



## Ways To Help Sell Your Home

In a slower real estate market, sellers cannot afford to ignore any part of the marketing process. Price, preparation, and presentation must be excellent in order to attract a buyer.

The price must be set realistically. Preparation should include fresh paint, de-cluttering, updated floor materials, and no glaring repair needs. And, presentation should be meticulous, with drapes open, lights on, lawn mowed, and interior cleaned.

Showing your home is the final step in winning the heart of a buyer. When a buyer calls for a showing, he or she already has an interest in your neighborhood and may have viewed your home on line. They are willing to invest time to visit your home. It is worth the effort to make each showing one that will be remembered. Here are some questions to consider:

### 1. Is your home easy to show?

If possible, schedule showings in the same way that is used by a majority of the homes in your area. This may be by special appointment or by a lockbox system. Remember that this will be the buyer's first contact with your home, and it should set a positive tone. Make the buyer and agent feel welcome. Be as flexible on timing as possible. The buyer may be viewing many homes over a large area.

To allow flexibility, you could wait until they arrive, and then slip out the back door. You may get a last minute call for a showing. If this happens, start by thanking the agent for the interest, and discuss how to work with the timing.

I can recall instances in which the seller came to the door in a hostile way and demanded to know why we were 30 minutes late. Or, the buyers sensed that they were inconveniencing the seller or their agent by asking to see the house. Many people have a strong reluctance to intrude or bother other people. Remember that the decision to buy a home is emotional response. Don't turn people off before they come in the door.

### 2. Does your home have emotional appeal?

Buyers use all of their senses to experience your home. The buyer is there to make a big decision, and they will be comparison shopping. Their job is to eliminate homes and reduce the list of choices. A dark interior, unpleasant smell, barking dog, or uncomfortable temperature can take the home off the list.

I see this happen all the time. The simple experience of being in the home during the showing is a key indicator of whether the buyer will enjoy living in the home later. Consider the builder's model home. It very light and fashionably decorated, with soft music and pleasant scents. This sends a message to the buyer that the home has been prepared for him, and he is welcome to enter. People are often sold when they walk in.

Some tips: Take off some screens, open blinds, increase bulb sizes, play some light music, and make sure the temperature is perfect. Be careful that your scents are designer quality. Don't use plug in scents that remind people of a public bathroom. Create a good mood with natural and lamp light. Use pillows, framed photographs, books, fresh towels and flowers throughout the home. Avoid having the TV on. Be very careful about cat litter boxes or other pet odors.

### 3. Are you staged and ready?

Sellers often ask if it would be best to show their home furnished or vacant. Of course this depends on how the home is furnished. If your home is dirty, messy, and poorly decorated, you need to stop and assess the situation. It may be possible to move out, and then stage the home with a few pieces of furniture and accessories. There are staging services that can help with this. Generally, some furniture will help to soften the interior and show it in an optimum way. However, I prefer a vacant house over a disaster.

It is important to keep the buyer's focus on the property, and not on your family. Remove most of your personal collections, family photos, political statements or artistic expressions of yourself. These distract from the important mission that brought the buyer into your home.

The buyer must establish a sense of trust of your home. Messiness and confusion sends a deeper message that the home is not well cared for. It speaks volumes about how maintenance has been handled. You only have a few minutes to communicate that your home is the right one. Make sure the visit to your home is a pleasurable experience that keeps the buyer's focus where it needs to be.

### 4. What would your buyer like to know?

If you were buying this home what would you want to know? Are there parks nearby that you could photograph? Does the school bus stop nearby? Anticipate your buyer's questions and answer them. New homeowners are choosing a home, a community, and a lifestyle that your home offers.



Some ideas: Survey; floor plan; local parks; shopping; school data; or neighborhood newsletter.

#### 5. What is the plan for kids and pets?

Children of all ages need to be coached on the showing process. Children should know that an advance call from an agent is required for a showing. This is very important if your children will be home alone. Figure out a plan for them to follow, depending on their age. For example, they may open the door for the agent and buyer, and then go next door during the showing. Discuss what to do if an unexpected person comes to the door asking to see the home. They must not allow entry to anyone who has not made prior arrangements through you.

If you have pet, consider a couple of points. One, pets may be fearful of strangers entering the house. Two, some people are afraid of, or allergic to, animals, and are not happy to encounter them. There will be a variety of people entering your home, including children. If you are unsure of how your pets will react to strangers, be sure to take them out during showings.

I recall a client who panicked at the sight of a small puppy in a home. I found that hard to understand until I realized that I reacted the same way to a ferret that was loose in a house that I was showing. I was ready to jump on the table.

If you have pets at home during showings, communicate this to the agent. Leave written notes in the house on where your pet is located and other special instructions (Dog in laundry room; Cat must stay indoors).

#### 6. Is your home safe for visitors?

Remember that showing your home is going to interfere with your day to day life. You will need to prepare for some inconvenience and intrusion into your privacy. Consider the safety of your visitors. There may be seniors as well as small children walking around your home.

Is there a statue or tall lamp that could easily fall if touched? Are there wires at ground level that could trip someone? Are there rugs that tend to slide? Are stair railings safe for small children? Could a visitor be bitten by a bird or other animal? Are the stairs free of small toys? Are traffic patterns open between rooms?

Also consider your own security and privacy. Put away valuable possessions. Do not leave money, guns, jewelry, x rated magazines or any personal items in public view. Do not leave breakable objects where they could be accidentally bumped. Move your medicines to a secure location. Do not leave bleach or poisons in reach of children. Do not leave candles burning when you leave the house.

#### 7. Should you stick around?

Generally, it is not a good idea to be present for the showing. Remember that this is not a social visit. Most buyers will feel that they are intruding on your privacy if you are in the house. They may shorten the time spent in your home. Or, they may not be able to discuss your home as freely as they might have. If it is difficult to leave, you may sit outside or take a short walk.

Sometimes sellers try to offer certain information, and they inadvertently turn the buyer off. It is best not to make assumptions about what the buyer wants. Keep in mind that buyers are there to make a big decision. They need some time to experience your home on several levels. If it passes the first test, there will be time to communicate how many water heaters you have and other facts about the house. I recall one showing in which the sellers actually grilled the buyer on his reaction to every room, and then argued about it. It was a relief to leave.

Showing your home is a very important step in getting it sold. Potential buyers should be treated with utmost care and respect. You only have a short time to gain their trust and interest in your home. Every showing is important. It is said that you only need one buyer, but you don't know which one.