



THE POWER OF CONNECTION

Ways for Design to Support Multifamily Retention

One of the more heartening actions to come out of the pandemic is the greater understanding of the power of connection. We witnessed families on the streets walking together and waving to neighbors in the middle of the day when we would normally be at work. We saw people standing on their porches, speaking to people passing by on the sidewalks. We observed increased desire to support local businesses that were part of the structure of their social life. We adapted. We found ways to socially connect in any way possible despite the barriers.

Connections are powerful. When we are emotionally connected, to a person or place, we reduce our own stress. A positive connection triggers the emotional center of our brains. Then in the future, we remember it. In multifamily developments, this is the goal. A repeated connection can turn into establishing a culture and community. This connection often results in greater retention. Fundamentally, people stay where they feel comfortable, safe, and happy.

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However, community identity cannot be manufactured. It must belong to the residents that develop shared experiences, and more importantly, a shared trust. **How can the architecture and design help?** Architects and designers need to design the places and spaces for multifamily developments that foster ongoing connections to both persons and places.

HOW DO PEOPLE CONNECT TO PLACE?

When we think about the concept of place, we need to think about environments. These environments become both the backdrop and the criteria for a sense of place. The place becomes meaningful. It could be quiet space or a communal space: it matters differently for everyone and goes to their own individual equilibrium. People are drawn to places where they feel personally comfortable. Spaces featuring more natural plantings tend to become collectors of people. Many studies have shown that these biophilic spaces help reduce stress. This reduction of stress helps create that moment that the individual or group wants to repeat. In a multifamily development, key moments created in well-manicured landscaped environments become amenities.

Group experiences in shared spaces helps create a culture through group socialization. For a single building, a well-manicured courtyard, a fire pit, a pool, or roof deck can become a shared experience, for individuals or groups. Designing for both is essential. Again, it’s about letting people find their equilibrium. For a larger master development, you must develop multiple public spaces for programmed use and impromptu individual occupancy and everything in between. The spaces should be designed to be plural of use. When the spaces make people’s lives better or enjoyable, people connect to them. This all leads to greater retention. It is imperative to design quality outdoor spaces that suit the residents.



THE BUSINESS CASE FOR PERSONABLE CONNECTIONS

Many property managers develop engagement action plans with the goal of creating retention. For any property manager and developer, you have unit refresh costs, marketing, and advertising costs, rent concessions, and potential leasing fees and commissions. But, if the residents do not want to leave, then much of that can be deferred. The average retention rates are around 58% nationally. Many companies target 65% or higher. What are the factors that drive retention?

Some of the simplest approaches involve making residents feel heard. A responsive management team breeds trust and confidence. This results in good experiences. If residents feel heard, they will feel valued and are engaged. This can be a key deciding factor in retention. Continual and proactive support helps that concept of being heard. Technology is a key component of this. Technology allows connection and response. AI can help make the response time more immediate. It can drive responses as part of the property management software that can be easy to use via phone. The ease and speed of connection to staff foster a sense of trust while allowing the resident to get results with minimal effort. These software solutions drive transparency and action.

Targeted Marketing can also be employed. It becomes quasi-recruiting. Targeting employees of local businesses with the promise of proximity and community equates to high-value potential residents.

The sales point is life can be easy. Residents can commute less and live in a community of similar professionals. Familiarity among residents can breed connection and a sense of community.

Beyond responsiveness, many management companies resort to programmed events to get residents to interact with each other. Co-experiences and social bonding are critical for establishing a sense of community tied to the brand. The building becomes the backdrop for great experiences. These good experiences become good memories.

CO-EXPERIENCES

Co-experiences are shared experiences by a group of people that creates touchstone moments in their relationships to one another. The hope behind events is that residents engage with each other and develop a common bond. This is the desired effect of the programmed activities: breed trust and comfort, meet like-minded individuals, have a great experience, and create your own culture. The architecture, in these cases, support communal experience by creating amenity spaces for events that are flexible enough to have different uses between events.

Strong social ties are linked to longer life expectancy and greater happiness. Community experiences are essential to building social interactions because they provide opportunities for shared experience, shared memories, and build support and trust within the community.

People’s surroundings help inform their good experiences. It’s this connection that many multifamily managers and developers are counting on. Residents want to feel comfortable, safe, and heard. Technology is essential to ensure any potentially negative situations are resolved in a timely manner.

Residents bonding with one another socially needs to be supported by the architecture and design to allow for many types of activities and allow people to find their own equilibrium. Therefore, retention programs that utilize shared event spaces and landscaped surroundings really want to work with the psychology of the resident to spur a sense of community. That sense of connection to a perceived localized community is what can help drive retention in multifamily.

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