

## **Secrets to Getting the Best Agent**

*(How to get your agent to work harder for you)*

By [Pat Rioux](#), USA

One of the great challenges for consumers today is finding top service professionals to guide them through personal and financial situations. Whether it be your doctor, lawyer, accountant, financial planner or real estate agent, you want to establish a good rapport to get the best results and excellent service.

Getting the best real estate agent is generally easier when you know how to be a good buyer.

Hopefully, this series of articles will give you some guidance on dealing with such matters as technical terms, working around your agent's schedule, being explicit about your needs, sharing the worries and keeping track of the information.

### **Choose Your Agent Before You Choose Your House**

[The first step is to choose your real estate agent instead of letting an agent choose you.](#)

When it comes to choosing a real estate agent, the expression "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" should come to mind. It is hard to convince home buyers that they should put as much thought into choosing a real estate agent as choosing a home. It is so easy to get caught up in the excitement of buying a new home that they may not be aware of how the game is played.

Savvy consumers know that they have the right to interview agents to see how they will perform for them and to change agents if they are not satisfied.

The variety of services available, the different skill levels and training of practitioners, and the company policies of the firms they work for all play a role in how your needs will be met.

So often we hear someone say they met the agent at an Open House or called the Listing Agent about a particular house and that is how they found an agent. Since it is not uncommon for new agents or part-timers to conduct Open Houses and do "up-time" answering the phones at the real estate offices, you may end up with someone who hasn't had much experience.

If you call Listing Agents and they specialize in listing houses, not focusing on buyers' needs, you may end up with an agent who will do a better job selling your house when the time comes rather than serving your needs and wants now as a home buyer.

If you haven't already found a house from your first search, it is generally easy to change agents even if you signed a contract for buyer representation.

If you have found a particular house but want a different agent you may have to deal with something called "procuring cause" which offers guidelines regarding who should get credit for the sale and consequently, payment. That is why we say an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure: choose your real estate agent before you choose your house.

### **Find Out Whom The Agent Represents**

[The first issue to determine is whether or not the agent can legally be your advocate.](#)

Most states have an agency disclosure form and asking about the form is a great way for you to open up a discussion if the agent does not bring it up first. You can ask the agent if they represent buyers, sellers, or both and how they handle conflicts that can come up if you, as a represented buyer, are interested in a home that their firm has listed (representing the seller).

Don't let them minimize the importance of this issue if the company has a lot of listings in the marketplace. After all, the more listings they have, the greater the chance that you will find your dream home among them!

Consumer advocates advise that first-time home buyers are best served by buyer's agents. Buyer's agents can legally look out for your interests unlike traditional real estate agents who represent home sellers. But not all buyer's agents are the same so you will want to dig deeper to find out if they work exclusively for buyers or practice a form of buyer agency that can end up in "dual agency".

Dual agency comes into play when a real estate office or agent represents both buyers and sellers and results in the agent taking a neutral position so you may lose the advocacy at a time when you need it the most. Determining an offer price and if there are better houses to choose from may be very important to you at this critical point.

### **'Due Diligence' - What will the agent actually do**

Even beyond the agency relationship distinction, find out how well agents are trained in something called 'due diligence'.

What will, beyond identifying and showing the home to you, are they going to provide? If they do not plan to do a property value study, help you get a thorough home inspection, refer you to qualified mortgage professionals and real estate attorneys, and advise you about the presence of any environmental hazards in the area, they are not performing 'due diligence'. You want them to approach your home purchase as if it was for themselves or their dearly beloved mother.

Assuming you have done your 'due diligence', let's look at some of the ways you can get any agent, even a topnotch agent, to work harder for you.

### **Understand the Terminology**

[Gently Stop a Conversation That Gets Too Technical](#)

Technical terms are common in every industry. Agents use the technical terms and acronyms with ease, forgetting that they sound like they are speaking a foreign language to outsiders. Real estate has as many or more than their share of technical terms, so don't fake it.

Buying a home is too big a purchase to have any uneasy feelings about what the agents mean when they talk about radon level thresholds, variable rate versus fixed rate mortgages, and zoning restrictions.

Treasure the real estate agents who are part teacher as they generally love being able to share with you the ins and outs of the business. Let them show off their knowledge for you and respect the honest agent who is willing to admit "I don't know" but knows where to find out and will perform 'due diligence.'

### **Mutual Respect**

The "top-producing" real estate agents work under schedules that resemble a fast moving ticket line at a popular bakery on a Saturday morning.

Most of them depend on their cellular phones and pagers to accommodate last minute changes. If you are going to be late, call them directly or support staff at their agency so they don't stew about it. And you have the right to the same courtesy.

If they constantly show up late meeting you at houses for showings, let them know that you expect better service.

Sometimes you can get around a scheduling conflict by agreeing to let an associate or assistant do the showing. If the house turns out to "the house", take a second look with your highly experienced, topnotch agent. Use as many of the technology tools you can to save time for both you and the agent.

### **Expectations and Progress**

Your first counseling session with an agent sets the stage for your relationship. Discuss your expectations in detail and what you have done so far to start the process.

