



Best Practices for Communicating with your Landlord or Property Manager

A working, healthy tenant-landlord relationship depends on honest, direct communication, and a focus on *mutual* concerns and interests. Like with any relationship, it must be nurtured to thrive. Even when relations are challenging, respectful and clear communication practices can resolve problems and avoid crises.

These communication best practices will help you develop a constructive relationship with your landlord or property manager and protect your business at the same time:

Connect – Always take a moment to connect with your landlord or property manager so that relations stay open and friendly, as much as possible. Have a “no agenda” conversation. Tell them about yourself and your business goals; engage in learning about their goals for the property, and what works best for communicating from their perspective.

Report – If you face a problem with your commercial space (leaking roof, troublesome neighbor, an emergency that will make your next rent payment late), call or meet with your property manager (or landlord) and tell them about it. Follow up with an email confirming your understanding of the actions each of you will take. If the situation is complicated or serious, print out the email and deliver it to the notice address in your lease.

Legal Notices – Some messages require special handling. A legal notice must be in writing (ink and paper – not digital) and either personally delivered or sent by certified mail. Your lease may require another special handling method that also should be followed. If your landlord or property manager has not responded to a repair request, if you are exercising an option or other provision contained in your lease, or moving out of your space, always send or deliver the communication following the legal notice rules.

Keep it cheerful – No matter how you feel, written communications should be polite and professional. If you end up in small claims court for some reason, the judge will notice your positive tone to work out differences.

Avoid text messages – Texting is a great way to make a coffee date with your property manager. However, texts should never be used to communicate important or complicated messages about your commercial space.

Through a grant from the Office of Economic and Workplace Development, Conflict Intervention Service (CIS) of the Bar Association of San Francisco offers free and low-cost services to merchant tenants and commercial landlords.

Contact CIS for negotiation coaching, business analysis, mediation, and legal referrals. Learn more about us here: sfbar.org/cis. Call the helpline at 415.782.8940 or email CIS@sfbar.org.

CIS guarantees a response to all help requests within 24 hours, 7 days a week.