



## Employee Feedback Helps Drive Growth Strategy at Griffis Residential



*“The employee engagement survey has been an extremely helpful tool for us. We can have observations, but the survey bears them out. The numbers don't lie.”*

**Jeanne Lynch, Vice President of Human Resources, Griffis Residential**

Griffis Residential, based in Denver, owns and manages nearly 8,300 Class A apartment units in prime real estate markets in Colorado, Nevada, Texas, and Washington. A period of rapid growth in 2015 challenged customer-facing associates essential to client retention. After two years as a [Denver Post Top Workplace](#), the firm did not make the list in 2016. Owning the setback, management built a strategy based on survey feedback, resulting in a return to the list in 2017.

## Background

### Engagement is Everything

Griffis Residential has built its business with a customer-centric focus, providing high-end apartments for clients in desirable locations. Early on, the firm realized the importance of





client retention. Jeanne Lynch, Vice President of Human Resources, explained, “Renewals are a big deal. It’s better to keep residents for longer periods than to find new residents.”



To that end, the company operates with a goal of providing outstanding customer service. From operations managers to service techs who happily fix a clogged sink, customer service skills are critical to the guest experience.

“Engagement is everything,” related Lynch. “If our employees aren’t engaged, they can’t be enthusiastic, and it affects the bottom line.”

In 2014 and 2015, Griffis Residential earned a spot on the Denver Post list of Top Workplaces. Despite company success, the numbers slipped the following year.

## Rapid Expansion

In 2015, Griffis Residential nearly doubled in size, acquiring 11 new properties. Just 235 employees managed 25 multifamily communities across the western United States. In addition, existing systems and policies had to be upgraded to keep pace with the expansion. “We didn’t make the list in 2016,” reported Lynch. “The growth was rapid and the transition stretched our resources, which contributed to a slip in our employee satisfaction scores.”

## Employees Challenged

While other industries offer flexible work hours to accommodate employee lifestyles, the nature of residential services makes such flexibility challenging.

The bulk of Griffis Residential employees interact face-to-face with customers daily, whether in the leasing office or maintaining properties. Customer service hours can prove unpredictable.

For example, explained Lynch, “Summer is our busiest season. When other people traditionally take vacation time, our associates are stretched to the max.”

# Strategy

## Survey Results Inform Decisions

Lynch worked with Energage to review the results of the 2016 Employee Engagement Survey and discover opportunities for improvement in the responses. While employees at the corporate office reported feeling more positive than the previous year, community managers and the service teams needed attention.

“We sat down with operations managers and went through every one of the questions, brainstorming and putting plans into place,” reported Lynch. “We measure quarterly how we’re doing against the goals we set when we received the data.”



## Employee Initiatives

Based on the survey results, Lynch and the Operations Management team launched several initiatives, including:

- Multi-site floating associates to cover vacation time or fill holes during hiring
- Higher pay for undervalued positions
- Competitive short and long-term disability
- Thank you cards and comp days to recognize hard work

## Education Programs

Attracting and retaining the right clients involves hiring and developing the best employees. That process starts with a summer internship program that benefits from personal oversight of the firm’s Chairman and Co-CEO, Ian Griffis. In addition, the organization invests in on-campus recruiting.

To supplement those efforts, the company significantly increased its tuition assistance program from \$1,000 to \$5,250 per year. Lynch explained the logic behind the change.

“We would like more of our people to have college degrees, to have another tool in their tool kit to be able to interact with residents. We have really pushed the tuition reimbursement program, and people are taking advantage of it, which is absolutely wonderful.”



# Results

## 2017 Top Workplace

Griffis Residential returned to the list of Top Workplaces for 2017. Evaluations were based entirely on employee feedback from the [Energage Survey](#). “We strongly believe that the high caliber of our team is a key factor to driving value for our stakeholders,” Griffis stated. “When the best and brightest individuals challenge each other to do their best every day, advancement opportunities emerge in a fun and motivating place to work.”

## Supporting Future Growth

Recognizing the role engaged employees play in the company’s growth, Lynch and the Operations Management team plan additional improvements to prime for continued expansion in 2017, including:

- Infrastructure updates
- Empathy training for managers
- New policies for football attire Fridays and Volunteer Days
- Team building

“It’s not just about how we treat our customers,” explained Lynch. “My customers are the associates. It starts at the top, and it goes to our associates and then to the residents. We are always asking, ‘what can we do better?’”

## Superior Employee Retention

Employees have responded positively to the changes in benefits and work flexibility. In an industry with historically high turnover, Griffis Residential boasts a turnover rate considerably lower than the average.

“I just received the Apartment Industry survey for 2016, and the average turnover rate is 40%,” said Lynch. “Our turnover is sitting at just below 29%. We’re doing better than average, which is wonderful!”