Life



Maximize your rental income, reduce your liability, and free up your time & energy with Good Life Property Management. We are the leading educator on all things property management in San Diego County. Rental property management is our passion. The Good Life team is guided by our core values--**be positive, be reliable, and be a go-giver**. We specialize in the management of single family homes, condos, and small apartment buildings, throughout San Diego County. Our years of experience, reputation for quality service and proven reliability are unmatched. You owe it to yourself to give us a call and see how we can help you today.

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Our Owner

Steve Welty graduated from San Diego State University in 2005 with a degree in business management. Devoted to the customer experience, he started Good Life in 2013 with the intention of improving the lives of others. He is a member of SD-NARPM (National Association of Residential Property Managers) and currently holds his RMP (Residential Management Professional) designation. He is a member of CAR (Cal. Assoc. of Realtors) and SDAR (San Diego Assoc. of Realtors).

