

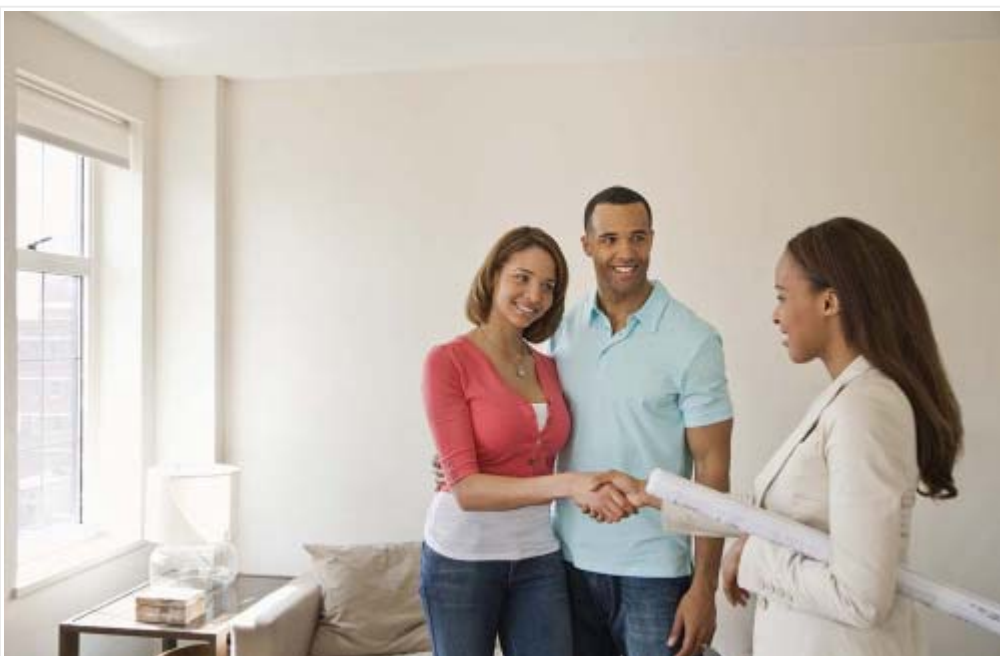


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Top 10 Strategies For Choosing the Right Real Estate Agent

Whether you're buying or selling, use these tactics to find a top-notch professional

By Shannon Petrie, FrontDoor.com | Published: 7/22/2009



While you're buying or selling a home, your agent will be a huge part of your life. Choose someone you feel comfortable with.

#1: Trust your gut

You may interview a real estate agent who seems competent and experienced and has a great marketing plan, but if you just don't like or trust him, you shouldn't hire him.

"When you hire a Realtor, you're adopting them into your family, so you have to make sure their personality fits," Ross says. "Do you want this person in your home every day for the next however many months your house is on the market?"

Bottom line: trust your instincts. The agent you choose will represent you and your home to the world, so hire someone you can comfortably entrust with that job.

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Schedule an in-person meeting with a real estate agent before hiring him, and come prepared with questions.

#2: Interview at least three agents

Once you've narrowed down your search to a handful of agents, schedule individual appointments so you can evaluate them face-to-face.

"You want to interview them as if you're interviewing them for a job, because that's basically what you're doing," Hahn says. "There's a lot of money involved. You take your typical 6 percent commission on a \$200,000 house, and the Realtor's going to make \$12,000. So you have the right to ask a few questions."

Not sure what to ask? Try these suggestions from Iverson Moore, spokesman for the National Association of Realtors:

- How long have you been in residential real estate sales?
- Is it your full-time job?
- How many homes did you and your real estate brokerage sell last year?
- How many days did it take you to sell the average home? How did that compare to the overall market?
- How close to the initial asking prices of the homes you sold were the final sale prices?
- Will you represent me exclusively, or will you represent both the buyer and the seller in the transaction?
- Can you recommend service providers who can help me obtain a mortgage, make home repairs and help with other things I need done?

- What type of support and supervision does your brokerage office provide to you?
 - How will you keep me informed about the progress of my transaction? How frequently?
 - Could you please give me the names and phone numbers of your three most recent clients?
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NEXT: #1: Trust your gut >>



A good agent will pay attention to your wants and needs and show you homes that fit your criteria.

#3: Choose someone who will listen and understand

Some agents are so intent on making a sale, they ignore your wants and needs and show you houses that clearly aren't right for you. When you're buying a home, choose an agent who will listen to you and advise you, but won't be pushy or patronizing.

"I want someone who's going to sit down with me and ask questions about my lifestyle and what I like to do," Ross says. "They have to take the time to get to know me."

Even if the agent doesn't agree with you, he/she ultimately answers to you. So choose a professional who can voice a contrasting opinion, but won't keep you from seeing a property you want to see.

"I recently wrote an article on short sales and why they're not good for the buyer," Sullivan says. "But as much as I abhor short sales, if a client comes to me and says, 'I want to look at this short sale,' I don't have any problem showing it to them. I just inform them of the process so they know what to expect."

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NEXT: #2: Interview at least three agents >>



A good agent will be able to point out what you should change in your home to make it more appealing to buyers.

