

How could Lake Superior State University miss so badly?

Written by Nathan Slovin,
SlovinGroup LLC,



Since 1976, Lake Superior State University, a small public university in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, has convened a "Word Banishment Committee" which publishes an annual list of words and expressions recommended for banishment.

The committee takes its work quite seriously — even "uber-seriously," according to a committee member. (Visit their Web site at <http://www.lssu.edu/banished>.) Over 5,000 words and phrases were nominated and through an extensive process, the committee banished the 22 most overused, misused and least useful words and phrases for 2005.

Each nominated word or phrase is judged on its mis-use, over-use and general uselessness. And while the committee banished words like "wardrobe malfunction," "blog," "carbs," and the aforementioned prefix "uber-," they completely missed the most overused word in business today: leadership.

Don't even get me started on what leadership means!. An Internet search for the definition of leadership yields over 45 million hits. A visit to Barnes & Noble showcases over 50 books on the subject. Sports figures and politicians use the word like soap, bathing themselves in leadership lather and pre-

tending that no one else--especially their opponents--can ever hope to obtain this magic stuff.

The word leadership is used incessantly in business, political and association meetings without any clear definition. This leaves the rest of us in the bewildered audience--those who have not been elected king or queen of the podium or marshal of the microphone -- to wonder "Are we leaders?", "Can we ever become leaders?", and "What steps do we need to take to become leaders?"

The primary reason I nominate the word "leadership" for banishment is that this madness needs to stop. Just because you have risen to top management, or have been given the gavel or microphone for a year, does not make you a leader.

Many of those who have been promoted, anointed, elected, selected or appointed "leaders" stand behind the podium never having developed skills necessary to do the job. Sometimes it's because no one else was available, or because the members of the group decided it was "their turn." In fact, many of the leaders I have met are leaders in name only, with the true organizational leadership coming from the back of the room, the receptionist's desk or some other corner of the organization.

Often times, it is people in these support positions, behind the scenes, who provide the effective leadership models--people who consistently and constantly "do the things leaders

do" without expectation of recognition or even the benefit of a formal position or title. Find these people, clone them and encourage your entire organization to perform this way and you will create a "team of leaders" that will enable your organization to prosper in any market.

Here is my list of the things that such people do (as opposed to say) so you and your organization can get started "doing the things leaders do."

Fill the gaps. Take a big picture look at your organization and take on the work that needs to be done, not just the work that is fun, interesting or sexy. Become known in your organization as the go-to person to successfully take on the tough tasks.

Another way I might put this is, do you stretch? Stretch your business muscles every quarter, or at least once or twice year a year, by taking on work you do not ordinarily do, or by joining a team in another part of the company that interests you. Stretching like this enables you to fill the gaps more readily, especially when a need arises.

Are you ready? I was staying at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas during the Roy Jones Jr. vs. Antonio Tarver boxing match. The casino was buzzing; and fans were everywhere waiting for the fight to begin. I had just finished working out (speaking of stretching your muscles!) and had just stepped inside the elevator when a boxer from the under card stepped in with his mother. She looked at him and said, "Are you ready?" He said, "I'm always ready. If you're always ready, you ain't got to get ready." That salt of the earth wisdom speaks more than 1,000 speeches on "leadership."

Are you always ready? When you are at work, are you ready to overcome every objection, direct your customers efficiently, anticipate customer needs and address any emergency situation? If you are leading a meeting or work group, do you know what you want to accomplish, how you will accomplish it and what you are going to say? (Or do you just wing it, again?) "Remember, 'If you're always ready..."

Talking the talk: or, are we speaking the same language? Speaking of quarterbacks, the best passers are those who complete the most throws ((Nobody gets paid bonuses, or wins awards, for throwing the most passes.)). In your

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WA3 Calendar Briefs:

- **January 22 - General Membership Breakfast at Weber's Inn. NAA presentation, and information on Senior Hording prevention.**
- **February 13 - Education Trade Expo and Maintenance Mania. 11:00 to 4:00**



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President's Message:

By Kelly O'Donnell

Happy New Year! As the New Year descends upon us, it gives each of us a chance to reflect on the past year as well as look forward to a new one. As many of us do, we make resolutions. Some of us keep them, some don't last until the end of January. Nonetheless, we do it each year. As you make your resolutions, I ask you to consider an additional one. This year, make it your goal to get involved with the association. Our association is only as strong as those who participate. Join a committee. There are many to choose from, all of them providing a vital role in our organization. It is also a perfect way to get to know other members. Offer to donate your time - we are always looking for people to help with our many functions, contribute to the Newsletter, participate in local government meetings and/or sponsor our functions.

