

Publication Date: 25 August 2020
YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 228. THIS is what we've been waiting for

Listen to this podcast episode [here](#).

Intro: Welcome to Your Strata Property, the podcast for property owners looking for reliable, accurate and bite-sized information from an experienced and authoritative source. To access previous episodes and useful strata tips, go to www.yourstrataproperty.com.au.

Amanda Farmer: Hello and welcome. I'm Amanda Farmer, your podcast host, and the strata lawyer who is here helping you to demystify the legal complexities of apartment living. And boy is it good to be here. I have a solo episode for you today. I'm here recording this in the spare room/office/studio in my own apartment here in Sydney. It is a windy afternoon. It's chillier here than it has been recently, but we still have that beautiful sun shining, life is good. We are very lucky.

What I want to ask you today is whether you're sensing this shift that's happening in our strata space right now? Amidst the uncertainty that I know many owners are feeling and the crazy busyness that pretty much all strata managers are feeling, there is I think an excitement and an optimism that I'm not seeing in many other places right now. That's what I want to talk about today. I want to dig into why I think this excitement and this optimism is here with us and what I believe we can achieve if we embrace it.

This global pandemic that we are currently living through has forced us to rethink. To rethink a few things, how we work, how and perhaps where we live, how we relate to each other, how we communicate with each other. We are reassessing what makes us happy, what's important to us and perhaps a little scary for some, this pandemic has forced us to rethink what the future might look like. Never before in modern history have so many people spent so much time at home. Across the world, people and entire businesses have shifted to working from home. For some people and some businesses, that shift occurred in a matter of days. And now we're hearing that many people have no desire to return back to the way things were.

In some parts of the world and Australian cities are included here, people have been and are still forced by law to stay at home. Now, in that context, the concept of home takes on an entirely new meaning, doesn't it? It's not just the place you go when you finished doing what you're meant to do out in the world. It is your world. However small, however many people might be locked up in there with you, the boundaries of your world have suddenly become very, very close indeed.

I can probably speak for a few of us when I say that even if we're not restricted to working from home or staying at home, we're simply spending more time at home. Entertaining friends and family, if we're lucky enough, at home. The Saturday night dinner party at home has replaced what might've been this time last year, a visit to a restaurant with a group of friends, maybe a bar beforehand, after, both. We feel this drive now to protect ourselves and those we come into contact with, by limiting our time spent outside our homes and limiting the places we go as much as possible.

At this point in the world history that is probably a pretty sensible approach. But what does all this time at home mean for our strata communities, for the people living in them, for the people and the groups managing them, for the professionals servicing them? In my community, I wear the hat of resident and of committee member. I'm the secretary on my strata committee and professionally I'm a strata lawyer. So I'm also serving these communities in that capacity. I work with strata managers almost every day. So I'm experiencing directly as a resident and a committee member, as well as hearing indirectly through my clients and my colleagues, how the people in and serving our communities are coping with this dramatic shift to the home.

First and foremost, we're concerned about health and safety as we should be. How do we keep our community safe from a virus that's probably going to continue to ebb and flow here in this country for some time to come? I think we'll be talking clusters and outbreaks for a little while yet. In some large communities, thousands of people are living in and coming and going from the same small parcel of land. And it's not like we can just shut a building down or truly lock others out. Like you might be able to do for a commercial premises.

What about all these new laws that are cropping up? The public health orders that come and go that get bandying around, but no one really knows if or how they apply to our homes, our strata communities. Where's that line between private and public space? One month we're closing the gym, the next we're told we can reopen it, but it has to be clean and it has to be monitored. How do

Publication Date: 25 August 2020

YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 228. THIS is what we've been waiting for

we keep up with that and make the right decisions that will keep us, our communities and the communities we're serving safe?

Then of course we have the little every day annoyances that have always been there. Those have now been amplified, not so little anymore. I'm talking noise, rubbish, renovations. When someone is home more than they ever have been, they see and hear these problems around their property more than they ever have. They're sensitive to issues they might not previously have worried about. Strata managers, I know your inboxes have never been more full. And I know many hands-on committee members will say the same.

Some people are a little more short tempered, have you noticed that? They're struggling with their own uncertainty about the future, their own fears and anxieties, there are up late. Maybe some of us are drinking a little more than we should, go on, fess up. It is never a good idea to get stuck into those unanswered emails after more than two glasses of wine, that's strata 101, or at least it should be. And many strata managers and committee members are bearing the brunt of that outpouring of anxiety right now, I know that.