#4: Look for a listing agent who can think like a buyer

Any agent can set a listing price and wait for your home to sell. Some may even claim they can sell your home at a high price, to get your business. But great agents know it's not just about the price, but the buyer's impression of the home. They know what buyers are willing to pay extra for and what updates and repairs will lead to a quick sale.

When Ross sold her home, her agent instructed her to have her home inspected, buy new appliances, tear down the wallpaper and replace her brass chandeliers. The first day her home was listed, it sold for all cash.

"I needed someone who understood what current buyers wanted -- someone who had that level of expertise and could direct me," Ross says.

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NEXT: #3: Choose someone who will listen and understand >>



Who is your agent representing: you or the seller? Make sure you know before hiring him or her.

#5: Avoid "dual agencies"

Many homebuyers think their real estate agent is representing them, but come to find out later that the agent is actually representing the seller in the negotiation of price and terms. Real estate representation is a tricky subject with complex laws that vary from state to state, so homebuyers -- particularly first-time buyers -- should consider hiring an exclusive buyer agent to be sure their interests are being protected.

"By not taking listings, exclusive buyer agents don't have the danger of trying to represent both parties in the transaction," says John Sullivan, president of the National Association of Exclusive Buyer Agents.

Exclusive buyer agents aren't available everywhere, but you can visit naeba.org to find one in your area.

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NEXT: #4: Look for a listing agent who can think like a buyer >>



Many homebuyers start their home search on the Web, so find an agent who knows how to market your home online.

#6: Look for a tech-savvy real estate agent

Not only do you want a real estate agent with a solid traditional marketing plan, you also want someone who will promote your home online -- aggressively.

"More than 90 percent of buyers do home searches on the Internet," Hahn says. "You definitely want someone who's knowledgeable about Web marketing."

If you're selling your home, ask potential agents exactly what kind of Web-based marketing they use. You want someone who will get your listing on multiple Web sites and get it noticed with plenty of high-quality photos and video.

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NEXT: #5: Avoid "dual agencies" >>



A good real estate agent will have a wide array of methods for promoting your home.

#7: Look for a solid marketing strategy

Sticking a "For Sale" sign in the front yard and posting an ad on Craigslist won't cut it in this market. You want a real estate agent with a detailed plan for promoting your home for sale. Find out where they plan to market your home, at what frequency, how many open houses they plan to hold and other specific information about their marketing plan.

"What I have done as a seller is incorporate that plan in the listing agreement," Hahn says. "That way if the listing agent drops the ball and doesn't do all he or she promised, I can cancel the listing and I can point to our agreement."

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NEXT: #6: Look for a tech-savvy real estate agent >>



A good real estate agent will know the ins and outs of the neighborhood in which you're buying or selling.

#8: Find the experts in your target neighborhoods

If you're shopping for a home, you likely have a rough idea of where you want to buy and where you don't. If you're selling a home, you have to "sell" the neighborhood to potential buyers. A real estate agent who specializes in the area you're buying or selling in and -- ideally -- lives there himself will be able to offer a lot more expertise than an agent from outside the area.

"You want to look for experience in the neighborhood you're looking in and knowledge of that neighborhood," says Bruce Hahn, president of the American Homeowners Grassroots Alliance and the American Homeowners Foundation. "You want to ask them how many sales they've had or purchases in that neighborhood."

Look for someone who not only has knowledge of local sales, which can help you price your home if you're a seller or shape an offer if you're a buyer, but also knows the neighborhood inside and out, including its schools, amenities, zoning laws and other details.

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NEXT: #7: Look for a solid marketing strategy >>



Don't make the mistake of hiring a real estate agent just because she's a friend or family member. Do your research to find the most qualified person for the job.

#9: Check out their credentials

While it may be tempting to hire your old friend from college or your cousin who just got his real estate license, you should only hire him if he's truly the best person for the job.

"If you're going to use a Realtor, it's extremely important that you use a qualified one, particularly if you don't have a lot of experience," Hahn says. "I would be very leery of going with someone who's a rookie because the bar to entry in the real estate profession is very low."

Look for a full-time, full-service agent with several years of experience. Find out what professional designations they hold.

"The more advanced education the better," Hahn says. "Not only do they know more, it's a sign of their commitment to their profession."

A well-seasoned agent also has built an extensive network of contacts and can put together a team of professionals who can help with your purchase or sale, including other agents, mortgage brokers, contractors, appraisers, title companies and the like.

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NEXT: #8: Find the experts in the neighborhoods you want to live in >>



Before hiring a real estate agent, research his or her reputation online.

#10: Get testimonials and referrals

A good real estate agent will come with a good reputation. Getting recommendations from friends and family is a tried and true method of finding an agent, but you can also turn to the Web for further research.

"A lot of Realtors are blogging, so I would look for blogs in my local area and see who's writing and watch what they post," says Bernice Ross, CEO of RealEstateCoach.com. "See if they're on Facebook and Twitter. Type their name into Google to see what comes up. Do they have a presence online? What's been said about them online? It's kind of a matter of doing your homework ahead of time."

In a competitive industry like real estate, an agent who is respected and admired by his/her peers also says a lot.

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NEXT: #9: Check out their credentials >>