This year we also have lots of fun, exciting and educational events. I am looking forward our annual Education Trade Expo at Weber's on February 13, 2008. This will be a daylong event with the Trade Show, an economic speaker as well as the much anticipated Maintenance Mania!! If you haven't considered it or signed up for the Maintenance Mania, do it today! It is not just limited to maintenance personal - anyone who works at the property is welcome and encouraged to participate.

I look forward to a new and exciting year and hope that you are as well. See you at the Trade Expo!



EO Message

It doesn't really seem that long ago that we were all concerned about Y2K killing all of our machines. As I look back at all the accomplishments over the past few years I am astounded what we have been able to achieve. Since I started with this organization in 1996, the most significant decision your board of directors made was the choice to join the National Apartment Association and the Property Management Association of Michigan. Aside from fighting all the local issues we instantly became involved in trying to make a difference at the state and national level.

With a lot of hard work and much effort from all 4 locals, we now have a presence in Lansing. With the help of David Gregory, contract lobbyist with Kelley Cawthorne, the PMAM is consulted and considered when legislation is being thought of before the fact, not after it's introduction. There is now a Capitol Day in Lansing whereby all members of all the locals are encouraged to go and talk with their representatives to discuss the impacts of legislation on the rental housing industry. (This years day is on February 6th and we need volunteers to attend) All areas of our membership are represented at this event. This includes Independent Rental Owners, large management companies and medium sized communities. In 2007, the PMAM created a PAC to contribute to legislators to further increase our influence in Lansing.

With the involvement with NAA we helped lobby our representatives (along with the NMHC/NAA joint legislative staff) to get the Bankruptcy reform getting rid of the automatic stay provision, are continually working with them on reforms for the Section 8 program to make it more transparent and increase the use of vouchers, and have worked to continually make the designation programs streamlined and more professional. We now have a Regional Vice President for Region III from Michigan.

Locally, our membership has gotten stronger and stronger. Our voice is getting bigger and better. In addition to representing Livingston County, we have recently amended our NAA charter to include Monroe and Lenawee Counties to our south to potentially increase our voice in the Southeast Michigan area. Please contact the Membership Committee Chair if you would like to help in this arena. And as Kelly indicated above, now is the time to get involved to make our local association even that much stronger. Not only with membership but in all other committees.

Master the 4 R's That Keep Your Apartments Rented

Coming to Ann Arbor in March!!!

by Cathy Macaione, CMA Direct and Stopping the Real Estate Gremlins



It's an all-too-familiar problem. Your units are sitting empty, collecting dust and eating away at your bottom line. Even though you show your apartments to many prospective residents each day, none seem eager to rent from you. If this sounds familiar, now is the time to take inventory of what is working and what isn't with your community.

For years we've been told how important the four P's are when it comes to evaluating a community. To refresh your memory, the highlights of each are:

People: Make sure you have the right people working for you. Everyone from the leasing agent to the groundskeeper should wave or say hello when they see a resident in the course of a workday. No one likes to live in a neighborhood where they are ignored and feel unwelcome.

Product: Your community needs to be well-marked with proper signage so prospective renters can find you. Make sure the grounds are free from litter with some attractive landscaping to lend some curb appeal. First impressions count.

Price: Your rents need to be appropriate. If you set your prices too high you'll immediately eliminate potential renters; if you set your price too low, people will think there's a reason for it.

Promotions: Evaluate your promotions regularly. Stay abreast of what your competition is doing. Realize that giving away freebies does not have the same impact as word-of-mouth recommendations from current tenants. If you have a good customer-service based organization, that will be promotion enough.

