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President's Message

Steven Pagan (NJ & PR)
AHWD, CIPS, CRB, C-RETS, e-PRO,
HFR, MRP, PSA, RENE, SFR, SRS



Rejuvenation

Spring, sweet spring! After a seemingly long winter, we welcome the sunny warm days like a long lost friend. It is not just the season, but the sense of rejuvenation that accompanies it that is the most satisfying. Spring provides a time to tidy up; to sweep out the accumulated grime of winter and welcome the crisp, sweet air of spring.

It is with this sense of renewed vigor that we assess where we are at in meeting our organizational goals for the year. Our talented and committed volunteers met last week during the NAR Legislative Meetings in the nation's Capital. At each committee meeting a consistent theme emerged: growth, expansion, member focus, and member value. Here are a few highlights:

- REBI is the largest affiliate of the National Association of REALTORS® with **45,944** candidates and designees worldwide as of March 31, 2023 – a 10% increase for the same period last year.
- We have delivered 775 classroom, online and virtual courses to 2,779 students through the end of the first quarter.
- Our global community continues to grow with 24 global partners and courses translated into 8 languages.
- Our CRB and SRS designees have contributed \$1,624,131 to RPAC through April 30, 2023.
- We introduced new digital marketing and promotion assets for our members.
- Some new tools and resources were identified that we will be developing to assist our members in navigating the changes and challenges of the industry.

Our volunteer talent pool is sizable and impressive. We are truly blessed to have the support and commitment of these real estate professionals who choose to share their time and talents with REBI.

As we move forward with our strategic priorities this year, we will keep you updated on significant milestones. We are excited about our direction and the new initiatives that we have already implemented and have planned. As a famous Nike ad put it – **“There is no finish line.”**

It is a privilege to serve as your 2023 President.

Sincerely,

Steve Pagan

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The confidence of earned expertise.

Q1 2023 list is current through March 31, 2023.



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Nora Lynch (MA)
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NEW Trends in Marketing

**Whether it's tech-based (yes, ChatGPT)
or old fashioned — marketing is changing
and you need to understand how.**



By G. M. Filisko



The way to more business—without spending money—is ensuring that your current clients refer you to everyone they know. The way to have that happen? Sell their home quickly for a bundle.

With the latest marketing, you can do that more easily than ever.

We recently checked in with three real estate marketing experts to find out the shifts they're seeing. Here are six ways you can take advantage of tech advances or update reliable standbys to get homes noticed and sold.

1

Keep working videos, but add voice tools.

"Start thinking about voice technology," advises Amy Chorew, president of Curated Learning in Bloomfield, Conn., a REALTOR® who advises proptech companies. "The next generation of buyers are avid podcast listeners. Believe it or not, I'm now seeing more often that, when they text me, they send audio messages."

"I mentor two young women professionals at a time," she explains. "They both send me voice messages. It's really audio messaging. If you hate video, which is fine, using your voice can be just as effective."



AMY CHOREW

PRESIDENT

Curated Learning
Bloomfield, Conn.

“I’m thinking of the value of podcasts for agents to be able to articulate what they do,” says Chorew. “I’m also seeing some cool products for voice messaging. There’s a diversity, equity, and inclusion product NAR asked for my help with called [DirectOffer](#). It assists with audio tours, and you can narrate and translate into 20 languages. One of the MLSs I work with is going crazy about this, and I have a call with them to discuss it.”

2

Dig into consumer personas.

“This is about using tools to know the type of homeowner who’s buying in a certain area,” explains Matthew Rathbun, ABR/M, AHWD, CRB, C-RETS, CRS, e-PRO, GRI, MRP, RENE, RSPS, SFR, SRS, a speaker at Four Pillars Education and executive vice president at Coldwell Banker Elite in Richmond, Va. He’s the instructor for [REBI’s Marketing the Listing](#) certificate course.

“We have to be careful with fair housing when we’re doing this,” he cautions. “But it’s about looking at the age, income level, family size, and those types of characteristics of buyers in an area—all the things you can know to target specific homebuyers in your marketing and advertising.”

“For example, if I learn the market for properties in my area is more 55 and over than first-time homebuyers, Facebook is where I’m going to advertise for those clients,” explains Rathbun. “People 45 and older are the target audience on Facebook. If it’s young families, maybe I’d advertise on Instagram. Definitely on YouTube, though I’d put a video reel on Instagram.”

Where do you get this information? “You can go to NAR’s [Realtors Property Resource](#)® and get it all right now,” he notes. “RPR® even tells you national voting behavior down to the community, which more buyers and sellers are interested in.”

“The other tool I’d recommend is the U.S. Census Bureau’s [Census Flows Mapper](#),” suggests Rathbun. “It’s free and allows you to find where people are moving to and from. Type in the ZIP code of your listing, and it’ll tell you the communities with the highest migration to that area. That helps me fine tune my marketing dollars.”

MATTHEW RATHBUN
ABR/M, AHWD, CRB,
C-RETS, CRS, e-PRO,
GRI, MRP, RENE,
RSPS, SFR, SRS

SPEAKER

Four Pillars Education

EXECUTIVE VP

Coldwell Banker Elite

Richmond, Va.



*How AI may be used
to modify images.*

3

Understand how ChatGPT and other AI can help you—and what it can't do.

You've probably already tuned out all the news about [ChatGPT](#)—the new technology that can do things like create artificial intelligence art and score in the top 10 percent on the bar exam.

Yes, it's all a bit tiresome to follow the news of what it can and can't do—and whether it's ethical. But you could benefit from everyday applications of the tech.

Let's start with a quick explanation. "AI is the overarching technology, which I define as a computer system that can perform tasks that normally require human intelligence," explains Valerie Garcia, a Grand Rapids, Mich.-based real estate speaker and educator who started in real estate sales. She's the instructor of REBI's webinar: [How to Harness the Power of AI with ChatGPT](#).

"ChatGPT is an AI model," she states. "The *chat* means it engages in conversation. GPT stands for generative pre-trained transformer. That means two things—that it processes language and that it was trained by humans."

