

Roommates

How to solve tensions and live in harmony with a roommate

Roommates



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Interviews

This is the most important part for creating a harmonious connection with your roommate!

It is the selection process!

What do you do?

First you need options!

Don't simply take someone!

Interview a few persons so that you can select the one that suits you best.

Next point, have an interview structure!

Here are the key questions you want to ask:

- What type of music do you like?
- Are you a tidy person?
- Do you have a partner?
- How much time do you spend together?
- Do you party a lot?
- Do you have pets?
- Do you make your own laundry?
- How much time do you spend at home?
- Do you travel?
- Do you drink?
- Do you smoke?
- Do you use any drug or substance?
- Etc.

You need as well to find out how high they score in given personal qualities.

What you will do is simply write down these qualities on a white page and give them a score (0% - 100%) as you interview them.

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Here are some of the qualities you want to check:

- Respectful
- Friendly
- Problem free
- Financially sound
- Emotionally stable
- Happy
- Clear values
- Flexibility
- Trustable
- Etc.

Interviewing someone with that type of structure takes 15 min.

That's it!

At the end of the interview, give the candidate an overall score between 0% - 100%.

That's your candidate's score!

You don't want to take in someone who scores lower than 70%

This means potential trouble.

Meet face to face ideally at your place.

Don't show them the scores or what you write down.

Don't look for a friend!

It's a roommate, not a friend!

Yes! A roommate might develop into a friend with time but this is not what you look for first, ok?

Why?

Because the contract you establish with that person is based on a different set of rules.

Keep these two set of rules separate in the initial interview and living together stages.

Don't talk about your personal life!

Be "professional", diplomatic and respectful.

Behave like you would if you were interviewing someone for a job.

Don't open your feelings or say much about yourself.

This is first a formal encounter and what you are establishing here is a financial contract with a person.

Don't get mixed up!

House rules

You need a set of house rules you feel are essential on your side.

You have two types of house rules:

The ones that are really needed to live in harmony.

The ones that are useless and make everyone's lives more complicated.

You have to drop this second set!

You have to drop them now, before you even have the interview!

You need to know exactly what is important and what is not!

Here are some rules which are important:

- No loud music anytime!
- Quiet after 10pm and before 8am
- Clean sink!
- Make the dishes after eating!
- Etc!

This set of rules is what you and your roommate need to agree to before you live together.

Your roommate needs to sign this!

They need to agree to it at 100%!

If there is something they disagree with, get them to speak it out now!

If you see them hesitating on one point or another, ask them and find out if their hesitation is justified.

Yes! Maybe there is something you overlooked or did not consider.

You can add as many elements as you feel are important for you!

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One advice though!

Keep it simple!

And don't add rules for the sake of it.

Identify exactly what is important and what is not.

Drop what is not!

Roommate agreement

This is the contract you two sign up for.

The agreement is what seals your partnership and gives it strength.

Yes! It is a contract and Yes! It is very simple!

- The exact price and what exactly is included
- When is the rent due
- The length of the contract if any
- Partners allowed or not
- Pets allowed or not
- How much time notice if they want to leave
- Etc.

Ad as well what you will provide on your side if there is something they should know.

This contract needs to be signed by both parties!

If you want, you can merge the house rules and the contract agreement in one page.

This works as well.

Make a copy for both of you.

Life will be much clearer if you both know exactly what you get into.

Your roommate contract can be dissolved once one or both parties break any part of the agreement.

It might be as simple as this roommate taking a pet or playing loud music during the day.

You can as well post this agreement in the entrance hall or another place in the house where you can both see it and remember it.

If in doubt, that's the agreement you need to refer back to.

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Yes! You can modify this contract in the future if you both want to and agree with new terms.

You both need to agree, ok?

You can't simply change the terms without them accepting them.

How to discuss issues

Okay, you now live together and face some tensions.

What do you do?

First, write down what the exact issue is!

You need to be crystal clear about what the problem is.

Make it very specific!

What exactly bothers you?

Next, ask yourself:

Is this an important issue to solve or can I simply better live with it?

Next question:

If this issue stays unsolved, is it a deal breaker?

For instance if your roommate did not pay their rent for 3 months, that's clearly a deal breaking issue, right?

On the other hand, if your roommate left in a hurry without doing the dishes once, that's not usually a deal breaking issue.

Next, find out exactly what you need or want.

Now, educating a roommate and getting them to change behaviour can be quite tough.

Before you go that way, you need to be clear about what you want and you need as well to know what to do if your roommate does not change their behaviour.

When to discuss issues

You need to be both prepared and ready.

This means that you need at least some time.

15 to 30 min is ideal.

Don't catch them by surprise just when they take off to work or come back home with a friend.

You need to warn them and ask them if now is a good time.

The key is to ask for permission before engaging into any challenging discussion.

Next, think respect and diplomacy at all times!

The fact that you disagree on something does not mean that you need to be disrespectful.

Treat them the way you would like to be treated.

If needed, you can set up house meetings on a weekly or monthly basis.