The four P's are a great start to evaluating how to improve your community. But to take it one step further, you need to evaluate the four R's. They include being: Resourceful, Ready, Relentless, and Remembered. When you master each of the 4 R's, you will be on your way to greater closure ratios and fewer empty apartments.

The First R: Resourceful. You must always maximize all the resources you have available to you. Make sure that your product knowledge workbook is complete. Know what your community has to offer. Think of potential objections people may have to your community and develop solutions for them. For example, if you don't have a fitness center on your property, find out if there is an independent one nearby where you can direct tenants. Or, if you don't have a clubhouse but a resident needs a large space to host a birthday party, find a church or community center nearby that will rent out spaces that meet your residents' needs.

Be prepared to answer questions about your community. Become familiar with your community in relation to community services. Be able to give directions to the hospital, schools, grocery stores, or the nearest ATM machine. Prospective renters like to know that they live in a convenient location to the services they need.

The Second R: Ready. Being "ready" is more than just a mindset; it also requires physical effort. Make sure the signs on your property easily direct people to the rental office. Have the rental office staffed during the posted times. If your office is scheduled to be open from 10 am to 5 pm, you don't want a prospective resident showing up at 10:15 only to find the lights off and the door locked. If they do, they won't come back.

Be aware of the work habits of your likely residents. If you live in a white collar community, you may consider opening your office during lunch or in the early evenings. If you live in a bedroom community where everyone has a long commute to work and your office is only open over lunchtime, you won't see much traffic.

The apartments themselves must be ready for move-in. Make sure there are zero defects. No one wants to see an apartment with moldy caulk in the bathtub and dead bugs in the kitchen. You also need to avoid "model surprises." By checking empty apartments daily, you won't have to worry about walking into an apartment that has a burst pipe and a flood in the kitchen. Is your empty apartment well lit, clean, and ready for immediate occupancy? Check every detail every day.

If you have a master key, double check that you are at the right building and the right apartment number when showing an apartment. Many buildings are identical except for their number. You don't want to walk into the wrong apartment and find Mr. Jones walking around wearing nothing but his boxer shorts. Avoid surprises and potential embarrassment by double checking before you enter.

The Third R: Relentless. Be relentless when closing the deal. That doesn't mean being obnoxious and pushy; it means being persistent in trying to rent your units. The old standard of one follow up phone call and one mailed postcard isn't enough. Follow up a minimum of five times with each prospective renter. Plan the follow up to make sure it happens. Write down when and how you plan to follow up, and once you do, what their response was. If, after showing the apartment, the prospective renter leaves without giving a deposit, what do you plan to do? Do everything you possibly can to follow up within seven days and have them sign the papers.

The Fourth R: Remembered: Do you have anything engaging or interactive within your office? Consider bringing in a tabletop classic 80s video game or a foosball table that both children and adults can enjoy. For a sense of nostalgia, install a railroad train around your ceiling. Decorate for the holidays. Give everyone who comes into your office the opportunity to feel nostalgic and "at home."

If your community caters to families, consider having some toys or crayons and paper so the kids can be occupied while you talk with their parents. Place some visually interesting items in your office so you give customers reason to stick around

for a few minutes. If they feel comfortable in your office they may decide they'll feel comfortable in your community as well.

Finally, are your follow up thank you notes memorable and creative? Add a reference to a unique conversation you had with a prospect so they know you remember them specifically and it's not just a form letter you're mailing to everyone.

Out-Rent Your Competition

None of the four P's or the four R's alone will make your community one that never has an empty unit. But when combined, your community will have as few flaws as possible and your residents will enjoy where they live. This can keep renters at your community longer and attract new ones with referrals. When you use the four R's to create a customer-service based organization, you will have the edge you need to beat your competition.