"That's the really important thing about ChatGPT and this type of AI," says Garcia. "There are inherent biases, errors, and inaccuracies in the material it generates. It's not a magic wand. It's a tool trained by humans to simulate human intelligence."

"It's web-based only; there's no app right now," she notes. "And it's one of hundreds of tools that do the same thing, but this one seems to be the most popular right now. It's free, but there's a paid version as well that's \$20 a month. That version is slightly faster and definitely more

stable. You'll always be able to access it; the free version is sometimes overloaded, and it can be difficult to get in."

How are agents currently using ChatGPT? "Most agents using it to research and generate ideas for content," explains Garcia. "I see agents using it to research things like long-tail keywords. The SEO capability in terms of research is amazing. Agents are using it to look at things like: What's not being written about in my industry? or What's not being written about in my community? They're using the results to generate blog posts helpful to consumers."



VALERIE GARCIA

**REAL ESTATE SPEAKER
AND EDUCATOR**

Grand Rapids, Mich.

"There was buzz around agents using it to write their property descriptions," she states. "That's the default to start with, but I think few agents will use it for their property descriptions; they'll use it to create more valuable content that's SEO optimized."

Rathbun agrees. "ChatGPT is now the most popular, but Google just released [Bard](#)," he notes. "In fact, ChatPGT is being integrated



into Microsoft Office 365 through their label Copilot. With that, I'll be able to go to a Word document and ask it to do what I just asked in ChatGPT."

He has tested ChatGPT for listing property descriptions and other SEO tasks and sees its value as a starting point. "You need Google to index your listing description," he explains. "The photos are fine, but to be searchable, even they have to be tagged. So if you download a photo, its name might be 0652.jpeg. Those don't come up in listing searches because the label doesn't reflect the property. You have to name every photo 123 Main Street to help it get found in internet searches."

"Also, with so many agents hiring the same people to take listing photos, listings are all looking the same," says Rathbun. "The next thing is to make consumers fall in love with the listing through the description."

"You can ask AI to write a witty and engaging and fair housing-compliant listing with good SEO in a five-paragraph essay format on this property," he states. "I can plug in other unique things to give the listing description more panache. I can get it to start from scratch and get a first draft, then make changes to it. Or I can put that into ChatGPT with more requests to make it better."

Rathbun also agrees AI is valuable for research. "It's essentially a smart brain, and you can

tell it how to behave," he says. "You can say, 'I want you to think like nervous first-time homebuyers. What are things they might be nervous about?' Based on that information, then you can ask it, 'What blog posts would be most helpful to first-time homebuyers?' Then you can ask it to write the blog posts and create the meta description you could use in Google."

It's still important to be thoughtful about your requests and to edit whatever AI spits out. "The content that's generated by any of these AI products is only as good as the prompt you put in—that's the word that's used to describe the question you ask," says Garcia. "If you ask a very vanilla prompt, you'll get a vanilla answer. The more intelligent your prompt, the more intelligent your answer."

"For instance, if you ask for 20 things a homebuyer should know and you're getting a vanilla answer and copying and pasting that to your materials, that's not a good use of these tools," she says. "That's going to create more noise and junk living on the internet."

"It's better to say, 'Here's a piece of my work. Please analyze it and create a style, voice, and tone guide and apply it to all content you're creating for me,'" suggests Garcia. "These tools weren't created with a job; we have to give them a job."

Garcia also believes it's a mistake to use AI as a set-it-and-forget-it tool. "I've seen agents saying, 'This feels like a good cheat code' or 'Write me 20 blog posts,'" she explains. "Then they don't put the effort into making the posts good. They're not editing them and adding their own experience. That will ultimately hurt you. I don't think there will be a difference between agents who use AI and those who don't but between those who use it well and those who use it badly."

4

Add solar-powered light to your listing signs.

“Right now, you can go to Amazon and for \$20, you can buy solar panel lights that go on top of a for-sale sign to keep a sign illuminated,” suggests Rathbun. “That’s basic, but it’s a big differentiator. In many areas of the country, people are leaving and coming home from work in the dark. Neighbors will see the sign and pay more attention to it.”

5

Understand that personal marketing is the foundation of the business.

“I see new agents who are getting second jobs to make ends meet,” says Chorew. “My response is: How about taking the four hours working at that job and instead calling people?”

“Calling consumers makes some agents nervous, but by the end of the month, you could have 80 people you’ve talked to who now know who you are,” she explains. “The whole concept of sphere marketing and connecting people is one that people get afraid of and don’t do.”

“Let me illustrate this with a personal example,” states Chorew. “A mentor of mine told me to network all the time, everywhere, with everybody. When I left Realogy, I made four strategic calls to people of influence whom I’d networked with and told them what I was doing—and from that I got business.”

“Also, I have a value proposition class I teach, and I say, ‘If you’re going to a restaurant, is there a foodie in your contact list?’” she explains. “Of course there is. And how did they get to be the foodie in your phone? They talk about food all the time. So why are you so afraid to talk about real estate?”

6

Stick with your personal voice in marketing.

“The biggest marketing trend I’m seeing is one we saw during the pandemic that we haven’t moved away from,” states Garcia. “It’s the general shift toward a more human tone and voice in marketing. Humanity is what is getting attention and interrupting the pattern.”

“Large corporations are still leaning toward that, and agents who are smart will do that, too,” she predicts. “That means less jargon and more stories. It also means a shift from free, easy, and fast. Consumers want free, easy, and fast, but humanity sells. So it might be better to say, ‘This is hard, but we’re going to help you through it.’ We’re moving away from polished promises and what’s more realistic.”

“It’s interesting that this trend toward human stories is happening at the same time ChatGPT is the fastest-growing technology,” says Garcia. “Everyone is craving humanity, but are we going to use a machine to provide that?” 🦋

G.M. Filisko is a lawyer and freelance writer who specializes in real estate, legal, business, and personal finance topics.



The Ethics of AI Tools Like ChatGPT

There's no question that AI can be used unethically. What does that mean in real estate?

"I'm quite a stickler for this," says Valerie Garcia, a Grand Rapids, Mich.-based real estate speaker and educator who started in real estate sales. She's the instructor of REBI's webinar: [How to Harness the Power of AI with ChatGPT](#).

