

Rules for Living in a Condominium

Thou shalt read this
Ten commandments to keep condo life enjoyable for all

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John Locke's inspired thoughts, first written in 1690, are as applicable today as then. Living in a community entails both rights and responsibilities, a curtailment of personal freedoms for the greater comfort of all. In a neighbourhood, it might mean not firing up the lawn mower at dawn, or turning down the outdoor stereo after dusk. Good fences make for good neighbours; they're a way to balance privacy and civility.

In a condominium highrise, the only fences are the walls between units. But whether it's a tiny row of townhouses or a vertical community larger than many towns, co-operation is key. Living in such close proximity isn't for everyone. You should think long and hard about buying a condo if you're not prepared to co-exist. Renters, too, should know that living in a condo is different from apartment dwelling. They are also bound by the corporation's rules. Ignorance is no excuse.

Herewith, our version of the Ten Commandments of Condominium Living.

1. Honour thy neighbour.

Keep the noise down - or invite them to the party - the same way you would wind down a backyard barbecue before the wee hours. Saying hello as you pass in the hall, holding the door for someone with packages in hand, not pushing the CLOSE button on the elevator when you can hear footsteps approach - all are measures of common courtesy.

2. Respect thy property manager.

You employ this person to ensure the quiet enjoyment of your home. If someone three floors away is drilling holes or laying a parquet floor outside the approved hours, let the property manager handle it. Often, this can be done with a phone call or a formal letter, leaving you anonymous. That way, the complaint is on file and you avoid any dangerous confrontations. The management can pursue legal remedies, if necessary. Also, give praise where it's due. A good property manager is the glue that holds a condominium community together. In a condominium highrise, the only fences are the walls between units. But whether it's a tiny row of townhouses or a vertical community larger than many towns, co-operation is key.

3. Respect all of thy property.

You own it all, from the lounge to the common areas, the garage (if you have one), the sauna, the pool. Any deterioration or damage to the building will bring down your property values. So, champagne glasses in the hot tub? Cigarette burns on the hall carpet? Gouged hallways from moving? Peeing in the pool? Just say no. (I once saw a woman spray-painting a wooden stool in the hallway!) If you see it, report it to your property manager or security personnel, if you have them. Otherwise, contact your board of directors - or police if it's serious enough.

4. Push thine own garbage all the way down the chute.

Not halfway, not unbagged or untied and, if it's too big (such as a box from a large appliance), take it to the garbage room. It's your garbage, your responsibility. Preventing the infestation of pests is everybody's concern. Enough said.

5. Thou shalt control thy pets.

To avoid a cat fight, we'll leave aside the issue of people who bring pets into a no-pets building - out of ignorance or wilfulness. If you have a pet, you should be in control of it at all times: in a crowded elevator, where inappropriate sniffing, licking or jumping occurs; in the hallways, where it is not suitable to let the animal out for a walk; on common-area balconies or roof decks, where Skippy might opt for a constitutional. People who fear large dogs or are allergic to cats or ferrets will appreciate your sensitivity and good manners. When taking your pet outside for his daily walk, remember your manners and city bylaws: Stoop and scoop.

6. Thou shalt control thy children.

Little darlings running amok in hallways, pressing all the elevator buttons or leaving footprints on walls do not endear themselves to their parents or their neighbours. Worse, children left alone or unsupervised around pools, saunas, balconies or exercise machinery can be injured or killed. Whether they're your kids or they are in your temporary care, keep a watchful eye. Please.

7. Thou shalt help keep thy building safe.

If you have a security staff, let them know if something doesn't seem right. Lurking strangers, defaced property, dangerous doings in the stairwells, newspapers piling up outside someone's door. Got leftover food after a big party? Offer it to the staff, who often work long hours for low pay. Have free tickets to a sports event or concert that you can't use? Pass them on. If staff can't use them, you can bet they know another resident who can. If you have no on-site security staff, don't let someone you don't recognize follow you inside. Insist their hosts buzz them up. You have a right to know who's on your property.

8. Thou shalt not toss cigarette butts, ashes or floor sweepings off the balcony.

Your neighbour below has a right to enjoy the fresh air without having to hold an umbrella. Be careful when watering plants that a torrent of water doesn't ruin Mrs. Pumpernickel's new blue rinse. Above all, don't barbecue on your balcony.

9. Thou shalt not leave water running when leaving the building.

In highrises, damage from floods costs several hundred thousand dollars a year. Burst washing machine hoses, overflowing toilets and dishwasher disasters can all wreak havoc for residents several floors below you. If you're going away for an extended period, shut off water supplies to appliances and toilets to prevent unwanted surprises.

10. Thou shalt not treat the parking garage as an Indy 500 test track.

Roaring around corners or racing along the underground straightaway can seriously injure someone exiting their parked car, walking with a baby in a stroller, or moving slowly because of age or infirmity. A minute's thoughtlessness could lead to a lifetime of tragedy. Will the extra minute saved really matter? Think about it.

Last, you should read and understand the bylaws and rules regarding your condo corporation. By finding out such things as how the building runs, when large deliveries are allowed or how locker rooms with shared keys work, you can avoid potential conflicts with your neighbours and, worse, any legal headaches arising from inappropriate actions.

"The only way by which any one divests himself of his natural liberty and puts on the bonds of civil society is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community". - John Locke

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