

Note to Self

18th May 2013

Dear Owners and Investors,

What a week it has been - life is never dull in Property Management. This week we had the tenant shuffle happening again - we had Mr E who is the one that had the operation on his lungs recently - he moved into the unit where Ms V was. I got the call from Ms V to say that she was ready to hand back the keys so I called over. There are just four in the block and I tried my best to sneak past Ms H at the front but she spotted me.

At 80 years old how can you not stop to have a chat and find out how life has been. It was her birthday recently so the family threw a weekend long surprise party for her. She had me out in the garden giving me cuttings as she knows Ramon loves his garden - when he will find time to plant them is beyond me. He will tell you I am a slave driver and the list of things I have him doing is never ending.

The move happened on Monday this week, and although on one hand I was sorry to see Ms V go, it gave us the opportunity to get someone into Mr E's unit at a higher rent. Mr E has been in the unit for some time, and his rent was pretty low. Tell me how we could have put the rent up to where it should be - especially knowing he would be moving on soon? This owner has over the past few years done a few upgrades - a new stove, a new fridge and a new washing machine. Sure the unit does need to be repainted and the carpets are not great, but they do have the tenant trade mark in the middle of the floor - an iron burn.

Fortunately this unit is huge in size and now that we have moved on the local dealers and trouble makers, it really is a nice complex. We have a lovely new lady and her son moving in as of Saturday - at \$25 per week extra. Happy Mr E, happy owners at both properties and a very happy property manager as we have managed to keep a great tenant and obtain a fantastic new one to boot.

We have an Indian couple that have just moved into a bedsit. I knew they would be a pain in my side, but even I didn't anticipate they would press my buttons the way they have this week. Monday they moved into the unit. I organised to drop the keys off to them on Sunday afternoon where they were staying, and they were to move in on Monday. Sunday late afternoon I am still wading my way through the forest that is growing on my desk at the office, when I get the call from the male tenant - who just happens to be a Taxi Driver - no never an Indian Taxi driver in Cairns.

He says that he is at the new unit but the key will only open the one lock on the screen door and not the wooden door. I tell him that all the locks have been changed and one key will unlock every single door. He assures me that he has tried and that this key definitely doesn't unlock the door. Remember watching those old movies where they show the fuse burning in the sand leading up to the dynamite - well remember that because right now there is a flash over to that scene with the fuse burning away.

He insists that I come over as the key just will not unlock the door - I said very calmly "I know it is the right key because I used that key to lock the door, if I come there and I unlock the door with that key will be *very angry* - think about this - are you sure you cannot unlock the door and you want me to come there." He insisted, so I got into the car and drove there - which is about five minutes from the office.

I am sure he was like a mad man at the door, seeing that fuse burning in the sand and knowing what could happen if I got there and it unlocked. With less than 200 metres before I pulled in the drive way the phone rings and he is telling me that it is fine, no need to come because it does work. He thought he had put out the fuse - but only for a short time.

The fridge that was there was not working so I got the owner to buy a new one. He must have walked in and bought THE BIGGEST fridge they had at the Good Guys. With a frost free fridge, when you open the door, and close it some air has to come out so the seal will pop slightly and then the air gets sucked back in and the seal is closed again. For some reason when this fridge was empty and you open the fridge door, when you closed it again the freezer door would pop open and stay open. This shouldn't be happening and although I checked everything I couldn't work out why. I showed them and asked them to keep an eye on it. All you have to do is push the freezer door shut and it stays - not that difficult.

The unit had just been repainted, a new mattress and the world's biggest fridge a bedsit unit. The place was looking great - did I mention that I have now rented FIVE bedsit units at \$170 per week!!! On the Monday afternoon we get the call to say the fan is really noisy and if we could replace this as well. By now I am getting to the cranky property manager stage - if I continually do things that the tenants want, then the list of wants will never end. I had to go there to pick something up so I asked to check the fan - bummer it really was noisy. The bearings are going and it squeaks really badly.

She tries to butter me up by giving me some jewellery she didn't want any longer - good try but I will let this one wait for a bit. I asked about the fridge and she told me that since she put things in the fridge and freezer there was no problem anymore. Not that I didn't believe her, but I went to the World's Biggest Fridge in a Bedsit and opened and closed both doors half a dozen times and each time a perfect seal.

On Wednesday I decided to stay at home and try to go through the other forest on my desk at home. I get a text from the same Indian couple whinging about the fan, and now the dryer and to top it off the freezer door now doesn't shut at all. Now for those of you at home that don't deal with fridges and tenants, if it used to shut and now it doesn't shut and it is a brand new fridge it can only be one thing - something they have done. They have either moved the shelf and it is stopping the door from shutting, or my money is that something is holding the door open - it can be just a fraction but enough to stop the seal.