"Italy has banned ChatGPT," she explains, as have China, North Korea, Iran, Russia, Syria, Hong Kong, and Cuba—so far.

"I'm consistently reminding people that this adds to their liability," says Garcia. "Current copyright laws in the United States and Canada say that what's created by ChatGPT is public domain. ChatGPT can cite its sources, but currently it doesn't have to.

"That's super important for people to realize," she notes. "Unless you significantly edit, and that's undefined, it's difficult to claim copyright on what's created. That also means you're not liable for the material it generates but that you must make sure it's accurate and truthful. A set-it-and-forget-it approach will add additional liability to your business."

"AI also doesn't always understand fair housing," says Garcia. "You're responsible for ensuring you're complying with those laws and ensuring the information you release based on AI is accurate."


What might be considered unethical? "I believe it's unethical to use ChatGPT to scrape the internet for emails and phone numbers," she states. "Or to feed in your competitors' content and ask ChatGPT to use it to write your content. Just because a technology says we can doesn't mean we should. That worries me. And that's not how relationships are made."

"I always end my classes with predictions," notes Garcia. "For AI, I say it's a technology that's going to be integrated in every tool we use, and we're not going to be able to avoid it. It's in Google and Microsoft, and Zillow is now testing it. ChatGPT is in betas in almost every major technology, and we'll see significant legal challenges to it. This is so new that it's kind of the wild west right now."



The background of the slide is a complex, layered graphic. It features a world map on the left side, overlaid with various financial data visualizations. These include line graphs with multiple data series, bar charts, and a grid of numbers. The color palette is dominated by blues, purples, and oranges, creating a high-tech, financial atmosphere. The text is centered in a bold, blue font.

What is your **WEBSITE** Actually Doing for You?



8 Tips

for analyzing
your site to
make sure it's
sending the
right message
and bringing
you the
right leads.

By G. M. Filisko

What is Your **WEBSITE** Actually doing for You?



Thankfully, there are some things in the real estate profession you can set and forget. A postcard mailer typically fits the bill.

Your website, however, does not.

“I don’t think many business owners are tracking their website,” says Amanda Peterson, owner of The Excelsior Agency, a web design and branding agency in Minneapolis who’s worked on both residential and commercial websites. “I think websites are kind of overlooked today.”

“Agents think of their social media presence before their website presence,” she explains. “That’s a mistake because you could be kicked off social media. The only places you own are your website and contact list.”

In fact, your website is one of the marketing tools that needs regular attention—some agents say even daily.

“Ahrefs is a really good tool that search-engine optimization professionals use to track progress, keywords, and the health score of a website, and I use it to track those daily,” says Marc Afzal, broker/CEO of Investly Homes and Sell Quick California in Napa.



MARC AFZAL

BROKER/CEO

Investly Homes
and Sell Quick
California

Napa, Calif.

“When you focus on SEO and you don’t hire it out, you find out things like you’ve moved down the ranking for the search ‘REALTORS® near me,’” he notes. “If you’re not tracking, you wouldn’t even know that happened.”

There’s so much more you can watch, or you can hire others to watch for you. Here are eight tips for smarter oversight of your website.

1**Know your search ranking.**

“I think the most important thing to track is your search engine ranking,” says Peterson. “You can use Semrush or other tools to look at what people who are searching for agents in your area are searching, meaning the keywords those people are using, and tailor your content to those keywords.”

“For example, when someone types in ‘REALTOR®’ on Google, that’s super specific,” she notes. “There are people who spend thousands of dollars a month to get to the top of that search. But you serve one area, and it’s probably better to research the keywords for someone in your area.”

2**Watch how many people visit.**

“It’s important to see how many people are going to your website and where they’re coming from,” says Peterson. “A really important component of that is whether they’re visiting your website on desktop or mobile. Today, about 62 percent of visitors come from mobile devices, but older websites are often built with a less-than-mobile interface.”

Brad Pauly, broker/owner of Pauly Presley Realty in Austin, says he monitors website traffic from weekly and monthly. “Our site gets 250-300 unique visitors a day,” he states. “I think that’s a lot, especially for a boutique real estate company.”

Ahrefs helps Afzal understand his website’s traffic. “Google loves to do updates, and sometimes the update improves or and drops your site’s rankings,” he explains. “So if I were to find something alarming, like a massive drop in my traffic, I’d have to figure out what that Google update was and whether it was based on content, keywords, or maybe the backlinks I’ve gotten, which is where someone links to your website.”

**BRAD PAULY****BROKER/OWNER**Pauly Presley
Realty

Austin, Tex.



3

Follow where people land and for how long.

“Where are they going on your website, and how much time do they spend on it?” asks Peterson. “If you post your listings on your website, if they spend perhaps two to five minutes viewing listings, that’s an indication that maybe they’re looking to buy.

“If your blog is updated often and visitors spend maybe 15 minutes on there, they’re interested somehow in what you’re posting,” she states. “If they’re viewing home updates or market reports, that’s still important, but it’s different than the person viewing active listings.”

“Semrush will tell you how long people are on your website, as do Hubspot and Hotjar,” suggests Peterson. “For instance, Hotjar uses a heatmap that shows you where people are clicking and looking. It’s helpful to see on heatmaps which photography is doing better on your website. You can also see on a heatmap which Instagram posts people prefer. Then you can optimize your website to the things people are looking at.”



SJ YUN

**DIGITAL
STRATEGIST**

Durst
Organization
New York, NY

Part of how long people are on your website is your bounce rate. But it’s complicated. “The higher the bounce rate, the worst,” says SJ Yun, a New York City-based digital strategist who managed the Daniel Gail Sotheby’s before joining the Durst Organization. “Do viewers get the information they want and leave? That’s a 100 percent bounce rate. You want visitors to click through to other things you’re providing, such as more pictures or similar homes in a price range. When that happens, that bounce rate drops.”



“You can’t live and die by your bounce rate,” he adds. “You have to look at the whole picture. For instance, your bounce rate may be high, but we also looked for intent. Are visitors calling after they see what they want? Are they filing out a form or making an appointment for a showing?”

