

"The 9 CRITICAL Questions Every Seller Needs To Ask When Hiring A Realtor"

(Spoiler Alert: Most agents don't answer these very convincingly)

Before We Get Started

So you've decided that you want to sell your home...

You may have already met with REALTORS, asked each a few questions, then selected a listing agent. Or maybe you already knew someone who sells real estate, so your decision was pretty simple.

If your listing agreement recently expired and you still want to sell, leads me to believe that things didn't work out as you hoped they would.

Anyone who ever sold a home knows how frustrating and unnerving it is to have your listing expire without a sale. You're probably thinking that you've wasted precious time without accomplishing your goal. The idea of going through the process all over again is an upsetting one and yet, you still need to sell your home.

There are several possible reasons your home didn't sell--your home's condition, the price, etc. - but my experience has been that when a home fails to sell, there's usually some kind of communication problem between the Realtor and the seller.

Now more than ever, choosing the right Realtor will make all the difference in the world. But how do you make the right choice? How do you make sure you don't end up in the same situation again?

Unfortunately, most people don't know the questions to ask a prospective agent. Nor do they know what answers they should look for.

As a Realtor who has worked with hundreds of sellers, I've found that those homeowners who take the time to find the right agent are consistently happier with their home-selling experience than those who don't. It's the first and most critical step in selling your home.

Basically, you NEED an agent who...

- ✓ **Has the experience, qualifications & abilities to sell your home**
- ✓ **Provides a marketing plan that offers proven results**
- ✓ **Has in-depth knowledge of your area & the market in general**

- ✓ **Will work hard and smart on your behalf**
- ✓ **Has resources to support the sales effort**
- ✓ **Will keep you well-informed during the process**
- ✓ **Has a personality you are comfortable with**

If you didn't know what to expect from your last agent before you signed the listing agreement, then it's possible you didn't ask the right questions.

I've drawn on my years of experience to develop this article, which is designed to elicit the information you'll need to make the right decision in choosing your next agent. By asking the following questions, you can dramatically improve your odds of having a successful home-selling experience.

Let's Get Started

1 - "How long have you been an active, full-time real estate agent?"

I recommend looking for an agent who has been actively working on a full-time basis for at least the last three to five years. You should also find out how long they've worked in your specific geographic area.

There are several reasons for selecting a well-established agent. You want someone who has a track record you can confirm. Also, an experienced agent will have creative, time-tested ideas for marketing your home.

Yes, there are good agents who have been in the business for a short time. But there is a high dropout rate in our industry (almost 90% by year 3), and it would be unfortunate if, three months down the line, your agent moved on to other things.

On the other hand, a part-timer often can't keep up with the pace or complexity of today's marketplace. And they might not be available when you need them most. Your home is your most important investment -- doesn't its sale deserve an agent's full-time commitment?

2 - "How many homes have you listed in the past 6 months?"

While an agent's length of time in the field is important, the quality of that time is even more important. You need to gauge just how active--and successful--the Realtor is. A large number of listings is often the sign of a successful agent. However, no matter how many listings an agent has, make sure that they have the resources and systems to market each of them effectively. Getting a listing is only half the job.

□ 3 - "How many homes have you sold in the past 6 months?"

Here's where we separate the listers from the doers. Just because an agent has a knack for signing up sellers doesn't mean he's good at finding, negotiating and closing deals--and that's what you want.

□ 4 - "What's the average amount of time one of your listings is on the market before it sells?"

You may think that a quick turnaround is a good sign. It could be. However, a faster-than-average selling record could indicate that an agent is quick to sacrifice a seller's profits in negotiations--which is why the next question is so important.

□ 5 - "How does your average sales price compare to the original price?"

There's a difference between a Realtor who gets you a good deal and one who gives away too much in order to sell your home. That's why it's important to compare the original list price to what a home actually sold for. For example, an agent who consistently gets 90 percent of the asking price is probably a better negotiator than the agent who only gets two-thirds of the asking price.

Again, this goes to the question of effectiveness. Make sure your agent has the systems in place to handle them all. A successful top-producing agent may be more effective at managing many listings than a less experienced agent is with a handful.

❑ 6 - "How will you market my home?"

Most Realtors have at their disposal the same tools for selling your home: the Multiple Listing Service, professional photography, video tours, open houses, marketing flyers and brochures, direct mail, advertising, personal networking--the list is long.

What differentiates the best agents from the rest is their marketing philosophy and the strategies they've developed to achieve their goals. You're looking for a Realtor who tailors his approach to your specific circumstances, and then puts the tools at his disposal to your best advantage.