I tried to call him, but he wasn't answering so I called her instead. I did try to ask her calmly if it was the same problem as when I was there - only popping open after you open and close the fridge or was it staying open all the time. She said it wouldn't close at all, so I told her it must be something they have done - instead of working with me she lit that fuse and let me tell you it was burning fast in the sand. We got into a bit of a yelling match and she told me to ring the partner.

He confirmed that the freezer door will not shut at all now - I tried to explain that it had to be something they have done. If it was closing correctly on Monday and now it isn't it has to be them. Remember the fuse is burning in the sand fast now - he says to me "I am not stupid you know, I know how to close a freezer door" oh the explosion is oh so near now. I take a breath, think and then out of now where comes "wait a minute two days ago, you couldn't even open the front door with the key." At this point any one smart would stay quiet but oh no he starts off again - at this point I just say "This hasn't started out very well has it, I am not sure that this is going to work out." He agrees and says that he will speak to the wife and find somewhere else and we part ways on the phone.

Here is the clanger - less than five minutes later, I get a text message to say the freezer door shuts now. Guess I won't be on their favourite property manger list!! They must have looked around at what else is out there to rent for the same money and have decided to stay.

I have made some changes to the way I do things. You all know I am rubbish at first thing in the morning so I will now have my phone on until midnight. If anyone calls I am happy to take the call until then, but before I go to bed I now put it on silent and in the spare room. I know some of you are thinking surely no one will ring after hours - think again! It is sure to happen just ask I am about to sit down to dinner and take that first bite. My logic is that surely it can wait until the brain cells kick in which is after 10am.

Some mornings I have missed one or two calls but on Wednesday I missed 18 - and that was by 9.25am. I really don't like it when one of the first messages on my message bank is from the Police. It all kicked off at one of the units - but fortunately not one of ours. This was followed by not one, but four of our tenants letting me know, and then two by email. I told you the dobbing net work I have at the complexes is just fantastic.

Ramon and I have a couple of units that are vacant - when our tenants leave they must all send smoke signals to each other and decide to leave at the same time. We have two bedsit units, two at Sheridan Street and one at Grafton Street. Since the rental market is better now, and we have Brad the Bogan painter helping us out we have decided where possible to improve the units. This includes repainting, new fans, new lights, new curtains and new door handles. We aren't going to touch the kitchen or bathroom but if required we do put in a new toilet cistern. The cost is \$59 for a whole new cistern and a toilet seat - and what a visual improvement it makes.

One of the bedsit units is just about finished when I get a call from another Indian Taxi Driver - I think they have my number up on the pin up board. I am a bit reluctant to take on single males - they do pay the rent but wow, can they be messy.

We have just repainted the unit - but for this particular one we really need to more than the usual. The fridge is an original fridge freezer style that has to be defrosted - so it has to be close to 20 years old. It still works but it is old, small and pretty crappy. The sofa was one of the original black metal framed futons which has seen better days, so we took this out prior to painting. The table and chairs have been varnished but they are pretty ordinary as well. The frame of the bed is salvageable but the mattress is awful.

So really we are also up for a new fridge, new sofa, new table and chairs and a new mattress. In walks my Indian Taxi Driver and he loves the place. He will take it at \$170 per week as it, but he has his own bed and mattress so if we could please remove this.

I am a bit dubious about giving it to him as I know there is a very real chance that he will probably be not just messy but incredibly messy. I do know that although they can be pushy and messy, generally the Taxi Driver guys are easy to deal with, the rent is paid and they don't cause a bother generally. If I don't rent it to him, Ramon and I will probably have to spend another \$1500 on furniture - and we won't actually get any more than \$170 per week. I grill him about making sure it will be clean, and then make the decision to let him have the place. He will be there for a while and it suits us right now. We can put that \$1500 into another unit to get a better rent. We have already increase the rent on this unit by \$15 per week, so we are happy and now we have another Taxi Driver to our collection. Great - now not only do I collect old people but now I collect Indian Taxi Drivers!

Today Ramon and I were getting the units ready for Brad the Bogan painter. He is great at painting, but not preparation. Seriously, if I stood still against the wall, he would paint over me! We have a ground floor unit at Sheridan Street, and then another at the back on the first floor. These are really old units probably built between the First and Second War. This is how old they are, when Ramon went into the roof space on the back of the tin sheets it has Made in England! Seriously these were brought out by ship - that is how old it is.

