

# COMMUNITYMANAGER

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## A Nice Approach

How being kind can lead to success in your community and in business.

BY KIARA CANDELARIA

Disputes and disagreements between board members, residents, community managers, staff members, and business partners are an inevitable part of living in a community association. While generating an atmosphere of kindness and respect might seem easier said than done, it can make for a more collaborative and positive environment for all, says advertising leader and best-selling author Linda Kaplan Thaler.

Thaler, who delivered a keynote address at the 2019 CAI Annual Conference and Exposition: Community NOW, in May, has carried the belief throughout her professional career that being

nice pays off. As CEO and president of Kaplan Thaler Productions, Thaler's advertising agency became famous for developing the Kodak Moments campaign, catapulting Clairol Herbal Essences into notoriety with a series of ads inspired by the iconic deli scene from "When Harry Met Sally," and turning "I don't want to grow up, I'm a Toys R Us kid" into one of the most recognizable jingles in the world.

### TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

Thaler says that her parents, especially her father, instilled the importance of being mindful and respectful of others.

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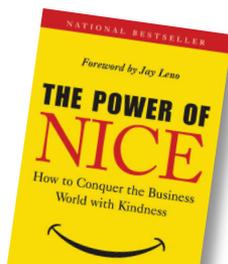
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While working on a book that demonstrates this philosophy, *The Power of Nice: How to Conquer the Business World with Kindness*, she interviewed leaders and CEOs who noted their key to higher productivity and profit margins was practicing kindness.

“It was something that a lot of men that we interviewed did not want to admit, because they thought being nice would be perceived as a weakness, but it really is a very, very valuable strength, and that’s why we felt we had to write the book,” she points out. Thaler adds that more company leaders are realizing that the main reason people leave their jobs nowadays is because they don’t feel acknowledged or respected by their immediate boss, not because of money.

“We don’t have enough people out there, enough leaders out there, who are really espousing this belief that being nice is really a tool for success. You are not filling people’s champagne glass. You are not a doormat,” Thaler emphasizes. “It is a fine strength when you can allow people in to collaborate. At the end of the day, people will work much harder if they feel acknowledged and if they feel like part of the process.”

The same applies to community associations. Thaler believes that codes of civility are a great way to guide people toward a path of being nice to one



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another. “You can’t have a culture, or an association, or a group of homeowners who will feel comfortable with each other if incivility is allowed, if disrespect is allowed,” she explains.

But actions always go beyond words, and community associations can practice what they preach in simple ways. “If you have a code that says you have to be civil with each other, and you interrupt people and you’re rude to people at a meeting, well what are you really saying?” she posits.

#### HONING LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Practicing kindness should be done across every part of the leadership in a community association, from the director, to the board members, to the community

manager, who likely has the most front-facing role. “It starts from the ground up, and that’s what we need to instill in everybody, that you’re only as good as that single person,” Thaler assures.

In addition, you have to make sure to hone your listening skills. “Listening is such a huge part of creating a culture where people are nice to each other, where people are kind to each other, because they feel like they are being heard,” Thaler says, adding that listening is also critical to creating empathy and connecting with people.

Also, Thaler advises to always tell the truth, however difficult it may be. “But you have to do it in a way that has a certain amount of kindness, because if somebody says something that shows anger, for example, you have to put your head on their shoulders,” she says. Empathy also comes into play here. “When people interact with you, they’re bringing other issues and problems that they are not discussing with you to that conversation.”

“The other thing is that you can deflect a lot of tension with humor. When we make another person laugh, we are basically creating a bond,” she notes, saying that humor can be a tool before communicating decisions that may not sit well with many people. “I think it’s very important to use humor in a way that says, ‘It’s going to be OK.’”

*Kiara Candelaria is the associate editor of Common Ground™ magazine.*

## Summer Safely

# Access Granted

Implementing clubhouse policies safeguards communities.

Summer is in full swing, and that means community association clubhouses and recreation centers are experiencing a higher than average volume of users. Since more residents are using these amenities this time of year, now is the perfect time to remind community members of the clubhouse or recreation center rules and policies to avoid confusion, reduce liability, and ensure everyone’s safety.

**Know who is using the facility.** Start tracking daily, weekly, monthly, and annual figures on who is using the clubhouse and when, so you can budget and staff appropriately. Collecting data on how and when it’s used will help community managers do a more efficient job of meeting the community’s needs and improving services.

**Pay to play.** Only residents in good standing should be able to use your recreation center. Assessments go toward upkeep and

operations for community facilities, so it’s important for all residents to share in the cost. Doing so will ensure that those who don’t live in the community—unless they’re a guest—aren’t contributing to the wear and tear of this valuable community asset.

**Set and follow rules.** Guidelines and access policies help ensure all community members and guests are safe. Minimize liability by asking facility users to sign waivers that show they understand all of the facility rules.

**Require ID at the door.** It’s important to verify the identity—or the eligibility—of all facility users, especially in large-scale communities. It’s okay to give a one-time free pass to members who forget their ID but remind them that proving their identity helps keep the facility secure. It’s important to remember that policies should apply to all members and guests equally.