What you want is someone who does more than provide a physical description of your home and area to prospects. Your Realtor® should be enthusiastically selling your home's benefits. You're spending a good deal of money with an agent, and you should expect a detailed marketing plan--in writing--before you sign a listing contract.

As you discuss the marketing plan, make sure you include the following issues:

Professional Photography

A picture may be worth a mere 1,000 words in other circles, but in real estate, it enters the realm of deal or no deal. With an estimated 84% of home buyers starting their search on the internet, photos are to home sale today what curb appeal used to be: the place where first impressions are made. Make sure your agent doesn't use their own digital camera and play it off as sufficient in your marketing plan. It is costly to have a professional photo shoot, however it may make or break your sale.

Professional HD Video Tour

Just like professional photography, many agents skip this step. However, that can be a costly mistake if you hire an agent who does. Video tours are up to 83 times more likely to get your listing in the top 5 of Google, and are 17 times more likely to be clicked.

Classified Advertising

Don't be unduly impressed with the huge sums of money some agents spend on classified advertising of their listings. I'll let you in on a little secret--classified advertising is great for keeping a company's name in the public eye, but it rarely sells a home in and of itself. An agent who stresses advertising at the expense of other efforts should be avoided. There's no substitute for hard work on the agent's part.

Other Forms of Advertising

Many of the marketing and technological advances found in other fields are also being put to good use in the real estate industry. Some agents now use text on demand marketing to provide potential buyers with 24-hour access to information on your home. Ask the agent what they do that they consider unique or special.

Open Houses

Again, be wary if the agent sings the praises of open houses. As a rule, they're good for your Realtor's prospecting efforts, but not very effective in selling your property. And a home held open too frequently can begin to look like a loser, making it a prime target for lowball bids. In some markets and locations, an Open House can be a good addition to a marketing plan. But it should be carefully considered in the overall strategy of selling your home.

Multiple Listing Service

The MLS is one of a Realtor's most important resources. But here's another little secret--many agents fail to use the MLS effectively as a marketing tool.

Make sure that your agent takes the time to craft a strong, detailed sales pitch that extols the benefits of your home, and doesn't just list a lot of dry facts.

When you consider that a listing in the MLS is like a free "classified" that reaches every other Realtor in town--many of whom have clients who might be interested in your home--don't you think you should take advantage of it? I do.

Other Forms of Promotion

Exposure is the key to any home sale. One of the most common ways a home is sold is when another agent knows a buyer who is looking for a home like yours. If the agent has many listings, then most likely they know where the buyers are. Ask the agent about techniques other than the MLS, advertising and open houses which they will use to maximize your home's exposure.

□ 7 - "What listing price would you recommend for my home? How did you arrive at it?"

Ask about the current market and how it affects your price and selling strategy. A good agent will be able to back up their assertions with solid proof. By running a comparative market analysis, they should be able to give you a sound argument and documentation on how they arrived at your home's proposed market value and price range.

The comparative market analysis should include the following:

- * Listing and selling prices
- * Description of comparable homes
- * Adjustments in values for finished square footage, bedrooms, bathrooms, etc.

The agent should give you a range of value as no home has a specific price. The actual list price should be picked by you taking the range into consideration.

□ 8 - "What's your pricing/marketing philosophy 30/60/90 days down the road?"

If your home isn't seeing any interest after two or three months on the market, what is the agent going to do to generate activity? You shouldn't have to go to your agent and suggest things to try, such as lowering the price. You want a proactive representative, not someone who simply reacts to whatever happens.

□ 9 - "Can you provide me with references?"

A Realtor's reputation is one of his most valuable assets; most will work hard to protect it. Surprisingly, most sellers don't bother to check references - you should. This is one of the easiest and most important steps you can take. And yet I've seen more people make the mistake of not checking references.

The 2 kinds of references to ask for

1. Past Clients - talking to past clients is an excellent way of learning how an agent operates beyond what they says he's going to do. You can get a good idea of whether a Realtor is a good match for you by finding out how they handled other clients.
2. Other agents - This is the one that throws most agents off. But why would you want to work with someone who has a bad reputation in the market?

If they are confident about their ability to sell your home AND how they are more qualified, they shouldn't be concerned if you talk with other agents, especially if it's just to ask them for their opinion. You want an agent who's not only known for their success, but well-respected by others in the industry.

IMPORTANT TIP: Talk with an agent who has worked with them before. The more often the better.

Here are some questions to ask:

- * How long was the home on the market?
- * Do you feel the agent priced it realistically?
- * What was it originally listed at? What did it sell at?
- * What type of marketing did the agent do?
- * Did the agent suggest how to make your home more marketable?

