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THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Choosing your REALTOR®

Jeannette Karis, President, Spokane Association of REALTORS®

I received an email this week from a reader asking how one would go about finding a good REALTOR® when you have a house to sell. That reader wanted to know what questions to ask, and how one chooses an office to begin with.

Those are great questions!

First, I must mention that if you call the Spokane Association of REALTORS®, we don't give out referrals. We don't rank or recommend, and I want you to know that, up front. The Association provides industry education and business services to our members, serving all our members equally, regardless of individual sales volume, years in business, or the real estate office that they belong to. We provide professional services to our members, but we basically stay "out of the way" in order to let our members market themselves and their companies directly to the public.

Choosing a REALTOR® is like choosing any professional service provider. Start by asking for referrals from colleagues or family members. Check out REALTOR® and real estate office web sites. Look for REALTORS® and real estate offices that advertise in local newspapers, journals, and magazines. Use Google®. See who is blogging about real

estate, and ask for recommendations. Check your mailbox for direct mail from REALTORS® that have worked in your neighborhood selling homes successfully. Ask at church, or get to know REALTORS® that are fellow members of civic organizations you belong to.

Below you will find questions to guide you in selecting a REALTOR® who will provide top-notch service and meet your unique needs.

1. How long have you been in residential real estate sales? Is it your full-time job?

While experience is no guarantee of skill, real estate — like many other professions — is mostly learned on the job. Many REALTORS® enjoy the flexibility of being self-employed, and yet work very hard to build a successful career and satisfy their clients' needs.

2. What designations do you hold?

Designations such as ABR, GRI, and CRS, which require agents to take additional specialized real estate training, are held only by about one-quarter of real estate practitioners. The e-Pro (Internet Professional) certification is also available for REALTORS® to master client needs using today's technology.

3. How many homes did you and your real estate brokerage sell last year? By asking

this question, you'll get a good idea of how much experience the practitioner has.

4. How close to the initial asking prices of the homes you sold were the final sale prices?

This is one indication of how skilled the REALTOR® is at pricing homes and marketing to suitable buyers. Of course, other factors also may be at play, including an exceptionally cool real estate market.

5. What types of specific marketing systems will you use to sell my home? Do you have a detailed marketing plan and do I get to keep a copy?

You don't want someone who's going to put a For Sale sign in the yard and hope for the best. Look for someone who has aggressive and innovative approaches, and knows how to market your property competitively on the Internet. Buyers today want information fast, so it's important that your REALTOR® is responsive.

6. Will you represent me exclusively, or will you represent both the buyer and the seller in the transaction?

While it's usually legal to represent both parties in a transaction, it's important to understand where the practitioner's obligations lie. Your REALTOR® should explain his or her agency relationship to you and describe the rights of each party.

7. Can you recommend service providers who can help me obtain a mortgage, make home repairs, and help with other things I need done?

Because REALTORS® are immersed in the industry, we are wonderful resources as you seek lenders, home improvement companies, and other home

service providers. We will generally recommend more than one provider and let you know if we have any special relationship with or receive compensation from any of the providers.

8. What type of support does your brokerage office provide to you?

Having resources such as in-house support staff, access to a real estate attorney, and assistance with technology can help an agent sell your home.

9. What's your business philosophy? While there's no right answer to this question, the response will help you assess what's important to the agent and determine how closely the agent's goals and business emphasis mesh with your own.

10. How will you keep me informed about the progress of my transaction? How frequently?

Again, this is not a question with a correct answer, but how you judge the response will reflect your own desires. Do you want updates twice a week or do you prefer not to be bothered unless there's a hot prospect? Do you prefer phone, e-mail, or a personal visit?

11. Could you please give me the names and phone numbers of your three most recent clients?

Ask recent clients if they would work with this REALTOR® again. Find out whether they were pleased with the communication style, follow-up, and work ethic of the REALTOR®.

Another great way to find a REALTOR® is to view current open houses online, at

www.SpokaneOpen.com, and visit several homes that appeal to you. The REALTORS® showing the open houses will be happy to answer questions about the house, but also about their marketing skills, business services they offer, and local market trends. Open houses are perfect first impressions of active REALTORS® -- in between the day's walk-in traffic, there is often a quiet lull in order to talk more in depth or set an appointment to meet later.

All of our members are licensed to practice real estate by the State of Washington. In joining the Spokane Association of REALTORS®, members are entitled to use the title of REALTOR®, and they agree to act in accordance with the REALTOR® Code of Ethics established by the National Association of REALTORS®.

We hope you feel more empowered to contact a Spokane REALTOR®, and we invite you to do so today.

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