About the Author: Cathy Macaione, President CMA Direct, Inc., an Apartment Marketing and Management Specialist and Employment Placement and Temporary Leasing Professional Placement Service, has more than 23 years in the Real Estate Industry. Cathy's creative marketing skills have won her numerous awards including Chicago's prestigious CAMME and ALEX awards. She demonstrates her creativity and expertise through the exploration and implementation of alternative marketing methods. Prior to starting her own consulting business, Cathy held numerous positions, ranging from leasing professional to property manager to marketing/training director, for several large management companies in the Chicagoland area. Cathy is also an experienced trainer and developer of "Personal Touch" workshops and seminars. Cathy is a frequent contributor of articles on marketing and management tactics to industry publications. She facilitates and presents for Sales, Marketing and Magic's Brainstorming Sessions, Home Builders and Apartment Associations across the country. Cathy is a national speaker and speaks on topics related to Leasing, Marketing, Maintenance, Customer Service, Tax Credit, Image and Resident Retention. Cathy is the author of "Six Days to Success: Training the New Leasing Professional," a complete how to train guide and creator of "Stopping the Real Estate Gremlins," a complete Video DVD training series. Cathy holds an Illinois Brokers license and has earned the H.C.C.P designation. She remains actively involved with The Chicagoland Apartment Association. For further information on Cathy, please contact her at www.stopthegremlins.com or www.cmadirect.com or 630-529-5028

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By Michael Tompkins,
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2008 National
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NAA's Newest Member Benefit: The Weekly E-Newsletter

NAA's electronic newsletter, *The Industry Insider*, gives all NAA members access to essential apartment industry news in a weekly e-mailed format. The e-newsletter, launched in early December, summarizes real estate and multifamily housing news from nearly 7,000 information sources, scanning 15,000 articles from newspapers, magazines, Web sites and other online and print sources. Covered topics will include transactions, statistics, business and finance trends, forecasts, legislation and other national and market-specific apartment news.

By placing advertisements in *The Industry Insider*, service partners can promote their products and

strengthen their brands while reaching key multifamily housing decision makers. Contact NAA's Julie Stalknecht at 703/797-0629 or julie@naahq.org for information.

NAA to Host Student Housing Conference

One of the biggest booming markets for rental communities is off-campus student housing. To help provide NAA members with greater knowledge of this niche market, NAA will host "The Unique Cycle of Student Living," Feb. 19-20, 2008, at the Fairmont Dallas Hotel in Dallas.

The conference is designed for those who are in student housing management, new to student housing management or who are considering entering student housing management.

Education tracks include pre-development, pre-leasing, move-in/turn, operations, technology and legal issues. Event and hotel registration information and a schedule of events who will address the audience on generational trends, are posted at www.naahq.org.

For details about exhibiting at the conference, please contact NAA's Julie Stalknecht at 703/797-0629 or julie@naahq.org or Justin Barker at 703/797-0671 or justin@naahq.org. For attendee registration, please visit www.naahq.org or contact Jenny Gibson at jenny@naahq.org or 703/797-0621.

Discounted Rates Available for 2008 NAA Education Conference & Exposition

Take advantage of discounted registration rates (up to 25 percent off of each registration!) for the 2008 NAA Education Conference & Exposition to be held June 26-28 at the Gaylord Palms Resort in Orlando, Fla. The event offers more than 50 education sessions with more than 6,000 industry professionals with whom to network. The exhibit hall includes more than 700 booths and more than 375 exhibiting companies. For information about any event, visit the NAA Web site at www.naahq.org/meetings or contact Jenny Gibson at jenny@naahq.org. Interested in an exhibit booth for the Education Conference? Contact NAA's Justin Barker at Ext. 131 or justin@naahq.org.

FCC Order on Video Provider Deals on NAA Web Site

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced Oct. 31 a unanimous decision that retroactively and prospectively bans the enforcement of "building exclusivity" contracts between apartment property owners and most video service providers. Specifically, the Order bans the enforcement of any contract clause between an apartment owner and a covered video service provider that grants the provider an exclusive right to make video services available on the property. More information and a copy of the FCC order, can be found at www.naahq.org.

The FCC initiated this action in response to claims by several large telecommunications companies, which have begun to offer video services to residents of "multiple dwelling units," that exclusive access agreements improperly interfere with market competition and consumer choice.

This Order does not impose mandatory access on apartment properties. Rather, it only prohibits apartment owners from negotiating agreements that grant covered video service providers exclusive access to the property. Mandatory access laws, which are in effect in 18 states and Washington, D.C., require an apartment owner to grant a right of entry to a service provider that wants to offer their product to residents.