We were working on the ground floor unit, which we have already tiled except for the bathroom. The kitchen was updated probably 25 years ago, but it will be fine for now. I got a call in the afternoon from yet another Indian Taxi Driver who knows the tenant that just left the upstairs unit - yes another Taxi Driver. His friend would like to have a look at the unit - I tell them I am there so they can come over straight away. The unit at the back was the next one we were going to prepare next for Brad the Bogan painter. We did renovate this one about 8 years ago, and it really needs to be repainted again. The furniture is fine it is just an old unit that is a bit tired.

Just as this phone conversation was going on, Ramon was pulling out a huge pipe from the wall above the doorway - no idea why it was there originally but it wasn't connected to anything now so I thought it would be a great idea to remove it. Ramon thought it was a dumb idea and to just leave it in place, but he caved and started to pull it out. There is now a HUGE chunk of wall missing where the pipe and surrounding wall was - I can hear cussing coming from Ramon.

The mortar mix is at Grafton Street, so just as the Indian Taxi Driver and friends arrive, Ramon is pulling out of the driveway. It is for one of the guys, his wife and their six year old son. Not a big fan of kids at Sheridan Street but then again it is vacant and that means no rent coming in - and less money to spend on cocktails on the cruise.

They have a look through, and say they are happy with it at \$220 per week. I ask when they want to take it from, and quick as a flash they say as soon as possible. My mind is now thinking about what we have to do if they don't take it. We will have to prepare the unit for painting, as this happens we will definitely discover lots of things that Ramon will want to fix up. It was one of our earlier renovations and he isn't happy with some of the things we did. We then have to not only pay for Brad the Bogan painter, but when he is finished we have to put it back together.

We wouldn't be able to help ourselves and we would then put in new furniture, change the fans and lights and even look at fixing that door jamb we never got to last time. All of this will mean another couple of weeks vacancy. For this unit, after we have done all of that we MAY if we are lucky get \$240 per week. This is a stretch so I now look back at the Indian Taxi Driver and tell him the three rules - pay the rent, keep the place clean and don't wind up the neighbours - all of which he agrees to.

As Ramon is pulling back into the drive way (seriously he only had to drive less than a kilometre to get to Grafton Street) I am exchanging keys, money and getting ID. They move in on Saturday and we have one less unit to do up! We did get an extra \$10 per week over the last tenant, and we will still have to do this one next time - but for now it is all about cash flow.

I will tell you about another tenant shuffle I did. We have had a lovely Japanese man at one of the two bedroom units since 2008. He has been asking for ages for a unit in the city as he now has a girlfriend and they want to be closer to town. Each time we had anything I would let him know but we had nothing that he liked. He found a unit with another agent and gave us notice as he had been accepted with another agent for a property.

On that same day we got notice from a tenant on Digger Street. I told him about the unit and he asked to see it. I arranged it and he loved it - and more importantly so did the girlfriend. He told the other agent he didn't want the unit and took ours instead. The reason was not that he liked our unit any better, but he has been dealing with us for five years and it is easy. There was almost no change over for the owner and we got him another \$10 per week. Happy tenant, happy owner and very happy property manager.

They came to my office this week, and although I have five million things to do I instead spent nearly 90 minutes with them. Their English really is poor - I can communicate when I can see them but the phone is just hopeless. They asked if I could help them with power, gas and telephone as they had no idea how to transfer it over. I know this really isn't part of what I am supposed to do but this couple will be great tenants that cause me no bother at all.

The last property they were at they were there for five years - so there is no reason they will be leaving any time soon at the new property. If it means that I need to spend 90 minutes with them sorting thing out, but then have an easy life for the next few years - so be it. The owner would be even happier when they then deposited six weeks rent into the account!

To finish off, did I happen to mention that we are going on another cruise? Not that I am excited at all, and there are just 30 more sleeps to go. I know that some with think it is extravagant but honestly, if I didn't make us take the break and actually stop and turn the phone off I really will be no good to you, to Ramon or to myself. What I do is hard physically and mentally and after 13 long years it grinds you down. I just have to remember our parole is up in 3 - 5 years - or that is the plan! For those that haven't been on a cruise, they do a show on the last night that is the crew talent show. They always do a skit called "If I were not upon the sea" and as this has been a Taxi Driver Note to Self, I thought it was right to include it. I am going to create my own line.

If I were not upon the land, something else I'd rather be. If I were not upon the land, something else I'd rather be ... a cruise ship passenger ME, happy all day long and this would be my song
Cocktail here, cocktail there - pass the fruit flan, Cocktail here, cocktail there - pass the fruit flan.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjsk3RjhaBq>

I hope you are all happy and well in your world.

Linda