



Do YOU Wash the Rental Car Before Returning It?

by Tony A. Drost, RMP®

How many times have you been asked by prospective owners what to expect when you rent their house out? Do you give the rosy story or do you use this as an opportunity to set up realistic expectations?

I believe that my company has an outstanding screening process. As a result, we have had very few horror stories and only minor disappointments. However, I know that someday a tenant is going to cause a major disappointment, which will ultimately cause my client (the owner) to not only become even more disappointed, but to also lose faith in my company's capabilities.

When I have been asked, "What can I expect from renting my house out?" I first explain all of the procedures that my company does to minimize troubles, such as our screening process. Then, I want to set the owner up for a possible disappointment.

To set up this expectation, I like to use the "Have you ever rented a car?" story. Almost everyone has rented a car. I agree that renting a house and a car is not quite the same, but the understanding of how a renter thinks, is dead on. The fact is, the car or the home does not belong to them. I ask the prospective owner the following questions about a car that they had once rented.

1. **"Did you read your car rental agreement, or did you just sign where asked?"** Almost everyone I have asked this question of stated that they just signed. They were in a hurry and just wanted to get on the road. I believe that our tenants think the same; they just want to sign and get on their way.
2. **"When you received the car, did you thoroughly inspect and annotate all cleaning issues or damages?"** No one, except an engineer or two, stated that they performed an inspection on the car at all. Now, my company expresses the importance and costs associated to ignoring a move-in inspection. But if we did not, I believe that less than 25% of our tenants would complete a move-in inspection.
3. **"Prior to using the car, did you check all fluid levels and tire pressures for proper levels so as not to damage the car? Did you promptly report needed repairs?"**

"Why check, it's not my car" or "I'm sure that the rental company already did this." Does this sound familiar? How many tenants change their furnace filters on a regular basis? Or how many tenants ignore required repairs, such as water leaks, until they hand you the keys upon their move-out? It is not their house and therefore, not important to them.

4. **"While driving the car, did you find yourself not treating the car as if it were your own? Did you accelerate from stops more quickly? Did you swerve to avoid road hazards?"** I have had some state that they remember purposely driving the car a bit more aggressively. "It's just a rental." So many of our tenants have the same mentality; they do not care for the yard as much. They do not clean the interior as often. It is not their property and they just tend to be a little more careless.
5. **"Before turning in the car, did you clean the car?"** Of course not. Again, if we did not emphasize the importance and costs associated with ignoring a move-out inspection, I believe that many of our tenants would not provide a thorough cleaning upon their departure.

After hearing these questions, the client begins to understand, through their own actions with a rental car, the renter's mentality. This analogy helps set up an expectation so that when the tenants move out and have taken reasonable care of the house, the owner feels lucky to have had such good tenants and as a result, is very happy.



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