4

Eye where the people visiting your website are coming from.

“When I managed Sotheby’s website, I and the leadership team looked at a number of things,” says Yun. “For instance, if people from New York City were looking at our website, maybe they were commuting from the city, so we could do a digital marketing campaign targeting the subway or billboards on their route. Or if they were viewing from Florida, there might be referral opportunities to pair up with brokerages there.”

5

Are your listings showing up properly and accurately?

“You may find a listing has the wrong price, the wrong agent, the wrong acreage, or the wrong school district,” says Yun. “It’s a combination of feeding from a data source and each brokerage manipulating the data for presentation.”

“So you need to do some spot checking,” he notes. “Agents are your best quality assurance people. When I was at Sotheby’s, people from other brokerages were quick to let us know a listing was wrong on our website. You’ll likely to hear from competitors, clients, and agents.”

“Some brokerages and agents don’t fix errors because they don’t have the bandwidth or resources,” says Yun. “But the more errors your website has, the poorer the results you’ll get from it. It’s about building authority. You want your website to make you or your company top of mind.”

**6**

Which marketing and advertising initiatives are driving traffic to the website?

“Whether it’s a digital, print, QR code, Facebook, Instagram, or flyer campaign, you have to put tracking numbers on marketing so you can see how much traffic each brings to your website,” says Yun. “Without that tracking, how are you going to be able to justify the expense? That’s true whether you’re spending the money or you’re saying to an agent, ‘You should spend thousands to farm this area.’”

7

Are visitors sharing their contact information?

“You want visitors to go somewhere on your website where you capture their email or phone number,” says Peterson. “Some agents offer things like a free guide of 10 quick ways to update your home to get better value.”

Afzal uses Google Analytics to identify his conversion rate—or the number of people who visit the site and share their contact information. “Google Analytics is also a great tool for tracking website traffic and conversion,” he says. “Converting your visitors is equally, if not more, important than your website traffic because it leads to profits. You might find you’re bringing in a lot of traffic but not converting it into leads. That likely means your website copy needs work.”



8

Know what information on your website Google is indexing.

“Also access Google Search Console, which provides a ton of data directly from Google,” says Afzal. “You can see pages Google has indexed and those that haven’t been indexed. Bots crawl your website, and they’ll quickly tell Google there are better articles out there, the information on your website is duplicated elsewhere, or that it was created by artificial intelligence.”

“The bot will essentially say, ‘We don’t want to index this to make it visible in Google search results because it’s not relevant or good information,’” he explains. “If I see that, I need to update that content and resubmit it to Google for the bots to crawl it again, or all the traffic I used to be getting from that page will be gone.”

“A mistake a lot of people make when they think of their website is to think of it only as a digital business card,” says Peterson. “Business cards are important, but connections are most important. When you’re inviting people to your website, it’s almost like you’re inviting them to dinner at your home. You want a great user experience.” 🍷

G.M. Filisko is a lawyer and freelance writer who specializes in real estate, legal, business, and personal finance topics.



DIY Website Tracking or Hire It Out?

Did you gasp when we suggested you should be tracking your website's analytics? Sure, the job may not be in your wheelhouse, and in that case, it's best to hire a pro. But how do you know?

Marc Afzal, broker/CEO of Investly Homes and Sell Quick California in Napa, does it himself. "I like to be very hands on," he notes. "I like to be in control of things until I can't do them."

"I can also go to sites like Fivver and Upwork to find someone with analytics expertise," he adds. "You can find someone who knows a good amount about setting up Google Analytics and will set that that up for you, and it won't cost that much."

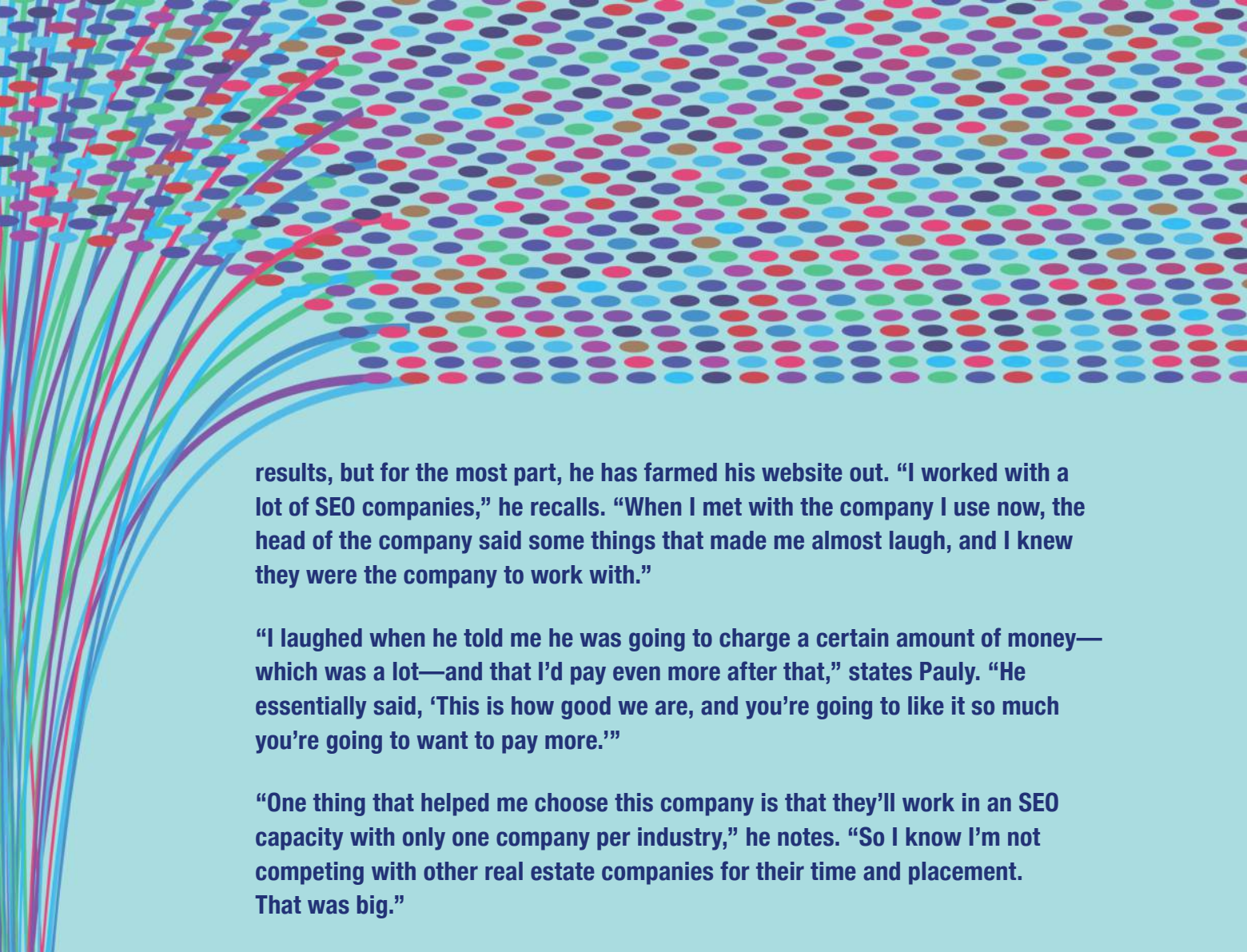
"For instance, I just went on Fivver and found you could spend \$70 for someone to set up standard analytics, fix four issues, and work on ecommerce tracking," says Afzal. "So you could get the basics set up for \$100—it's that easy. Or if you have someone in your office who understands tech, they might be able to do it."

