

# The New York Times

## City Room



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## Keeping Peace in a Vertical Village

By [SARAH KRAMER](#)

Ozier Muhammad/The New York Times  
Doug Weinstein

*As director of operations and compliance for AKAM Associates, a property management company for luxury co-op and condominium buildings in New York City, Doug Weinstein is responsible for all physical projects in 125 buildings. He fields daily calls from cooperative and condominium boards about everything from code issues to job bids. Mr. Weinstein started in the business nearly 30 years ago, working for his cousin,*

*Martin Raynes, of M. J. Raynes Inc., a large real estate developer in the city in the 1980s.*

**Q.** What is the difference between co-ops and condos, in simple terms?

**A.** In a condominium, the owner of the unit owns the actual real estate. In a co-op, the apartment is not even owned. It's assigned shares, so the person is a shareholder in the co-op corporation. Condos historically have less restrictive policies dealing with subletting and sales.

**Q.** What are three things that can immediately boost market value in a building?

**A.** One is curb appeal. When you walk into a building, if a potential buyer sees a well-decorated lobby, a clean lobby, not something that looks a little threadbare or worn around the edges, that's one of the big items that buyers look for. The other is to have good financials and to make sure the board is on top of financial details. Third, amenities. That could be anything from a health club facility or a gym in the building to a shared rooftop. Nowadays, buyers are looking for such things as dog grooming rooms, which are becoming very popular, or private wine storage areas, in buildings. There has been a big surge in prewar buildings trying to utilize basement areas or other common areas in the building to match some of the amenities you're seeing in new construction.

**Q.** What's the most useless feature for a building?

**A.** One of the things that a lot of people will look for is rear courtyard space in a building. And we find that in buildings that do have that, that do go through beautifying it, we find, across the board, that it gets very little use.

**Q.** Who picks the doorman's uniform?

**A.** Doorman uniforms are usually selected by the board or a subcommittee of the board. The managing agent will provide samples from numerous uniform companies. There are some buildings that want to have a very fancy uniform and then there are other buildings that want to get away from that and go very simple, let's say blazer and turtleneck, more toward the look of the boutique hotel rather than the standard epaulets with braids and scrawling writing on them. We've had instances where we've had existing doormen model the uniform for the board so they can see what it looks like on an individual. It's one of the issues where a considerable amount of time can be spent.

*Continued below ...*

There are some buildings that want to do a certain type of fabric or do a certain weight fabric. We'll recommend that they go to a heavier blend or a different blend because we've seen that in the past where you have uniforms like the ones they're choosing, they only last one season. It's up to them ultimately, but we need to bring all options to them.

**Q.** Any advice on achieving harmony within a building?

**A.** In buildings where there is disharmony among residents or residents and boards, it basically points to one big area and that's lack of communication. We find that frequent communication bridges a lot of what could have been difficult or tense situations in terms of a viewpoint of us versus them. You're living in a little confined community; it is a breeding ground for rumors and stories that are not true, and a little bit more communication could alleviate that.

**Q.** Any real life examples from buildings you've managed? Any nightmare scenarios?

**A.** This is a business where you're dealing a lot with people's emotions because you're dealing with where they live. And you're dealing a lot with instances where these emotions can get heated. You also have different personalities living in what can best be described as a vertical town so that you're going to have personality conflicts. Our job is a lot of social work, psychology and patience.

We've had buildings where at annual meetings, we've had to break up fist fights, to seeing furniture thrown in meetings. There was an argument that started between a board member and a resident having to do with parking spots in a building. And they felt that the board member was getting a preferential parking spot because they were on the board. I physically had to step in between the two of them.

**Q.** You must get complaints and calls all day long.

**A.** It's a job that has a lot of pressure. One of the ways we try to blow off steam is we try to tell funny stories. The most recent story: we were able to nab a resident who we had long suspected of allowing their dog to go to the bathroom in the hallway. We were never able catch them, and then we did some surveillance and we were able to identify the person. At the building, the board and I viewed the

evidence with quite a bit of satisfaction.

**Q.** Do you own a co-op or a condo?

**A.** Not presently. I live in a house. Dealing with the industry on a day-to-day basis, it's my relaxation to get to somewhere where there's a little more space involved.

When I still lived in the city, I did own a co-op on the Upper West Side.

**Q.** A lot of our readers who wrote in signed their questions with signatures like "Hopes to Never Own a Co-op Again." Do you relate to that?

**A.** Oh, absolutely. But one of the best possible remedies for that is to help the situation and volunteer. If you're unhappy, there are avenues you can go to become a voice of change in your building.

**Q.** Or move to New Jersey and buy a house?

**A.** No, I'd rather sit and fight.

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