This works especially if you have a few issues you would like solved.

This works as well if you live with a few roommates.

If you have unsolved issues, simply leave them open for a week and think about it separately.

Agree to discuss that specific issue one week later.

In the mean time, don't bring it up again!

Accept to live with it until you discuss it again.

How to communicate without creating tension

If you attack they will usually react in a defensive way and fight back.

That's simply human nature.

Now, how can you share issues without attacking someone?

Simple!

"Hey, I am facing a small challenge in the flat and I wonder if you can help me solve this"

"I like your attitude and am overall happy with what you bring in this house"

"You are friendly and respectful and I really appreciate that"

That's positive feed back!

Everyone has at least a few good points you can mention, right?

Say it and mean it!

Don't expect them to reciprocate.

Next, say something like:

"I noticed a pile of dishes on the sink for the last 3 days. I am not sure what to do with it. What do you suggest?"

See?

That's not an attack, right?

It's a call for finding a solution together.

They might say:

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"Yeah, right... I was in a hurry the last few days. Sorry... I'll get to it on the spot. It won't happen again"

This could be it, right?

What if they fight back and say something like:

"Well... the other day, you invited these friends and I could not sleep until 3am!"

You will ad:

"Oh, sorry I did not know it was an issue"

"Let me write this down so that we understand each other..."

"So, on my side, there is the pile of dishes and on your side, I kept you awake the other day"

"Anything else that bothers you right now?"

You get the picture, right?

This is constructive dialogue and it is your role as a "house manager" to manifest it!

Yes! It might require a few new skills!

Yes! You need them to successfully live with others.

Hire a maid?

Tidiness is often an issue with roommates.

Yes! You can decide before someone moves in that you will get a maid to come and do the cleaning a couple of times a week.

This needs to be in the original contract and part of your agreement.

You can for instance add an extra \$100/month to the rent for the maid.

You might require this as a condition before someone moves in.

You can as well discuss this with the roommate candidate and design a solution together.

You need to solve this issue before it even happens.

Hiring a maid is the easy way to go to tackle most of the problems you might have on that level.

If you spend your time cleaning behind your roommate, this will quickly build up into resentment.

That's the last thing you want.

Fire a roommate?

Of course this can happen and you need a strategy ready just in case.

First, identify the exact deal breakers.

Know exactly what you can take and what you can't.

How to break the news?

First, they need to be warned.

If they are crossing the line, they need to know that certain behaviour is not acceptable and that you will take final action if there is no change.

It could be too loud music, lack of tidiness in the kitchen area or too late with paying the rent.

Second, make a quick estimation of their overall score as a roommate.

How high do they score now?

Is their score lower or higher than 70%?

Are you confident that their presence has become a hindrance and you know you can find better?

If they have been warned, you face a deal breaker and no change happens, you will need to go for a hard call!

Yes! Firing a roommate is a hard call but it will give you back your peace of mind.

It is definitely an option you can consider.

Write it down or face to face. Both work!

You choose what suits you best.

Noise levels

Another potential trouble area!

This is one you can usually prevent in the interview stage.

If you are into classical and your candidate is into metal, that's potential trouble of course!

Don't be blind!

See it coming before it happens!

Simple! Ask them!

What kind of music do you listen to?

Do you play it loud?

Yes! This can be one key disqualifier when selecting the right person.

Make sure that what is ok and what is not is 100% clear and stated in the house rules.

Loud music in the evenings or week ends will be a source of trouble if you don't tackle it before it happens!

Personal hygiene

Another potential source of tensions.

Some people don't take showers or don't do laundry as frequently as you would like.

They will smell bad!

Their room might be a mess!

They could bring with them a cluttered mind with dozens of unsolved issues and problems.

You are not a charity!

You are not a therapist!

It is not your job to solve their issues!

Your role is not to educate someone and get them to change their behaviour.

Choose someone who is ready!

If you feel you will need to "fix them" when they move in, choose someone else!

Someone who fits your ideal roommate!

You can definitely foresee these trouble areas in the interview period.

Positive feed back

This is the number one educating strategy you want to apply from the start!

People like being appreciated!

Thank you!

It is that simple!

Reward positive action rather than punishing negative one.

Actually, it is a management skill you can apply in any area of your life.

How does it work?

Tell them when they do something right!

“Thanks for doing the dishes”

“Whaou! That’s a clean bathroom”

“I like your attitude!”

“You are very respectful! I like that!”

You get the picture, right?

Use these a lot!

Here is simple rule you can apply:

For one challenging or negative feed back, give them 5 positives.

Once you learn how to do that, you’ll find it very easy!

Every person has at least a few positives.

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Start pointing these ones out before you even consider mentioning a negative.

On top of that, this is an effective strategy to build up a very respectful connection.

Educate or let go?

In many situations, it is easier to let go of trying to educate someone.

There are many little life imperfections you can live with.

It is something you can train.

Obviously, living with someone is not like living by yourself!

You invite a full human being into your personal space.