"If you want to be hands on, you can learn about website tracking right off YouTube," he notes. "You can find videos on how to set up tracking and conversion on Google Analytics. It's pretty self-explanatory. So if you're not tech savvy, just hire it out. But be sure to look at the reviews of the people you're hiring."

Afzal says his daily tracking is speedy. "Within a minute, I'm done," he says. "It's when I have to make changes like creating new pages that my website is going to take my time. If you have a site that doesn't do too much, nothing's going to really break. But if you're SEO focused, Google updates can change your ranking, and that seems to happen about monthly. But you can definitely hire out if you have to create new content or respond to issues that come up."

Brad Pauly, broker/owner of Pauly Presley Realty in Austin, tracks big-picture





results, but for the most part, he has farmed his website out. “I worked with a lot of SEO companies,” he recalls. “When I met with the company I use now, the head of the company said some things that made me almost laugh, and I knew they were the company to work with.”

“I laughed when he told me he was going to charge a certain amount of money—which was a lot—and that I’d pay even more after that,” states Pauly. “He essentially said, ‘This is how good we are, and you’re going to like it so much you’re going to want to pay more.’”

“One thing that helped me choose this company is that they’ll work in an SEO capacity with only one company per industry,” he notes. “So I know I’m not competing with other real estate companies for their time and placement. That was big.”

As promised, website services don’t come cheap. “I’ve worked with them now for six to seven years, and I spend around \$50,000 a year,” reports Pauly. “At the time, I said it was probably more than I wanted to spend, but I recognized how important it was. It may not have been in my budget before, but now it’s one of the most important parts of our company’s budget.”

“Based on the insights I get, I consider it well worth it,” he explains. “For example, this company creates original blog posts, and two they’ve written have gone viral. They have hundreds of thousands of views. When I see things like that, I think it’s totally worth it. I couldn’t have done that. That’s cool.”

That said, Pauly admits the cost of website management requires a leap of faith. “It’s tough with SEO,” he says. “You pay them money, but it’s not like you’re digging a ditch and can see the progress. You have to trust that it’s working. And then you see the results from their tracking or the viral blog posts, and you know it is.”



Tech to Help You Get Home Safely Every Night

You work hard, and you're entitled to protect yourself and what you've built. Here are how your colleagues are adopting to beef up their security.

The tragic murder of property managers in Atlanta last August—the latest in a terrible string of crimes highlighting the dangers of a real estate career—shows that it's critical that you take steps to protect yourself on the job.

Technology can help. We checked in with an insurance expert for guidance on how adding safety or other systems to your property could affect your insurance coverage and premiums. We also asked your peers the technology they're using to stay safe and how much it costs them.

Speak first with your insurer

"If you've added a professionally monitored alarm system, that could qualify for a discount on your business insurance policy, as could adding professionally monitored fire, smoke, leak-detection, and sprinkler systems," reports Earl Jones of the Earl L. Jones Insurance Agency in Sunnyvale, Calif. "If you've made any modifications to your building, you must let your insurance provider know to ensure there's sufficient coverage on the policy for those modifications; those aren't automatically covered."

"Here's a potential draw back," he adds. "If you've added any type of camera or surveillance system, you must advise your

cyber insurance and business insurance providers. Those policies may require you to add an endorsement to your policy and to place signs stating the office has cameras."

"Failure to do so could result in a not-so-great claims experience," says Jones. "Just double check with your insurance provider to ensure that you're strictly complying with the terms and conditions of your policies."

"Here's an example," he states. "Let's say you install \$20,000 of security and surveillance equipment and fail to advise your insurance provider. Not only do you lose out any potential premium discounts, but you also don't have coverage for the equipment under your business owner policy because it's not listed. You'd be amazed at how many business owners don't report updates or changes to their building, security, and operations—until it's too late and their claims are denied."

Galvanized to act

"After a burglary at our brick-and-mortar location, we decided to invest in additional security measures," explains Alex Capozzolo, an agent with Craig Sanger Realty and co-founder SD House Guys in San Diego, Calif. "We've installed exterior and interior cameras throughout our brick-and-mortar location



that are monitored 24/7 by trained security personnel.”

“At the entrance, we have a buzzer entry system that requires visitors to be visually identified before they can gain entry,” he adds. “We also have a safe room that’s outfitted with a panic button and provides an added layer of protection for staff in an emergency, such as a fire or intrusion. And we’ve installed emergency buttons throughout the premises that alert 911 when pushed.”

“We’ve also implemented other measures to protect workers and consumers, such as putting up signs with safety instructions and ensuring that all exits are clearly marked and easily accessible,” says Capozzolo.

