

Ten Questions a Real Estate Buyer Should Ask Before Hiring an Agent

Purchasing a home is the biggest investment most people will ever make. Many do not realize that there is a big difference between working with the agent who has a sign in front of a property for sale and “employing” a Buyer Agent to work specifically for them.

We meet many people who have been searching for months, going to open houses, calling for information from signs and talking with Seller Agents that have never been shown the Consumer Notice. The Consumer Notice is required by the PA Real Estate Licensing and Registration Act (RELRA) when a consumer and an agent begin to discuss a possible real estate transaction.

Using a real estate agent is the key to a successful search. To help you select the best agent, there are several key issues you should discuss with agents you are considering.

- 1. What will you do for me?**
This question is the crux of the interview. The agent you hire should demonstrate what actions he or she will take to help you reach your goals. Expect answers touting communication and negotiation skills, personal commitment, and access to resources.
- 2. What plan do you have to find a home for me?**
Buyers should expect their agents to have a plan to help them find the right house. Expect the agent to have access to objective information about each property, professionals to help with financing and inspections, and more.
- 3. Do you have the time to devote to my needs?**
Many real estate agents will promote the number of sales they've had or how many buyers they are currently working with, but does the agent have the time to devote to your needs? If the agent is working with several buyers or has lots of listings, make sure you're comfortable with the time they'll have for you. If they've had few listings or sales, ask them how their lack of experience can be overcome. If you tell them what you need, most agents are willing to do what it takes to get the job done.
- 4. How often will you communicate with me and how often?**
The success of your transaction depends on regular communication. You should agree to the frequency of contacts: contact is vital, even when nothing is happening! And, insist on communicating with the agent, not just with the agent's assistant.
- 5. How do you decide what price range to recommend to me?**
Choosing a price range is key to your search. Agents should look for homes in the range you're comfortable with, not merely what you qualify for. When it's time to make an offer, expect your agent to provide a list of comparable sales, which should help you establish your offering price.

6. **Explain to me how "real estate" works. What happens in this process and what is expected of me?**

Buyers need to understand the process so there won't be any surprises. How offers are presented and negotiated, what happens during escrow, which inspections are recommended, what estimated costs will be, and any potential problems that could arise should be addressed. A review of the purchase contract before you're ready to make an offer is advised. If you and your agent are aware of what *could* happen, problems will more likely be avoided.

7. **What type of training or education do you have in real estate?**

Most successful real estate agents devote time to continuing education. The educated practitioner will know more about the laws and practices affecting your transaction. Commitment to education also indicates a higher degree of professionalism.

8. **What happens if I am not happy with your services?**

Besides learning what the agent will do for you, you also need to know what recourse you have if the agent drops the ball. Discuss how your relationship with your agent can be improved or terminated so there are no surprises.

9. **What references can you give me for yourself and your firm?**

Number of sales is important but reputation is equally so. The NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® survey of buyers and sellers finds that 82 percent of them would use the same agent in their next transaction. A firm's sales record will probably indicate the success of their agents, but if considered without reputation, that success will be short-term. Get references!

10. **Are you a REALTOR®?**

Not all real estate licensees are REALTORS®. A REALTOR® is a member of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, a professional organization that keeps them informed on current laws and other important issues. REALTORS® are obligated to follow a Code of Ethics and can be disciplined for violating it.

Your relationship with your agent is a partnership: both have certain responsibilities to insure success. Make sure your agent explains them to you up-front. Bottom-line: You want an agent who will help you find a home that meets your needs and can get you through closing with as few problems as possible.