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ETHICS – EXCELLENCE – VALUE – TEAMWORK

Case Study

Reclaiming Trust

TRUST IS DIFFICULT TO REBUILD WHEN A CLAIM IS IN LIMBO.

Imagine the unthinkable: your home destroyed by fire. Even with no one harmed and insurance coverage in place, there are things you can never get back. Structures may be rebuilt, but some contents—especially family keepsakes—are irreplaceable.

Now, imagine it is two years and four insurance adjusters later, and you still do not know which of your possessions were salvaged from the ashes.

That was the case for one homeowner when a fire gutted her home. The contents portion of the claim was in limbo, as no Schedule of Loss (SOL) had been created to list lost and damaged items. Nor were her questions about the missing articles, and status of stored contents, being answered. Even the adjusters handling the claim could not get any updated information from the contractor concerning the items. Adding insult to injury? The claimant was not able to see her contents, often driving hours to the contractor's warehouse where they were being held—only to be turned away.

Understandably, she felt like she was getting the runaround. Communication—and any trusting client relationship—seemed broken beyond repair.

Given the lack of progress with the contents aspect of this case, the insurer turned to SPECS, as they were already dealing successfully with the building side of the claim. The timing could not have been better. SPECS had just launched

the new Contents Division, leveraging over 20 years of appraisal expertise to enable insurers to process claims faster, control costs, and enhance customer satisfaction.

The local branch manager introduced a SPECS Contents Appraiser, to the handling adjuster...and the contents claim that had been at a standstill for over a year immediately began to move.

The job started with earning trust—not so simple, given the claimant's level of frustration with the lack of progress. The appraiser became the point of contact between the contractor and the insured. Consulting directly with the insured about everything that had happened, since the claim was first made, was necessary to compile a summary of services. The SPECS appraiser took the time to identify her needs and concerns, all while regaining her cooperation.

The road to trust was not without its bumps. The contractor had been avoiding everyone—including the client's adjuster, the core appraiser, and the policyholder herself. When SPECS arrived for a scheduled meeting with the contracting company owner to review the claim, he was not there. The appraiser was left to deal with the contractor's staff. Despite the fact that they knew nothing about the situation, the appraiser was able to get access to the non-restored and restored items lists the contractor company had on file; which had not been updated since the beginning of the claim.

At this point, one of the options considered was to have a different contractor take ownership of the contents. The adjuster, who had great confidence in SPECS handling of the file so far, felt that this would cause even more of a delay to what was already a lengthy process.

Instead, the appraiser arranged a second meeting, showing up an hour early to ensure the owner's attendance. After explaining that updated contents lists needed to be delivered right away, he asked the contractor to assign two workers to help create an SOL. The two employees had little experience, so the appraiser rolled up his sleeves and was able to direct them as they went through all of the claimant's contents located at the warehouse to verify that each item was accounted for and properly categorized on the appropriate restored or not restored lists. SPECS software was used to produce the claim and the initial SOL in record time.

Then came the delivery of contents. The claimant did not trust the contractor, so she requested SPECS be on site to coordinate and oversee the delivery. The appraiser arrived before the scheduled delivery to meet with the insured and review the newly created SOL. The contracting company's drivers arrived as scheduled, but it quickly became evident they were missing half the contents. Despite their insistence that nothing was missing, SPECS called the owner of the contracting company who verified that they had, in fact, left two crates back in the warehouse. While the drivers headed back to the warehouse—one-and-a-half hours away—the appraiser and the claimant inspected every item together to make sure she was 100% satisfied with the restoration work. Also, more items that were previously returned without having been restored were added to the SOL.

During this process, the insured asked the appraiser to set aside some personal possessions that were unaccounted for, including baby clothes and a death certificate, if he came across them. Fortunately, he located them and had them delivered to her—even before the remaining contents arrived.

Finally, SPECS created a like kind and quality assessment to find the correct Depreciated Replacement Value—the cost to replace home contents that were affected by the claim with new property of like kind and quality, less depreciation.

The final result?

Thanks to an accurate and detailed SOL, coupled with proactive problem-solving, contents were returned to the insured within two weeks of SPECS taking control of the situation. Moreover, she was satisfied with the fact that everything was cataloged and verified before it was returned.

The insured went from having lost all faith to trusting that her best interests were being looked after both by SPECS and her adjuster, who was recognized for being able to identify the right company to effectively navigate an incredibly challenging situation.

While there are certain steps to follow when dealing with contents loss, it isn't a one-size-fits-all response. It is important to recognize that there are people's lives behind every claim, making each one a unique and ever-changing entity.

SPECS adapted based on the client's needs. What started out as just creating a list quickly turned to identifying what needed to be done and applying the best solutions possible to ensure the contents got returned properly and promptly. The appraiser's hands on approach made it very clear that SPECS was there with the insured every step of the way, creating and building the relationship.

In the end, this job was about more than successfully retrieving contents—it was about reclaiming trust.