“Additionally, all our staff members have been trained on safety protocols and how to respond in an emergency.”

“Unfortunately, we suffered considerable loss as a result of the burglary,” he recalls. “Fortunately, our insurer was very understanding and willing to work with us in providing discounts on our premiums for adding this tech. This allowed us to get the security measures we needed while still staying within our budget.”

“We invested approximately \$10,000 to implement the security measures,” says Capozzolo. “There are ongoing expenses, such as maintenance of the cameras and other equipment, as well as service fees for

the monitoring services. However, we believe these costs are worth it for the added layer of protection and peace of mind it provides for our workers and consumers on site.”

A similar event prompted upgrades at the office of Nathan Claire, an agent at One Realty Corp. in Jacksonville Fla. “After someone tried to break into the office while a staffer was working after hours, my broker installed panic buttons at various points throughout the office,” he reports. “The buttons alert security personnel, law enforcement, or paramedics of the emergency or threat, such as an intruder or someone having a seizure.”

There’s another factor you may not have considered, according to David Light, chief development officer of Land Broker Co-op and Land Broker MLS in Bremen, Maine. “We’ve implemented a number of safety technologies in our office, including monitoring systems for air quality and temperature,” he notes. “When necessary, this technology can identify contaminants or temperature ranges that pose a risk to the health of the workforce and issue alerts or alarms.”

Sudden swarm frightened staffers

For Rinal Patel, co-founder of Webuyphillyhome and an agent at Everyhome, REALTORS®, in North Wales, Pa., a scary mob triggered action.

“There was an incident one afternoon in which a bunch of random people came into our workplace and started making a commotion,” she recalls. “They started causing property damage and were belligerent. My employees were afraid and unsure of what



to do. Once some time had passed, the police were contacted, but the incident influenced me as well as my staff.”

“As a result, I’ve integrated into my physical location interior and exterior safety cameras, panic buttons, burglar and fire alarms, a safe room, buzzer entry systems, keycard access, and access control systems,” says Patel. “The access control systems can regulate who enters the facility and keep track of who has access to what sections.”

“We’ve also adopted wearable safety gadgets,” she adds. “These include safety buttons or personal alarms that alert law enforcement or security professionals. We also have workplace safety software to manage issues like safety audits, incident reporting, and safety training. And we use mobile apps on



our mobile devices that can alert security personnel or emergency services.”

“This technology has demonstrated how seriously we take our employees’ and customers’ safety,” says Patel. “All told, the cost of procuring and installing the equipment was around \$7,000. And we spend about \$1,000 annually for monitoring and maintenance costs.”

Budget friendly options exist

“I have the responsibility to ensure maximum safety for my employees and visitors,” says Doug Van Soest, certified real estate appraiser and co-founder, Social HomeBuyers, Murrieta, Calif. “Also, something we’ve built, our office, with hard work should be protected.”

“We have security cameras and access control systems,” he says. “We also have panic buttons to alert us in case of an emergency. We know that no security system can guarantee complete protection if we’re not aware and alert. And we spent \$300-\$700 to implement these tools.”

Jon Sanborn, co-founder of Brotherly Love Real Estate in Philadelphia, has also been able to improve security without spending a fortune. “Implementing additional safety measures is part of any corporate culture, but for us, it was also the increase in crime rate in the city,” he says. “Philadelphia has one of the highest crime rates in the country. We didn’t have any particular experience in our location, but there were a few break-ins in our neighborhood.”

“We’ve kept the office entrance biometric based,” he states. “Only the employees and associates who have their biometrics listed with us can enter the building. For clients, appointments are scheduled beforehand so the security is aware they’ll be coming, and entry passes are printed in advance.”

“We also participate in safety-based training courses such as fire risk and CPR, and we have a designated fire officer, with the proper training, at all times,” says Sanborn. “Additionally, we have 24/7 security and interior and exterior cameras.”

“When we installed the equipment a couple of years ago, we were charged a one-off payment of \$2,700,” he states. “We don’t have any ongoing expenses other than yearly maintenance that’s around \$250. Installing security equipment makes us feel safe and secure, and I believe it has potentially prevented dangerous incidents.”

Your Blockbuster Agent Used to Do *What*?

As these real-life examples show, the best agents may come from the most unusual places.

Rebecca Hidalgo was waiting patiently for a recruit to show up for an interview and got a call from the potential agent saying the recruit had to cancel the interview. The recruit was sorry, but she'd gotten hopelessly lost and felt it was best to back out.

Hidalgo, the CEO/managing broker at Integrity All Stars at Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices in Phoenix, had a hunch and told the recruit to come in anyway. "She was working retail at a store in the mall," she recalls. "She had zero home sales experience, and I was unsure how much her work in retail would translate."

"But I insisted she come for the interview," says Hidalgo. "She was an hour late, but she was a great interviewer and an amazing listener, so I hired her as an agent. My bosses gave me a lot of grief for hiring her, but I believed she was a great hire."

"The following year, she proved my bosses wrong by winning a bunch of awards and becoming our best agent," she reports. "Today that woman is a senior-level employee at a well-known title agency."

What in heaven's name made Hidalgo take a chance on a recruit most people would have dismissed after such an awful start?

"I'm a believer in listening to my gut and intuition," she says. "When the recruit was

super late and lost and saying to just forget it, I told her she was being silly. Perhaps it was the raw transparency. And sometimes we all just need to be cut a break. When she arrived, I could tell she was smart and knew how to interview well."

Hidalgo isn't the only broker/manager who threw caution to the wind and brought on a recruit whom others would have dismissed out of hand. In fact, it happens more than you might expect—and it works out far better than it should.

It's the person, not the skills

"I feel like we have so many unusual hires because we're not the typical, 'try to recruit top producers' brokerage," says John Wentworth, owner-operator of the Wentworth Real Estate Group in Fenton, Mich. "Almost all our top producers came with little to no experience, and some have crushed it."

"Jake was a college dropout waiting tables while living at his parents' house," recalls Wentworth. "He was licensed but hadn't sold a home in six months. I met him at dinner—he was our server—and appreciated his effort that night. A few weeks later, I called him out of the blue, and he came to a team meeting. Then I hired him."