Let them know about any disappointments from previous agents, such as not returning phone calls, late for appointments, vague answers to your questions.

Discussing your approach will help them understand where to fill in some gaps, make sure you haven't missed vital information to protect your interests and open up the marketplace to you if your previous efforts were scattered.

The ability to really listen to your needs and wants and help you focus are traits of the best agents. Your input will allow them to find the best communities, schools, and neighborhoods to match your budget. Communication is so important to your satisfaction with an agent that you should establish how frequently they plan to contact you and how (telephone, e-mail, fax, etc.) at your very first meeting.

Maybe you are a "high maintenance" buyer and need more frequent and thorough communication. There is nothing wrong with needing more contact but to keep from being a pain in the neck show your appreciation for the extra help and attention. A "thanks" and acknowledgment of professional skill goes a long way with most agents.

An industry that in the past has spent so much effort convincing you that it is as easy as 1-2-3 and every office is #1, is paying a price today for minimizing the work involved in representing buyers and sellers in a complicated, risk-filled business.

Make it easy for agents to get the information to you via voice mail, fax and answering machines. You can schedule a time for a personal conversation, either on the phone or in the office, for some of the stickier issues or decisions to be made.

### **Share Your Feelings**

Let your agent know if you have any concerns, worries or fears about buying a house. A good agent will be able to explain the process, and put any setbacks in perspective.

Real estate agents are used to the emotions that can run high in a home purchase and can comfort you about tactics used by the other side ("We think we have another offer coming in", "That's our final counter") and dealing with the discovery of high radon levels, lead paint hazards, and repairs needed.

And they really enjoy it when you are thrilled about winning a home from competing buyers or finding the "needle in the haystack" house just when you were ready to accept something else. And if the emotions ride too high and you have an outburst, apologize right away and get back to business.

Agents know how hard it is to hide some disappointments. If the agent has the outburst instead of you, put your cards on the table and get it out in the open. Don't let it fester and ruin what you have established so far in the relationship.

Hopefully, you will have selected an agent that you felt would work well with your personality and style to minimize conflict.

## **Get Organized**

### **Take Good Notes, Get Copies, and Set Up a System to Keep You Organized**

Some real estate agents understand that you may feel overwhelmed with the amount of data you have to review as part of your home purchase and will make suggestions to help you.

Many provide folders, notebooks, reports, fact sheets, comparison charts, etc. to help you. Taking good notes or photographs can help jog your memory when you start to deal with data overload.

Your agent may want to provide a quickie one-liner type report to give you the overview of what's on the market and, based, on your profile, print up the whole story on the houses that match.

If you are just starting and need to learn about pricing, house styles, and old Vs, new homes, etc. Don't be afraid to tell the agent that you have changed your mind about the criteria for your home search. They are used to buyers changing their minds based on prices and, believe it or not, the compromises that couples make when they have vastly different preferences at the outset.

Good agents will use your profile to select some sample homes to show you right away and they will really listen to what you like and don't like when you see them on your first outing.

## **Know the Staff**

**Not every phone call to your agent has to be handled by your agent. Some offices emphasize a team approach that allows you to get more bang for your buck. Other offices have a more territorial approach and only Susie can help you so you have to leave voice mail.**

Sometimes you might just need a full data sheet on a house you saw for sale on your way to work or maybe just the price to see if it is in your range. Real estate agents are out of the office frequently, showing homes to folks like you or previewing homes for you and other buyers, and attending classes to keep their skills up to date.

Cultivate a relationship with a receptionist or assistant so they will help you out for the little pieces of information you need.

After all, if you are in a seller's market and that sign you saw on the way to work just went up and you get to see the house before the other buyers, you and your real estate agent will be happy that the assistant or receptionist was able to look it up on the Multiple Listing Service and tell you the price and some features of the home.

## **Define Your "Show Stoppers" ...**

**... and make sure your agent knows about them. Every real estate agent knows that no house is perfect. Even brand new homes have flaws for some buyers. The best approach for you and your agent is to understand your 'show stoppers' and avoid them.**

You should hear agents buzz about the brand new home that allows someone walking through the entry foyer to see into a laundry room...whoops, who laid out that floor plan? Or a stunning contemporary flair home on a lot so steep you better have a Jeep!! When it comes to show stoppers the list is endless.

Some buyers will only consider living on one-level in a ranch, some insist on two-story. Some folks want the easy maintenance of vinyl siding, some wouldn't be caught dead living there. Some buyers think a cape is boxy, others find them cozy.

Focus. If you have small children and are concerned about lead paint, don't look at those charming older homes.

Focus. If you know your schedule won't permit doing home repairs and updating, don't look at fixer-uppers no matter how cheap they are.

Focus. If your young family needs a subdivision setting and you really want that private country setting, think again. You know you will do what is best for your family.

Focus. If you know that the interstate highway and the noise in the backyard will drive you nuts, don't make an appointment to see that good-looking home on Utopia Drive.

Do you see the pattern, here?

Don't discount the art of compromise when buying a home as it is usually a very necessary part of the process. But don't waste your time or the agent's time looking at property that have 'show stoppers.