

# The Home Front

LEBLANC & ASSOCIATES

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## The Front Porch

**E**xpectations usually get us through our daily lives. When we were younger, our expectations were simpler. We expected the tooth fairy to leave us some change under our pillow. How about that guy/gal that we had a terrible crush on in high school? As we get along in years, our expectations grow in many directions. Some good. Some with no merit. Webster defines *expect* as to wait for, to anticipate or to look forward to the coming or occurrence of. It can also mean to consider bound in duty or obligated. You can see how expectations can take on different interpretations.

So how does this apply to sales? It occurs on many levels. Builders expect their communities to meet pro-formas. If they are lucky, they will exceed them. They expect their employees to carry out the company's goals etc. according to the rules and other criteria established within company manuals. In turn, employees expect to be treated fairly in terms of compensation and working conditions.

In our sales offices, there are different types of expectations. What does the sales professional expect when they see someone entering their sales office? Hopefully a sale! But they should also expect to guide and counsel that prospective buyer through the challenge of buying a new home. With today's frustrating selling conditions, this can be a stressful endeavor for all parties involved. The agent is expected to maintain a smiling face and friendly demeanor when they are faced with multiple angry homebuyers all competing for the first spot on the priority list. Oh my.

Agents expect buyers to understand this maze of purchasing a new construction home. This is not a good expectation to have. Sales agents must determine if the prospective buyer has purchased new construction before. Even if the buyer has purchased other homes, if they have never purchased new, they are entering a whole different world of the *company's* expectations. The company expects the buyer to make timely decisions to meet deadlines, cut off dates,



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etc. In the resale market, they have *their* agent guiding them through the process. In new home sales, they have the *seller's* agent guiding them. Oh my.

What does the prospective buyer expect? A home, of course. Preferably, one they can move into sooner rather than later. The thought of having to be in transitional housing before your new dream home is completed is not pleasant. The buyer also expects to find a home that matches their housing needs. What a challenge that is. How can you find the right home when you must go from one community to the next to get on a waiting list with the remote chance of getting lucky on each list of 500 names? Oh my.

Prospective buyers also expect to be treated fairly and professionally. Buyers have many questions, concerns, and demands. They expect to be heard and treated in a manner that makes them feel like more than a number on a priority list. The personal upheaval in their lives over the next 2-10 months (sometimes longer!) creates tension that at times can explode. So, our weary agents must put a smile on their faces, and treat those frustrated buyers in a manner that makes them feel important. What an expectation.

We must maintain a level of professionalism at all times. We all anticipate it and we all are obligated to maintain it. That is everyone's expectation. ♥

## Those Last Few Homes

By Manny Schatz, MIRM

**Home Front:** *It seems impossible in our current market conditions, but many communities still have one or two straggler home sites that just can't seem to sell. How can builders move these remaining homes and still attain projected profits?*

**MS:** To accomplish these results is often no different than the steps a builder should take throughout the life of the whole community every day, for every home sold and closed. Together with the sales team, the builder needs a specific plan for each home to accomplish the close-out goal.

**HF:** Could you take us through the process?

**MS:** In addition to a broad-based Community Marketing & Sales Plan, an Urgency Action Plan (UAP) is needed. A UAP is a detailed, specific action plan for selling house number one, number two, etc. Buyers purchase one home at a time. And that is how builders sell them – just one at a time. The action plan to sell out the remaining inventory should also project only one sale at a time.

**HF:** How does that translate to the buyer?

**MS:** We need to focus our buyers on the 'one-of-a-kind' home that we're offering that will meet and exceed all of their needs and expectations. If a buyer feels the agent is

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## Model Merchandising 201

by Dave Harding

### Landscaping Within the Model Park

**A**s we discussed last time in MM-101, merchandising is much more than decorating or furnishing model homes. It is a cohesive approach to staging the model park (and sales office) to make more sales ... earlier and easier. As such, it requires the homebuilder to lead, not follow the consultants.

The merchandising team must include the landscape architect and landscape installation contractor. Without leadership, these consultants may avoid working toward a common goal and may work at cross-purposes with the decorators.

