

Choosing the right agent for you

Lew Sichelman, *United Feature Syndicate*

There are all kinds of ways to choose a real estate agent to sell your house. You may use your brother-in-law, for example, or take a recommendation from a co-worker. But according to an informal survey of agents from across the country, there are plenty of things you shouldn't consider.

The aforementioned relative is one. "I'm sorry, but you just can't mix business and family," said Liane Jamason of Smith & Associates Real Estate in Tampa, Fla.

Don't go with an agent just because he or she has the most listings or the most signs up in the neighborhood, say some of the realty pros. Those agents are probably overextended. If they have lots of listings, said Karen Netterstrom-Dooley of Re/Max Elite in Melbourne, Fla., "they are not going to give you much attention."

Somewhat surprisingly, the agents who answered the question, "What one attribute would you look for if you were hiring an agent to sell your house?" tend not to think too much of professional designations, the agent's brand or whether he is part of a team.

Respondents had plenty of comments about the attributes that indicate a standout agent. Here are the ones that seemed to rise to the top:

Rapport. Agents used all kinds of terms to indicate how you "click" with an agent, including philosophy, presence, personality, integrity and trust.

"Chemistry," said Allan Glass of ASG Real Estate in Los Angeles. "Clients who don't establish a personal connection with their agent or broker will put themselves at a disadvantage."

Emily Morrison Griffin of John L. Scott Real Estate in Seattle agreed. "There has to be that special spark that makes you and your Realtor a great team."

"All other characteristics are secondary ... to the ability to trust your agent," said Lou Sansevero of the Re/Max Alliance Group in Sarasota, Fla.

Referrals. Referrals are "golden," advised Joshua Hanoud of Tropic Shores Realty in Spring Hill, Fla.

Without them, "you don't know you've gotten a bad apple until you are too far into the process to make a change easily," he said. "As a result, going into the game with someone who has a strong recommendation from a friend or relative can make a huge difference."

Experience. There's nothing like a proven track record, said Sandra Geary of Re/Max Pros in Rohnert Park, Calif. "While experience is no guarantee of skill, real estate, like many other professions, is mostly learned on the job," said Rae Catanese of Prudential Tropical Realty in Tampa.

And Harold Huggins of Harold H. Huggins Realty in Burtonsville, Md., suggested looking at sales similar to yours.

Other statistics. A key ratio for Robert Kelly of Re/Max Main St. Realty in Moorestown, N.J., is the selling price of recent transactions in comparison to the listing price. An agent who is getting 95-plus percent of the asking price is doing a great job, he said.

Another important number is average days on the market. "An agent whose days-on-market average is 35 or less also is doing a great job," Kelly said.

Photography. Pictures are "the language of real estate, yet most agents' look like they were taking pictures while drunk with a cellphone," said Hanoud in Florida. "The level of detail needed for good photography is usually indicative of an agent's attention to detail throughout the process."

Listening skills. "I want (agents) to answer my questions clearly and be able to explain the process of buying and selling," said Teri Andrews-Murch of Lyon Real Estate in Auburn, Calif.

Asked Barry Sulpor of Strand Hill in Manhattan Beach, Calif: "Do you get a strong feeling that this is an agent who will listen to your needs?"

So listen up and follow the advice of these experts to find an agent who's just right for you.

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