

Bringing “Military Precision” to Rental Housing Management – CRB Delivers!

Hello. My name is Dave Marshall and I’m currently employed with Kelson Group Property Management, a family-owned company based in Kamloops, BC. I’m the assistant property manager and my job entails helping and supporting our two property managers who oversee a Kelson Group’s personal portfolio of over 3400 residential rental units, based in 9 different cities across BC and Alberta.

My main task this past year has been to oversee and prepare Kelson Group’s BC buildings for accreditation into LandlordBC’s Certified Rental Building Program (CRB). We currently have 6 buildings certified in the Fraser Valley and are actively working towards certifying another 25 buildings in Kamloops and Kelowna.

Prior to joining Kelson Group, I was fortunate enough to have a full, 25 year career, in the Canadian Military. I enrolled in the Army in September 1983 as an Infantry soldier, holding the lofty rank of Private. After many wonderful adventures, five overseas deployments and numerous postings across Canada, I eventually took my retirement in April 2008 as an Infantry Officer, in the rank of Captain.

As an observation, one of the aspects of military life which I always marvelled at was their amazing ability to take the rules and regulations and equally apply them to everyone. While no system is ever perfect, life in the Army basically means that all the rules apply to all the people all the time. In other words, a simple annual fitness standards policy is enforced upon every member who is on duty, regardless of rank or position.

What I would now hope to relate to you is where I see the parallels between how the military conducts parts of its business and how the CRB program can significantly help a landlord or owner in the residential rental housing business.

First, I’ll need to provide you with some context. We are going to compare the method used by the Army to prepare a large group of soldiers for an overseas peacekeeping mission to the method used within the CRB program to ensure compliance to its 50 Standards of Practice. Let’s start on the Army side first.

When Ottawa decides to send Canadian soldiers overseas, a set of orders will be issued and those orders will then start to make their way down the military chain of command. A tour of duty on a peace keeping mission will generally last for a six month duration and involve between 1000 and 1500 soldiers so there are a million things to do in advance to prepare that many people to go overseas for that length of time.

Now imagine for a moment that you are the commanding officer of the unit being deployed and you have just received your orders to prepare your unit. Where would you begin the task of organising everything? What if it was your responsibility to draw up a master list of all the requirements of the various equipment, training, ammunition, rations, vehicles, weapons, etc. that would be needed? How would you know that your list was complete and not missing a vital component or two?

Fortunately, all these requirements are planned out in advance at the highest levels of the Army Command and the necessary information comes down to the unit commander as part of his orders package. He will know exactly what he has to accomplish, how he is to accomplish it, and how much time and resources he has to work with along the way.

Eventually, several months later, the unit emerges from their cycle of preparation as a fully trained, cohesive unit ready to deploy overseas. The last portion of the preparation is an intense field training exercise where all aspects of the unit will be tested and evaluated by qualified army officers from outside the unit. Should the unit successfully pass the final field portion, the unit is declared fit and ready for deployment overseas.

Now imagine for a moment that you are the owner/operator of a portfolio of rental properties or the owner of a licensed third-party property management company, and you are looking for a competitive edge over your rivals in the residential rental market. In the midst of running your company, how do you find the time to do a comprehensive review of all aspects of your company to see if you could be doing things better? Even if you had the time, would you have the requisite insight and ability to properly analyse your own company? As the old saying goes, a person doesn't know what they don't know. As the owner of the company, how can you implement something that you don't even know about?

This is where the Certified Rental Building program comes into the picture. CRB has been created and built by leading experts in the Canadian residential rental housing industry as a way to provide a comprehensive, detailed, master set of best practices that an owner or property manager can use to examine and improve their overall methods of operation. Just like our unit commander with his orders package in the example above, owners and property managers can use the CRB program as a multi-faceted tool to accomplish their desired mission of being certified as one of the best in their industry.

The actual process is quite simple to follow. Once the owner of a portfolio of rental properties decides to enroll in the CRB program, they simply contact LandlordBC and fill out the registration paperwork for the properties they want in the program (I recommend the entire portfolio). LandlordBC will then send out a detailed set of instructions that will include the 50 Standards of Practice. These standards are divided as follows into five categories: Human

Resources Management, Resident Management, Operational Management, Financial and Risk Management, and Environmental Management.

The plan is now set for the company to follow. At their own pace, they review each CRB Standard and compare it to the current way they conduct their business and it quickly becomes apparent which parts of the company are running well, which things will need to be adjusted and, in some cases, new policy and procedures will need to be created and implemented to cover any gaps identified.

The huge advantage to each company that joins CRB is they don't have to spend time and resources on trying to determine on their own what the best practices are for their industry. It is provided to them with clarity and they can simply devote their time and resources to implementing the changes required to become compliant with the CRB Standards.

Once a company has determined that they are ready, just like the unit commander above, there is a final test. They organise with LandlordBC for an independent auditor with specialized knowledge of the industry to visit the company, review the Head Office procedures and conduct site visits at each property that was registered into the CRB program. Once the audit is passed, those properties and the company are entitled to be CRB certified and can use this accreditation in their marketing, put it on their website, use it in social media platforms, and advertise on signage at the buildings, etc.

It really is a win-win scenario for all involved. The company can operate on a daily basis knowing it is using recognised rental housing industry best practices, and the residents of the buildings are assured a high level of professional management that they would not have in a non-CRB building. On a personal level, I equate the CRB accreditation as being very similar to the hotel star ranking system. If you are travelling somewhere for a holiday and wish to stay in a 5 star hotel, are you going to even consider looking at a 3 star hotel? You've already decided that you want a certain level of comfort and professional management and that's all you're looking for.

Having CRB accreditation is a 5 star advantage for an owner/operator and a property management company. Although there is an obvious cost and time investment required to become accredited, it will pay off in the quality of the rental prospects that will come to your buildings and eliminate operating inefficiencies that invariably infiltrate an organization when policies and procedures are not consistently understood and applied by the entire team.

Having quality tenants living in CRB accredited buildings that are professionally managed sounds like a winning long term formula for any rental housing provider. Just like the Army unit commander we discussed earlier, having a well thought out plan to follow is always half the battle. It is very difficult to correctly move forward if you don't know where you are headed.