What about some of the financial impacts we're seeing? Some owners have lost their jobs or family members out of work. Investors may have lost their tenants, or they're accepting reduced rent. Levies are being paid late or not at all. Committees are being asked to waive interest or enter into payment plans. Most committee members have never considered this type of request before. You're asking new questions. Is it okay to ask for evidence of hardship if an owner tells me they need a payment plan? Is the tenant really not paying their rent? Or is this landlord just being opportunistic when they say they need more time to pay the special levy? What about that big capital works project we had planned, should we delay it? Can we delay it? Is that legal?

How about the shift to virtual meetings? How's that going for you? I'm hearing a lot more confidence around this topic, particularly from strata managers who are embracing technology and understanding more and more how it can be used to make this part of their job so much more efficient. I'm hearing about how the poll feature in Zoom is being used to count votes and display the results. How strata committee elections are being conducted online and how the mute button is so effective that some strata managers now dread having to chair a face to face meeting because they don't know how they're going to make the troublemakers shut up and move on to the next agenda item.

I'm hearing that virtual meetings have increased engagement and show up right in some buildings, because overseas investors can now participate more easily. There is so much being gained by this rapid adoption of technology that really has always been there, but most of us weren't using it. But on the flip side, what does the rise of the virtual meeting mean for our ability to properly hear and understand each other, particularly when a controversial issue might be up for consideration? How do owners really get to know and trust each other when they may only be meeting once or twice a year? And now that meeting is taking place online, not in person.

There is so much communication that happens between humans when we're together in person that simply can't be replicated in the online environment. What is it that we're missing out on that we'd otherwise pick up when it comes to body language, facial cues, tone of voice? These are all questions you've probably never had to ask before. Or if you're a manager or a committee member, they're questions you've never been asked before. What are the answers to these questions? More to the point, maybe what are the right answers? Sometimes it's hard to know what the right answer is in any of these situations. These questions are new and they are hard.

Since about March this year, when the reality of this pandemic really set in here, I've been telling owners, committees and managers to make the least worst decision. That doesn't mean it's the correct decision. And maybe we can't even point to a particular part of the strata law that backs it up, because that part of the law doesn't exist yet. But the least worst decision is simply the best that can be done right now in a difficult situation.

Have you heard the quote, just do the next right thing? Yes. Parents, grandparents of young kids listening, you may take that as a reference to Frozen 2, but it has been attributed to a few others other than Princess Anna. Making the least worst decision is really just about doing the next right thing. But when you're facing a situation that you've never had to face before, sometimes it's hard to

Publication Date: 25 August 2020

YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 228. THIS is what we've been waiting for

know what the next right thing is, right? Sometimes you don't have that flash of inspiration or your uncertainty, and let's say your fear is getting in the way of the solution. When that happens, that's when it's time to ask for help. That's when it's time to draw on your wider community, your network of mentors, of colleagues, of friends. Maybe these people are not facing the exact same problem as you, maybe they're not even dealing with difficult owners or neighbours in a strata building, but maybe they know a thing or two about conflict or about human behaviour or effective communication. Maybe they can give you a perspective that you haven't quite been able to get before. And a change of perspective means everything when you're trying to solve a difficult problem.

Now this is the reason that I am excited and I am optimistic. Not just optimistic, I think that's too small of a word. I am enlivened. I'm inspired because I can see that when we're forced to shift our perspective, when we're forced to admit that the way we've been doing things may not be the only, or even the best way. When we're forced to be resourceful and to look outside of our small strata world. When we do that, we start building a path towards a brighter future, a future where strata living, strata investing and strata service is more desirable, more profitable and more rewarding than ever before.

Now to this very end, there is something that I have been working away on in the background for a few months now. If I'm honest, it's actually the coming to life of an idea that's been percolating for a few years. I'm bringing it to you now, because I know that now is the right time for something like this. Over 4 days in September, I'm going to give you these different perspectives that I've been talking about. This resourcefulness, this range of viewpoints. In September, you'll have access to 9 world-leading experts on community, property and law. I'm bringing them to you as part of The Shared Space Summit, the world's first online summit for strata property owners.