- * Did the agent keep his promises? Did they do what they said they'd do?
- * Were you kept informed along the way? How often did you talk?
- * How many offers did you get?
- * During the closing process, did the agent have good follow-up?
- * What did you like the most about the agent?
- * Was there anything about the agent that you didn't like?
- * Would you want to work with this agent again?

Bonus Questions

10 - "Do you have a personal staff? How many are licensed?"

Make sure you're very clear as to the involvement you can expect from your agent compared to your agent's staff. But don't assume that you're being treated poorly just because the agent isn't doing everything herself. If you were having major surgery, you wouldn't want your surgeon handling anesthesia and monitoring vital signs and every other detail of the operation--that's what the rest of the medical team is there for.

The important thing is that your listing is handled in an efficient, professional manner, that you are kept well-informed as to what's being done to sell your home, and that the operation is successful.

11 - "Will you help me stage my home?"

Three things go into selling a home: price, condition and agent effort. If you choose a hard-working agent who helps you set a competitive price, make sure

that they also will advise you on how best to present your home to prospective buyers. Some agents are reluctant to say anything in this area because they don't want to offend their client. Ask the agent what kind of information they will provide to help you stage your home--the more detailed and honest, the better.

12 - "How will you receive showing feedback?"

One of the biggest complaints sellers have about their agents is that they didn't receive enough feedback. I've found that the best communication occurs when the showing feedback is sent directly to the agent and seller at once. This way you receive the feedback right from the 'horse's mouth'.

13 - "What's your commission on a sale?"

A Realtor's commission isn't set by law; it can vary from agent to agent. Make sure you know up front what you're paying.

While you are legally entitled to negotiate a lower commission, some agents may be less willing to list your home as a result. In a soft market, an agent has even less incentive to push your home when there are others on the market whose sale will result in a higher commission. And an agent who's too quick to give up his money may be quick to give up your money during the negotiation process.

TIP: Remember the saying, "You get what you pay for"? Well, it also applies to your real estate service.

14 - "Do you have any personal marketing materials I can review?"

The quality of a Realtor's own marketing pieces--brochures, direct mail, listing presentation book, etc.--is a good indicator of how well they'll represent you and your property. If they haven't already sent them to you, they should provide them at your first meeting.

15 - "Do you have any questions for me?"

The sharp agent is considering your situation and plotting a marketing strategy as you speak, so of course there should be questions. If not, you could be dealing with someone with a "one size fits all" mentality that's going to plug you into a prefabricated marketing plan.

A good agent will ask your reasons for selling, the date you need to move, what improvements you've made to the property, special features you feel are noteworthy, and whether there are any defects or problems with the house. All of this shows a concern and responsiveness, and the agent will incorporate your answers into his selling strategy.

Remember, you're looking for an agent who's ready now--the last thing you need in your life is another meeting!

16 - "Am I comfortable with this person?"

This question isn't for the agent - it's for you. Ask yourself if you feel good about the agent, their personality and how they conduct business. After all, this is a person who will be representing you in the sale of your most precious asset. The last thing you need is a personality clash in the course of the selling process. You want an agent who you can trust, who is honest with you and who relates well to you.

I firmly believe that this is often the single most important element in a successful home sale. Uneasiness or discomfort in the agent-seller relationship leads to unhappiness on both sides and usually poor results. Both of you need

to be completely comfortable in sharing expectations, thoughts and concerns regarding all aspects of the sale.

I hope this has given you a better understanding of just how important choosing the right Realtor is for a successful home sale. Asking these questions before you sign with another agent will enable you to avoid the agony of another failed listing and, ultimately, choose the professional who is best able to deliver the results you deserve.

Please feel free to call me if you would like further explanation on any of these topics, or if you have any real estate questions at all. I simply see my mission as striving to be as helpful as I possibly can to area homeowners. I hope this special report provides the information you need to be an informed home owner.

Interview Checklist

Realtor: _____ Agency: _____ Date: _____

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. How long have you been an active, full-time Real Estate Agent?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. How many homes have you listed in the past 6 months?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. How many homes have you sold in the past 6 months?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. What's the average amount of time one of your listings is on the market before it sells?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. How does your average sales price compare to the original price?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 6. How will you market my home? - Professional Photography - Professional HD Video Tour - Other Forms of Advertising - Open Houses - Multiple Listing Service	
<input type="checkbox"/> 7. What listing price would you recommend for my home? How did you arrive at	

it?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 8. What's your pricing/marketing philosophy 30/60/90 days down the road?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Do you have a personal staff? How many are licensed?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 11. Will you help me stage my home?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 12. How will you receive showing feedback?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 13. What's your commission on a sale?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 14. Can you provide me with references?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 15. Do you have any questions for me?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 16. Am I comfortable with this person?	

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