7 TIPS TO SCREEN POTENTIAL TENANTS

Or how to make sure you don’t get stuck with a problem tenant!

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Why You Need To Screen Tenants

As a landlord there is nothing as discouraging as finding out the model tenants you lucked into are actually examples of the worst type of people on the planet. Everything that appeared so rosy and perfect at the beginning was in fact an illusion crafted by what can only be referred to as “bad people”.

Dealing with problem tenants is the proverbial buzzkill to Real Estate investing and the best way to deal with problem tenants is to avoid them. The place place to start avoiding them is at the beginning and make sure they never actually get into your property in the first place.

Often when screening tenants, emotions can get in the way. This can range from panic on the landlord's side about ensuring the property is rented for the first of the month to feeling sad for a tenant with a particularly depressing story. I use the word story, because often they are just that, stories to help them get what they want.

To help us combat being drawn into an emotional reaction and acquiring less than reliable tenants, we have created our “Tenant Screening Questions”. This set of questions we have taken from a selection of screening questions we have learned over the years. We've taken those original questions, and fine tuned them added to them and essentially made them ours.

Here, we will share them with you and hopefully they help you avoid problems as well as they have helped us!

When we stick to our systems, miraculously we rarely have problems. These screening questions are a firm part of our system and we recommend you adopt...
The 7 Screening Questions You MUST Ask Potential Tenants

1) How long were you hoping to sign a lease for?

If you are looking for a long term tenant, and their answer is three months, this might not be the right tenant for you!

2) How many people will there be renting the place?

If it's a two bedroom suite and they answer just the seven of us, the conversation should end fairly quickly!

3) When would you be moving in?

If they answer in a couple of months and you need to fill it at the end of the month, well you know where I am going. If they answer tomorrow they better have a great story or you could be saddled with tenants that don't prepare very well!

Side Note - our absolute best tenants came to us this way.

They were in the process of moving here and the place that was supposed to be ready for them was a mess and their moving van was 12 hours behind them.

They had an impeccable list of references and I called each and everyone and had glowing responses back from them within two hours confirming everything.

So listen to the story, but never forget your screening and if they are golden, it might just work out!
4) Have you already given notice to your current landlord?

If they plan on skipping out early on their current landlord, what would stop them from doing the same to you?

5) How long have you been at your current address? And the address before that? And before that?

Your goal here is to ascertain if they only stay six months before moving on, or whether they are the long term equity building tenants us landlords love. On the other hand if you like meeting lots of new people every six months, skip this question!

6) Are you currently just looking or serious about finding a place right away?

If they are just checking out places right now and won't make a decision for a month or two, do you really want to rush across the city to show the property? Once again if you like meeting lots of new people, skip this question.

7) The security deposit is XXX which is equal to one month's rent.

Both are due in cash prior to moving in, will this be a problem? If this is a problem for them, this should raise a red flag about their ability to pay rent in the future, or maybe they just aren't ready to move into your place yet and you can let them move into another landlords place who doesn't screen!

*Depending on the local laws and regulations in your region, you may not be able to collect security or damage deposits, but instead collect first and last month's rent. Modify the question to suit your local laws.
Now that you have these questions, your next step is to print this out or save it somewhere you can find it. Then, next time you are going through the process of filling a vacancy come back to these questions and keep them near you so as the calls come in, you are prepared to ask them.

The journey of filling vacancies doesn't end here however. So neither will I. Here are a few more tips for you when it comes to filling vacancies.

## Tips to Help Fill Vacancies & Save Your Time

### Confirming Viewings

Just about every landlord has had a tenant miss a viewing. They may have found another place to rent and don't care enough to let you know, they may have simply forgotten, whatever the reason, it still wasted your time.

To help minimize this occurring here is a tactic to preserve your time and minimize the impact of tenants standing you up. When scheduling viewings tell the potential tenant they must call you an hour prior to the viewing time. Make it very clear if you don't receive their confirmation phone call an hour prior, you won't be there. Also make sure they write your number down with the address of the property and that you are very clear with them that you will not show up if you do not hear from them an hour prior.

You can let them know if for some reason you don't answer their confirmation call they need to leave you a message confirming they are coming. This way you won't have to worry about missing them if you are on other calls and helps take pressure off of you.

The most important part of this, if they don't call you an hour before, but then call you at the meeting time wondering where you are, don't rush over there! Reschedule and get them to follow the same process. If they can't get it right the second time you may want to be concerned if they can follow any other instructions you have for them, such as the rules of the lease?

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**Arrive Early & Prepared**

This seems like a common sense tip, but it is amazing how many times landlords show up just moments before the tenants do, or worse yet after they do. Try to give yourself at least half an hour preparation time. When you arrive at the property, you never know what could be awaiting you and if you have multiple tenants arriving for a viewing having extra time can be a blessing. During winter months, there may be some snow shoveling required to make the property have a better first impression and to improve safety. During spring, fall or summer, you can use the time to open windows to freshen the place up.

These 30 minutes can also be your preparation time to make sure everything is just right, the floor is clean, dust bunnies in their pens, toilets clean, flushed (flush toilets every time you stop at a vacant property to reduce stains!) and lid closed, all the lights on to brighten the property up and any preprinted information about the property set out on the counter.

To make this an easier process it can be handy to assemble a “vacant property preparation package”. Simply put a collection of cleaning supplies, rags, air fresheners (FeBreeze and or Glade Plugins are handy) and replacement light bulbs together in a box in advance. You can just set the box in your vehicle when you are stopping at a property and you will have the necessities to get a property ship shape with you.

If you haven’t been to the property for a few days, it is an excellent time to spray some FeBreeze around or plug in a couple Glade plug-ins to help air the place out as well. If your property has some of the modern fixtures they may require the new R20 or A16 style bulbs or possibly even halogen bulbs. If you don’t have these bulbs with you make a note and stock up your box for your next visit.

Now, if you are more adventurous and want to create an even better environment, it never hurts to bring a vase of aromatic flowers in. Or if you are especially energetic, you can even pick up some of the cookies you just spoon out onto a baking sheet and bake away so the potential tenants are greeted with the scent of fresh cookies when they arrive. Tell me that doesn't help make the property a bit more inviting!

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Your goal when showing the property is not to be just a landlord, but also the best marketer of the property you can possibly be. Your goal at this time is to fill your property with the best possible tenants out there. If you are just one of five places they are viewing that day you want yours to stand out, be memorable and be the one they not only want, but feel they need to get.

Checklists

Creating checklists can make a huge difference to a landlord. These checklists will help you follow your systems and systems are what will make you a success in Real Estate. When you first start investing in Real Estate there is a considerable amount of information to learn and much of this information changes over the years.

Due to these changes, and due to the complexity of Real Estate itself, utilizing checklists for various steps within Real Estate can help you avoid repeating mistakes and even prevent making brand new mistakes. You can never start building your checklists to soon, no matter what type of business you are operating and Real Estate is no different.

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**In Closing**

There you go, you now have a crash course in not only Screening Tenants with my set of 7 Screening Questions, but you have some additional tips to help you fill those vacancies. Hopefully you have found the information helpful and you can use this to improve your business as a Real Estate investor.

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Regards,

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