As a general rule, rather than trying to change them, learn to accept them.

This radically shifts the way you relate to them.

Trying to control someone else's actions can be tough.

It can be very demanding on both sides.

On top of that, it often leads to unsolved conflicts.

When someone moves into your personal space, you won't have the same amount of control over your personal space as when you live by yourself.

You need to know that before you consider living with a roommate.

You need to respect their freedom of action and behaviour and as I said before, identify the exact elements which are issues and those which are not.

As a house manager, you could be too strict!

Probably 80% of hosts make that mistake!

They try to reinforce rules that the roommate can't recognize or fully agree with.

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This covers:

- Extreme tidiness and order in the house.
- Energy or strange rules backed up by feng shui theories for instance.
- Possessive attitudes with space.
- Etc.

In these situations, the guideline is simple:

Drop it!

Don't try to micromanage a roommate!

It won't work!

If you are extremely strict about your interior and how you want things in your house, don't take a roommate!

Not everyone is fit to live with others.

If you take someone in, you need to be flexible!

Flexibility is the key!

Yes! You need to reinforce the roommate contract and make sure for instance they pay their rent in time.

But, micromanaging a roommate is a mistake!

It never works.

You need to set them free and give them space to be themselves, even if what they express might not be what you would express.

Everyone is entitled to a high level of freedom of behaviour, thoughts, attitudes, etc.

When a roommate moves in, they don't give you the right to control these of course.

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So, the best is to relax and let go of trying to control what they do or how they do it.

Not everyone will clean a house in a similar way.

If their way is not your way, drop it.

Have you ever been in a situation where someone tries to micromanage you?

It could a boss, a partner, a friend or a family member.

How did that make you feel?

Did you like it?

What was the outcome?

What was the impact on your relationship with that person?

The keyword here is control.

Anytime you try to control someone else's actions, it creates trouble!

Why?

Because nothing gives you the right to control someone else's actions!

That's the basic law you need to agree with when allowing a roommate to move into your personal space.

Again, we are not talking about total incompatibility.

You will screen out these candidates in the interview process.

We are talking about a roommate who scores at 80% and still does a few things that irritate you.

These are usually simple things which are insignificant for others.

If you tend to be bothered by them, you have two choices:

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Either drop it or don't take them in.

The other possibilities like educating that person or building up resentment are lose-lose choices.

The educating option is usually tough.

It can work but only if you deal with very isolated situations and the person is still open for your feed back.

Educate a roommate?

Yes!

In some isolated situations, you can teach them something they might not be aware off.

For this to work, you need first to give them lots of positives before you give them one negative.

That's a golden rule!

Second rule:

If you can, drop it instead!

It is usually much easier to change your mind or your perception of what they do then to change their behaviour.

Third rule:

Mention it once properly and then drop it!

Don't mention it again for a month!

Give them space to integrate this new behaviour and make the change.

What you suggest needs to be a rule or behaviour change that makes sense!

If they feel it is only a battle of principles, they will usually build up resentment and resist that change.

Be open for their feed back as well.

Remember that you can make someone's life miserable by demanding things from them or being too controlling.

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If you are in a management or power position it is your role to defend someone else's integrity as much as your own.

When you respect other's freedom, they will respect you back.

Remember that!

Don't talk about your personal life

This is one of the key mistakes you can make, especially when a roommate just moves in:

Telling too much about yourself.

Why is it a mistake?

Because you are first a house manager, not a friend.

Your first role is to make sure that the agreement you just established works.

This agreement works because there is a certain balance of power between the two of you.

Telling too much about yourself weakens you and shows your vulnerabilities.

As long as there is no conflict or disagreement, everything is okay.

Now, suppose that tension builds up over a simple issue, you will need all your power to solve that.

It is hard to solve tensions when they know too much about you, your love life, feelings or any other issues you might be facing.

Does it mean you can't be friends with a roommate?

Of course not, but you need to take it one step at a time.

You need to time it right.

The first 3 months is a trial period.

In that time, you don't build a friendship.

You check if you are a good match and learn to live with each other in harmony.

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I'll be clear: don't expect anything beyond a roommate agreement.

In most cases, this is all it will be!

In some isolated cases, a roommate will turn into a good friend.

This will happen only if you are already living in harmony and there are no tensions.

As you can imagine, if you face basic disagreements, it is hard to be friends, right?

It is even harder to try to build a friendship, realize later that you have some deep incompatibilities and having to fir that person.

Yes! This could be a key "roommate trap"!

Don't expect this roommate to fill a gap in your social life.

If it's friends you are looking for, find them within a social context.

It will usually make your life much simpler if you don't get these two areas mixed.

If after 3 months of living together, you realize that this person is turning into a good friend, sure, take one small step forward and see what happens.

It could be inviting them to a party at some friends or going to a concert or game together.

Don't rush.

Take one small step at a time.

I will need another e-book to cover that one!

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Conclusion

I hope you enjoyed this book!

Feed back? Questions? Success stories?

Email me at francisco@vitalcoaching.com

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To your power!

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