I truly feel that there is no better time than now for a summit like this. Not only is it online, the only way to plan events of this magnitude these days, of course, but I know these experts are going to bring you knowledge, inspiration, the encouragement, the tools, the actionable steps and strategies that you can take back and implement in your communities and those that you're serving. The summit runs from the 15th to the 18th of September. It will not cost you a thing to experience the summit. Registration is free, but you do need to register. You can do that over at yourstrataproperty.com.au/summit. Over on that page, you are going to find out some more information about the summit and about our special guest experts. You'll see on that page, I've already announced the names of some of the carefully curated guests I'll be bringing you.

One of these guests is Charles Vogl. Charles is an Executive Advisor and regular Guest Lecturer at Yale School of Management and the Yale Leadership Institute. He is the Author of the international bestseller, *The Art of Community*. Few people know more about building and sustaining great communities than Charles. Charles tells us what a trust bank is and why our strata committees need to start building one right now. You want to be better at dealing with those everyday problems that have suddenly been amplified? Then you need a trust bank. We'll also talk about the importance of the welcome. How do you welcome new members into your community? And if your answer is "*Amanda, we don't welcome them at all.*" Then you better tune in and learn what this mistake is costing you. All of that and more in my chat with Charles Vogl.

I'm also bringing you Sam Reese, the Director of Australian Apartment Advocacy, a group that gives voice to people who choose apartments. Sam brings a well needed shot of positivity to our sector at a time when we're hearing about declining property values in some areas, Sam is proudly proclaiming the easy breezy lifestyle of apartment living, and she shares with us the number one reason why people choose to live in apartments. Sam is doing excellent work with governments around the country, letting them know precisely what apartment owners need to ensure that we can continue to improve apartment living. She shares all of that in her summit session with us.

And Cat Carmichael joins us from California. Cat is the immediate past President of the Community Associations Institute in the U.S. So you want to think SCA on steroids, that's what the CAI is. Cat explains how they are turning the crisis of the pandemic in the U.S on its head. Recognising the strength of the community management sector, it is as recession proof over there as it is here. Their leaders in the U.S. are already developing a recruitment strategy, targeting other industries that have been hit hard by the pandemic, such as hospitality. Why does a hospitality worker make a great strata manager? Cat gives us that answer and more.

Publication Date: 25 August 2020

YSP Podcast Transcript: Episode 228. THIS is what we've been waiting for

Those are just 3 of our special guest experts for the summit. I have 6 other inspiring experts for you, but I like to keep you in suspense. So I am only releasing their names gradually as we lead up to the summit. I'm actually releasing the names of a few more this week. So, by the time you're listening to this episode, there may be a few more already announced over on the summit page. Head over there and register for free yourstrataproperty.com.au/summit. That's with 2 M's in case you're not sure. How does it all work? Well each morning, during summit week, I will release 2 summit sessions. That's 2 interviews with summit guest experts. If you have registered, you will receive directly to your inbox, the link to view the sessions. You can then watch those sessions at any time during summit week. So the 2 sessions released on Tuesday morning, for example, you can watch them anytime up to Friday afternoon.

Now I am bringing you more than just the interviews with our guest experts during summit week. Each afternoon, I will also be live over on the Your Strata Property Facebook page, debriefing with even more guests, some of them experts too. And hearing from you about which sessions you are most enjoying, what your key takeaways have been, have you had any aha moments. I think that is what I am most excited about, having you join me live over on Facebook, to squeeze out even more summit gold there. Our summit supporters are LookUpStrata, the City of Sydney Council and Lannock Strata Finance. And this may need some editing because I may have another one by Tuesday, just in case. The City of Sydney Council, Lannock Strata Finance, and Smarter Communities. Our supporters are helping us share the summit with as many people as possible.

Find out more about The Shared Space Summit, secure your free summit ticket over at yourstrataproperty.com.au/summit. The message I really want to leave you with is that this is our time. Now is our opportunity to take control and build the communities that we want to live in, the communities that we want to invest in, the communities that we want to serve today and as we move into this new future. Let's get started on this mission together at the Shared Space Summit.

Outro: Thank you for listening to Your Strata Property, the podcast which consistently delivers to property owners, reliable and accurate information about their strata property. You can access all the information below this episode via the show notes at www.yourstrataproperty.com.au. You can also ask questions in the comments section, which Amanda will answer in her upcoming episodes. How can Amanda help you today?