

# Matching objectives of seller, listing agent 1st step to satisfaction

By Doug Funke  
staff writer

Before most people can move into that new dream house, they have to unload the old one. Most hire real estate agents to help. But many agents don't take the right approach to the task.

That's what Al Mayer, a Cincinnati Realtor told a group of sales professionals here recently during a talk billed "Customer Qualification and Total Customer Satisfaction" sponsored by the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan.

"When you go to get the listing, are your objectives the same as the seller's?" Mayer asked. "Building customer satisfaction has to be a shared expectation. When I go to get the listing, the first thing I should ask is, 'What do you expect me to do?'"

"We don't find out what expectations are, we don't counsel at the beginning... we don't have shared expectations, and we don't have a happy customer," Mayer said.

Sure, the house will eventually sell, but at what price and aggravation? And referrals? Forget it.

**SIT DOWN** with the seller early on and talk turkey about pricing, exactly what services you'll provide, advertising strategies and what's expected of the seller, Mayer said.

"Let's tell them now what we can and can't do," he said. "Tell them, 'Wouldn't it be better to disappoint you now than later?' Dialogue. As partners, it's important that we review the marketing plan on a regu-

lar basis."

Houses that eventually sell within 2 percent of the initial listing price move, on average, in 37 days, Mayer said. The time frame expands to 91 days for 5 percent below listing, 113 days for 7 percent and 184 days for 10 percent.

"Price it right," said Mayer. Brokers shouldn't take a listing they don't believe they can sell within 90 days, he added. The result may be fewer listings, but probably a higher "kill ratio."

**THEN THERE'S** the marketing plan, or, more specifically advertising.

"What we're suggesting is a combination of image advertising with target advertising," Mayer said.

"The first home is shelter. After the first home, you buy amenities. Tell them about the family room, fancy kitchen, Jacuzzi. People buy image. They'll respond to something they've always wanted."

Mayer said his research indicates that number of bedrooms, number of bathrooms and price don't lure buyers nowadays. A family room, a large, open family kitchen and site privacy are the top three.

Realtors should look at how and where they're advertising.

For instance, they might aggressively target a starter home to singles for a couple of weeks, to empty-nesters a couple of weeks or to young families for a couple of weeks rather than everyone at once.

And consider radio ads, Mayer said.

**REALTORS AND** agents seemed to respond to the message.

"I'm going to go home and analyze my own personal listings," said Dennis Dickstein, a broker/owner of Ralph Manuel Associates in Birmingham. "It's time we started writing ads for different consumers."

Helen Ziemann, an agent for Century 21 M.J. of Farmington Hills, vouched for many of Mayer's points from personal experience.

She said her firm sold a house that had been on the market for nine months eight days after getting the listing.

"We also set down the law," Ziemann said. "We said, 'You're limited showing. We don't want to hear your house is a mess.' We said, 'If you want to sell right away, you have to drop the price.'"

The Bloomfield Hills house, which initially listed for \$224,000, languished for nine months and ultimately sold for \$177,000, Ziemann said. "She was happy to get that."

Ziemann parts company with Mayer, though, on the importance of price in advertising a house. "My people are really concerned about price," she said.

Ruth Shoemate, an agent for Chamberlain Realtors in Troy, said she found the talk informative.

"I think there are too many people (agents) who think about profit and end result rather than the consumer," she said. "A satisfied customer will recommend and refer people to you. That's more important to future business than the actual sale."



Before seriously hunting for a new house, many prospective buyers must sell their present houses.

## Realtors sponsor sales seminar

If you're thinking about selling your house but anxious about the process and not sure what to expect, consider learning the fine points from the Western Wayne Oakland County Association of Realtors.

The professional organization will sponsor a free seminar 7-9 p.m. Tuesday at Holiday Inn Livonia West. Reservations are requested through the association offices, 478-1700. Ext. 0 during business hours.

"We like to stress that our seminars are not sales oriented," said Allen C. King, president of the association. "They are strictly for educational purposes. Persons attending are never under any pressure to enter the market or even to do business through one of our member offices."

The panel includes:

- Jim Courtney, broker-owner of

Romerica, Inc. of Plymouth

- J.P. Pilot, president of HomeLife Inspection of Ann Arbor.

- Tom Ervin, a former real estate agent, now a syndicated real estate columnist from Birmingham.

Attendees are asked to bring a canned good donation for the Salvation Army pantry.

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