The Order only prohibits the enforcement of exclusive access clauses, not entire contracts covering items beyond exclusive access rights. In

other words, the Order does not prohibit contract clauses that grant exclusive marketing rights or the granting of an exclusive right to use inside wiring owned by the property. Lastly, the Order applies only to video service providers; it does not prohibit exclusive access agreements between property owners and service providers offering voice or Internet access. The issue of whether or not to ban these types of contract provisions is slated to be the subject matter of a separate FCC rulemaking procedure.

NAAEI Exam Handbooks, Skill Checks, Answer Keys Available Online

As part of the initiative to transition to online exams, NAA Education Institute (NAAEI) staff has developed exam handbooks, skill checks and answer keys for the Web. The handbook, administrator guide and skill checks, complete with answer keys, are now available on the NAA Web site at www.naahq.org/education/designationheadquarters.htm. Download this information and provide free study materials for students. Login information to NAA's Web site is required.

Groundhog Job Shadow Day Set for Feb. 1

Affiliates can showcase their communities and employees to today's youth by participating in Groundhog Job Shadow Day on Feb. 1, 2008. NAA headquarters, along with apartment communities in Washington, D.C.; Philadelphia; and Chicago will also participate in job shadowing that day. To learn the benefits of job shadowing to local high school students and to learn more about Groundhog Job Shadow Day, contact Julie Barden at 703/797-0691 or juliebarden@naahq.org.

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organization, success is about "completing the passes": connecting with your co-workers, your team and your customers. Make sure your communications can be understood by all of your intended recipients.

To this end, consider eliminating shorthand, jargon, and abbreviations. While these words may be short cuts for you, they not only make unknowing customers (or even co-workers) feel left out, but without clarification or definition such cuts can cause miscommunication. Be clear about action items and their deadlines, and ask for confirmation to make sure that not only is the message received, but that it is also understood.

Skills check: How are your skills? When was the last time you updated and upgraded your current skill set? Have you added any new skills this year? The business world changes every day. Mergers, bankruptcy, management changes, layoffs and changing markets require that every team member from top to bottom keeps their skills fresh and regularly adds new skills.

What am I talking about? How valuable are you to your company, your team, your co-workers? Can you create a killer Excel spreadsheet, and use all the top software products for your industry at a high level? Can you speak in public, run a meeting (effectively that is), speak another language, or perform CPR?

Cross- train yourself and your team by adding and fine- tuning skills. Invest in yourself, your people, and each other. Reward people for learning new skills, and for keeping their current skills fresh, and you will have a productive team able to meet any challenge and take advantage of any opportunity.

Show up: I think Woody Allen said that, "80% of success is just showing up." That must be like the 4 out of 5 dentists who recommend sugarless gum! Anyway, I have always felt that there are three levels of showing up. Sometimes, after all, the stars align in the worst way to prevent you from being at your best or even from being on time.

So, first and foremost, just showing up is good. Showing up on time is great. And of course, this is the best great habit to acquire is showing up on time and ready to contribute, which makes you valuable at every meeting. It is amazing to me how many people show up at meetings not ready to participate. Why bother? If you are not going to add your voice or your experience to the discussion, why bother showing up? Isn't that a waste of your time?

When you show up prepared and ready to contribute, your input becomes important. It makes the final decision stronger when every corner of the organization (including yours) participates in this way. Imagine how valuable you become when you show up with important information and ideas. Isn't that the reputation you want to earn?

Finish Strong: Tom Peters once said, "Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly." This may seem counterintuitive, given all that I have said above about cultivating excellence.

Yet Peters' lesson is especially relevant when addressing new projects, because very few of us get it right the first time. It is the completion of a project or a task, however, which enables us to carve another notch in our belts. Once you finish something, it can't be taken away from you. It is now a permanent mark on your resume, but more importantly, regardless of the result, you now have the experience to build on and to improve the next time.

Years ago I witnessed an old man running a marathon (26+ miles) and during the last mile he looked like he was going to die. I was tempted to call an ambulance, but when he rounded the final bend and headed toward the finish line, he sparked up and started running like a champion marathon runner. After he broke the imaginary finish line tape, I walked over to this man and I said, "What was that all about? A mile ago you were on death's door and now at the finish line you look like Alberto Salazar (the winner of several New York and Boston Marathons in the '80s). What gives?"