"He just had his six-year anniversary and has sold more than \$50 million in volume," reports Wentworth. "He consistently earns in the six figures and is an outstanding human being."



Another server Wentworth had known for years showed up at his office one day and said she wanted to be an agent on his team. “She didn’t even own a computer and had zero tech skills, which in today’s world, can be tough to overcome. She’s also earning six figures annually.”

“And then there’s Andy, a dude I met at Qdoba who’s kind of quirky and overly anxious,” he ribs. “I met him and offered an interview but thought there was little chance I’d hire the guy. Plus, he’d just gotten fired from a corporate job.”

“But it was early in our growth, and I needed people to serve our growing client list,” says Wentworth. “I gave him a shot to attend an open house with me, and he blew it out of the water. I hired him that day more than 10 years ago, and he’s sold more than \$100 million in volume.”

What makes Wentworth take a leap of faith? “There’s definitely something in common with these recruits, and it’s that we don’t focus on production,” he explains. “We focus on finding quality human beings with a strong work ethic who are coachable. We’ve found that no matter how successful they get, they remain coachable, great humans first.”

“Of course our technique has failed,” says Wentworth. “But I’ve learned to make the process better. I really just dive deeper onto who people actually are. What do they like to do in life outside of real estate, and what are their ambitions? What are the most difficult things they’ve ever lived through where they showed resilience and kept going?”

Recruiting

Initiative speaks volume

When an 18-year-old in her second year of college invited herself to a lunch meeting with Brett Rosenthal, his interest was piqued. “I didn’t ask her,” recalls the team leader with the Revolve Philly Group at Compass in Philadelphia. “She said, ‘Can we meet at Parc restaurant Friday at 1?’ Not only that, she invited a friend who was also a potential agent. I loved that she was being different and taking initiative.”

That woman is now the top-selling agent on Rosenthal’s team. “She pushes me to do even more business, and she has taught all of us things we didn’t even know,” he states. “There was a transaction that involved working with a wholesaler that nobody in my company thought could be done, including myself. She was able to work with a title company that would allow the transaction to close, and she has since then taught me how to do similar transactions.”

The synergy can be surprising

Bennett Heyn, CEO of the Parker-Marker brokerage in San Francisco, recently took a chance on a retired computer coder. “I was initially hesitant to hire someone with no experience in the real estate industry, but I was confident in his technical skills and knowledge,” he explains. “After a few months of training, he has become an invaluable asset to the team.”

Specifically, the agent has helped develop a client management system that has streamlined the company’s processes and made it easier to track progress. He also identified tasks that could be automated, freeing up time for other team members to focus on higher-value activities.

“What convinced me to take a chance on this recruit was his impressive technical skills and knowledge, as well as his enthusiasm and willingness to learn about the industry,” says Heyn. “I could see how his expertise in coding and problem-solving could be applied to our work.”

“One thing that translates well from his coding experience is his ability to approach problems systematically and to think creatively about solutions,” he adds. “I’d encourage other brokers to consider the benefits of diversifying their teams in this way.”

Another offbeat job turned out to be a good fit for Yawar Charlie, an agent on the AKG team at Christie’s International Real Estate in Beverly Hills, Calif. “I had someone join my team who was studying mortuary sciences—they were sensitive and good with people’s emotions,” he states. “At first, he was worried how he’d translate those skills to selling real estate.”

“I told him he already sold real estate—just six feet under the ground!” says Charlie. “I also told him he has the skills to be present, empathic, and sensitive. He turned out to be one of the best agents on my team when it came to working with difficult clients.”

“I also have *lots* of actors, which is a great feeder industry for real estate,” he says. “They’re presentational, good with people, and good at ‘faking’ it. Also, bartenders who had no real estate experience but are well liked with great people skills.”

The takeaway for Charlie? “Everyone has a story,” he says. “Everyone has a past. The trick is using that person’s narrative to sell homes. And can they connect with people? Is their

background unique enough that they bring something to the table that nobody on your team has?”

Job history may not tell the full story

On the surface, it looked like Tomas Satas, founder and CEO at Windy City HomeBuyer in Chicago, was making a terrible mistake hiring a man with carpentry skills as a property manager. The man never held a job for more than a year or two. He was well spoken, but was a man of few words.

“Once he got to work, I was worried because of the lack of communication,” recalls Satas. “After a week, I went to the properties to check on the tasks I’d given him, and everything was done—and then some. He never asked for help on any repairs. He watched YouTube videos and figured things out on his own.”

“We had to work on the communication skills,” says Satas. “I started requiring weekly reports of all of his maintenance and repair tasks. Since he has started reporting, I haven’t had a single problem, and he has held this job longer than any previous one. I just don’t think he’d ever been challenged by previous jobs.”

Customer service translates

Joel Comino, founder and CEO of Next Modular, which serves consumers looking to build a new home, had good a result when he focused on a recruit who showed exceptional people skills.

“I have a team member who used to be big box store team member,” he explains. “He has always been friendly and accommodating. He remembers people well, even if we’ve interacted only three to four times.”

“In the last conversation we had in the store, he mentioned wanting to buy a house, and I told him the nature of my business,” states Comino. “One thing led to another, and I told him to email me his resume.”

“I took a chance on him,” he adds. “He had no background in real estate, home building, or home improvement. But he has since become a tremendous asset to our team and is now a huge part of our success, leading the charge in customer relations and helping create a streamlined process that ensures our customers get the best possible experience.”

The view from the other side

It was Mercedes Smith, an agent with Equity Real Estate in Ogden, Utah, who was the unusual hire. “I’m also the principal flutist of the Utah Symphony,” she explains. “I was laid off from the symphony during the early months of the pandemic. I enrolled in real estate school and was licensed in May 2020.”

In her first year, Smith closed \$1.295 million in residential and multifamily sales and has bumped that up to \$5.151 million, all while continuing to perform more than 100 concerts a year and earning her MBA.

“I didn’t have to do much convincing for my broker to hire me—he was game,” she recalls.