He looked at me and said, "I always cross the finish line strong, because that is when they take your picture."

Now what do you do? My wife once took a golf lesson from a very impatient golf teacher with a French accent at Club Med in Bermuda. He placed the ball on the tee and she proceeded to swing three times -- missing the ball each time. Frustrated, he kicked the ball from the tee and in a condescending voice he said, "Now what do you do?"

Well, I ask the same thing of you (with what is left of my New York accent) because the world is waiting to take your picture. It is time to start doing the things leaders do. Remember to fill the gaps, always be ready (so you don't have to get ready), talk the same talk to communicate powerfully, show up prepared, and make sure your skills are excellent.

And when you cross the finish line, finish strong and smile, because that is when they take your picture.

Nathan can be reached at Nathan@slovingroup.com, 602-787-2991, www.slovingroup.com

Since moving to Scottsdale, AZ and hanging out his shingle in June 2004, this apartment industry veteran, former Executive VP of the New Jersey Apartment Association, property manager, legal counsel and Regional Marketing Director for SureDeposit, has worked for apartment management companies and apartment associations to help them achieve laser-like focus on their customers in order to serve them at the highest levels and develop current and future leaders at every level of their organizations.

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Education Trade Expo
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- Seating for AIT is limited to 20 students per class.
- The text is the same source document for the IREM and Equity Residential Advanced Instructor Training course

Testimonial:

I just finished the training here in SD. All I can say is, "Bravo!" I thoroughly enjoyed the class, learned a ton of new things and met a lot of great people. The instructors were great!! I would highly recommend this course to anyone who is already teaching, no matter what level they are. We all saw the improvement in ourselves from Day 1 to Day 3. Even the camera crew made the same comments. Thanks for offering such a fantastic, worthwhile course!

Gail L. Scott, CPM. Lincoln Military Housing, San Diego, CA,



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Events:

JANUARY:



17 - Manager's Only, 8:30 to 9:30 am., Golfside Lake Apartments New Clubhouse. This is open to Manager's and Assistant Manager's to get together and share in conversation.

22 - General Membership Breakfast, 8:00 to 10:00 am at Weber's Inn, Cost \$20. Join Dave Edwards, Assistant Director of Affiliate Affairs from the National Apartment Association with an overview briefing of what NAA has to offer you, especially the new Independent Rental Owner Benefits that started in 2007. Also, information from Harriet Bakalar from the Housing Bureau for Seniors and the problems they are experiencing with Senior Hording behavior.



29 - Leadership Training at Kellogg Center in East Lansing sponsored by PMAM. Free Training open to all Board of Director Members and Committee Members. Call the office if you would like to attend. Carpooling available.

FEBRUARY:



6 - Capital Day in Lansing. Join a delegation that goes to the State Capital and introduces the complexities of the Rental Housing Industry your local State reps. If you don't have an entire day to give at least consider attending the Legislative reception where all legislators are invited to attend 4:00 to 6:00 pm. Location to be announced.



13 - Education Trade Expo and Maintenance Mania. The Education Portion of the day will start at 11:00 am with an Economic Overview for the State of Michigan and Southeast Michigan Counties. Cost to attend Economic Overview, \$50. At noon there will be a FREE lunch with the Trade Expo for 2 1/2 hours until 2:30 and then the Maintenance Mania will start in the Atrium Room until 4:00 pm. NO TEAM PLAY REQUIRED. Call the office for car wheels for the Maintenance Car Race and get started building your car today. While the scores are being tallied we will have entertainment and drinks.



27 - GLAStar Training - 1:00 pm at Lake Village of Ann Arbor. This is being done early so you can all turn your Award entry boards into the office well before the September 19th deadline.

MARCH:



11 - Cathy Macaione, President CMA Direct, Inc, an Apartment Marketing and Management Specialist - Two 1/2 day sessions to include **"Top Reasons why I can't rent"** and **"There is a Fortune in Followup"**. Cathy has more than 23 years experience in the Real Estate Industry.

18 - General Membership Breakfast with David Gregory. Legislative information from the state.

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