Smith—whose email signature is simply, “Onward”—believe it’s her confidence that has made her successful. “Performing several times a week in front of audiences of 1,000-5,000, I’ve developed a level of confidence that translates to so many other things, including talking to strangers and conducting effective listing appointments. The focus required to learn a musical instrument translates directly to many other fields.”



John D. Mayfield
*ABR®, CIPS, CRBsm, C-RETS,
e-Pro, GRIsm, RENE, SRS*

How to Handle Objections Effectively

Category: Professional development

Materials needed: Handouts included with meeting materials, flip chart

Estimated time: 15-20 minutes

PowerPoint available: Yes

Meeting objective: To help your team members learn a simple four-step process to handling consumer objections effectively on a daily basis.

INTRODUCTION:

Today's meeting is adapted from an article at changingminds.org.

STEP 1

Distribute Handout 1-A to your team members and ask each person to write several examples of objections they regularly hear from consumers during the listing and sales process. Allow about five minutes for this exercise.

When finished, debrief with your team members by asking for volunteers to share some of the

objections. You can use your flip chart to record answers.

STEP 2

Ask: Do you believe objections are opportunities during the sales process? Why or why not?

Answer: Objections, if worked properly, can aid in the sales process and help you understand what might be holding consumers back from making a purchase decision.

STEP 3

Use your flip chart to write the following acronym on a blank sheet of paper as shown below (if you're using the PowerPoint, you may skip this step):

- L
- A
- C
- E

Explain that the acronym LACE, taken from changingminds.org, is an easy way to remember the four steps for handling objections effectively.



STEP 4

Complete the following on your flip chart, or use the available PowerPoint.

L = Listen

Explain: Before you can act on an objection, it helps a great deal if you can understand properly not only the objection but also the thought and emotion behind it.

Find the objection. First, listen some more. Ask questions that elicit the background and detail of the objection. Listen not only to the objection but also to the emotion behind it. Seek to read between the lines.

The objection as stated may well be a cover for the real objection. Probe for more detail. Ask “what else” and “how come.”

Use one of the examples given by your team members during from Step 1 to ask:

What’s a good example of how you can probe for more detail for this objection?

Complete the following on your flip chart, or use the PowerPoint.

A = Accept

Explain: Once you’ve discovered the objection, the next stage is to acknowledge not only the objection but also the person, too.

Accept the person: First and throughout, accept:

- The person
- That they have a right to object
- That you’ve not fully understood them

Explain: You don’t do this by saying, “I accept you” or anything similar. The simplest way is through your attitude. Objecting can be a scary act, and people can fear your reaction. By not reacting negatively, by accepting the objection, you also accept the person.

Inform the group: By accepting the person, you build both their trust and their sense of identity with you. You also set up an exchange dynamic where they feel a sense of obligation to repay your acceptance.

Accept the objection: Accepting the objection means understanding how it's reasonable, at least from their current viewpoint, for them to object to what you may believe is an excellent offer. It also means accepting the work that addressing the objection will require of you.

Remind your group: Objections can be frustrating, and if you object to the objection, you'll have a stalemate.

Complete the following on your flip chart, or use the PowerPoint.

C = Commit

Explain: Now it's time to get serious. With the increased understanding and trust, you have an ideal opportunity for a trial close.

Get their commitment—Ask your team: Do you think if you can get a commitment from consumers such that if you can satisfactorily address their objections, they'll agree with you and make the purchase?

Answer: Yes!

Explain: This is also a good method of identifying further objections because if consumers say no, you can loop back and elicit more questions. Normally, they'll run out of objections. If you can address these, it's in the bag.

Make your commitment—Summarize with your group: This is also the point where you may well be making a commitment to them to resolve

their objections. This may be difficult and cost you in various ways, from calling in favors from other people to putting in additional effort. The decision you have here is: Is it worth it?

Complete the following on your flip chart, or use the PowerPoint.

E = Explicit action

Explain: Now it's time to address the objections, to take explicit action on the commitments made.

There are two types of objections:

1. Real ones—Real objections take work, but if they can be resolved, you've got the sale.

2. Accidental ones—Accidental objections are where the objection is due to a misunderstanding. Misunderstandings are usually easy to address with an apology and an explanation.

Persuade your way through—This means working to change the way consumers view the objections. You can wear them down such that they no longer view the objection as being worth pursuing. You can also change the way they view the objection more positively such that they have an aha! experience that leads them to perceive the objection as no longer important.

Concede your way through—You can also concede your way through, giving in and effectively buying their commitment. If they object to the price, you can always lower it. If they don't want the home, listing agreement, or whatever, you can come back next week.

Concession can be both a useful approach, especially if you're in a hurry, and a threat. If you give an inch, the objectors may want to take a mile. But this isn't necessarily so, and a prepared concession strategy can pay dividends.

Ask: Do you think it's more effective to try to persuade your way through a commission objection or to concede your way through? Why or why not? What about a shorter listing period?

Of the two options noted above, what would be the best way to help resolve a possession dispute between a buyer and a seller? Concede or persuade? Why?

CLOSING

Remind your team that there are many ways to generate new leads and that you hope they've learned some new ideas for generating new leads for their business.

“We have two ears and one mouth
so that we can listen twice as much
as we speak.”

— Epictetus

John Mayfield, ABR®, CIPS, CRBsm, C-RETS, e-Pro, GRISM, RENE, SRS, received his real estate license in 1978 and has been a practicing broker since 1981. He earned his Master's degree from REALTOR® University in 2015, has been recognized as REALTOR® of the Year from his local board, and received the 2014 Richard A. Mendenhall Leadership award from Missouri REALTORS®. John has spoken to thousands of real estate professionals in over 22 countries and served as the 2010 President of the CRB Council. He also owns and operates the Global Real Estate School. For more information, visit www.easysalesmeetings.com.



Handout 1-A

How to Handle Objections Effectively

Write several examples of objections you regularly hear from consumers during the listing and sales process.

L= _____

A= _____

C= _____

E= _____

There are two types of objections:

1. The _____ ones.

2. The _____ ones.

**No Goals
No Consistent
Progress?**



Plus

**How 3 Pros are
Building their
Real Estate
Empires**

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