Landscaping and street appeal are noticeable long before customers see any colors or furniture. Plantings must be selected and placed to AVOID blocking the best views of the home. All customers know they can add landscaping to enhance privacy from the street ... if that is what THEY prefer. Our task is to show off the home, not the landscaping. We are setting the stage for a successful model demonstration by the sales professionals. Trees could be used to add privacy if model windows face another model that is quite close. (Another solution could be to display window treatments available as an option from the builder.) Otherwise, windows should be jealously protected from too many view-blocking

### A Question of Timing

By Charles J. Clarke III

**R**ecently, I spoke at the South Eastern Builders' Conference (SEBC) and at the Southern Building Show, sponsored by Bonded Builders. At both conferences, I discussed the one key question that we at Charles Clarke Consulting recommend that every salesperson ask 100% of the time with everyone. Even your unlikely prospects.

I've developed a tent card to go on your desk that will remind you of five questions that really need to be asked after you've given your presentation:

How do you like our community?

Is this a community that you would like to live in?

Which one of our homes do you like best?

Is this the kind of home you would like to own?

What do you think about going ahead with this today?

It is this last question that I consider the real key.

trees. Few buyers, even in very hot conditions, say they appreciate how dark landscaping makes the models.

If appropriate for the local market, consult a *feng shui* master before planting anything in front of a window. Specifically, avoid plants with sharp spiny needles in a *feng-shui* sensitive market. And do not allow flagstones, tiles or saw-cuts in concrete where the points are aiming toward the front door. These are killing arrows. Check some of the *feng shui* texts regarding auspicious shapes for hills or moundings. A turtle shape is especially good chi. Remember a fountain is better than a still pond, which can grow stagnant and be a maintenance problem. "Water flow is cash flow." But make certain any fountain is on the correct side of the front door. Practicing good *feng shui* will show respect to those who follow its tenets. There is no down side to incorporating this approach in landscaping models.

Utilize "good smells." Some attractive plants have a foul odor and set the wrong tone for customers walking toward a model. Remember rosemary and other herbs in your model planting palate. Jasmine and Natal plum are wonderful fragrances to add to a model. Be careful with citrus trees, which usually smell appealing, but come with lots of "allergy baggage."

The problem is that this is the same question that is most often left out, even by experienced sales professionals.

In the SEBC seminar, I set up the following scenario for the audience. Suppose you had just met a buyer fifteen minutes ago. This was the first time they had visited your property, and they had just walked through your model home. Then I asked, "How many of you would endorse the concept of asking 100% of the time 'What do you think about going ahead with this today?' if you got four yeses from questions one through four?"

About 50% of the audience thought that a sales rep should not ask the question because it was too soon and it was only their first visit. If you are a builder, would you mind if your salespeople asked, "What do you think about going ahead with this today?" 100% of the time? Ask your own sales staff how they feel!

Think about these two points: In repeated surveys of builders and developers from coast to coast, approximately 90% of prospects never do come back a second time (only 10% are Be Backs.) In similar surveys, we ask potential buy-

If possible, walkways within the model complex should be wide enough for three people side-by-side. Otherwise, pity the sales professional who must decide to lead a couple by walking backward ... or to separate the buying group and let one of them lead the salesperson and one prospect ... or worse yet, to follow behind, unable to add any value to the tour.

School the architect that the goal is not to minimize hardscape. It is to sell homes. As such, a serpentine approach gives more time for qualifying and rapport-building. It also gives a series of views of each model home. There must always be a viewing spot, set well back from each model, so that at least three people can stop and admire the architecture, exterior style and appeal, the colors, the approach, etc. Don't have narrow, straight sidewalks close to the homes.

Step back, and step up to a better presentation. Strong model landscaping will be an immediate aid to sales.

*Next issue, Model Merchandising 301 – The Sales Office*

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ers in communities, "Have you ever bought a home the first day, or would you buy on the first visit?" and consistently 50% say yes they have or would. That means if you don't ask the question every time, be aware that 9 out of 10 aren't coming back. So why not ask them today, even if it is their first visit?

If half your potential market says they would rather make the purchase on the first day, then at least give them the opportunity to do so. Both of you will be more satisfied.

*Charles J. Clarke III is the creator of the Bulls, Outs, Lambs and Tigers System of Personality Based Selling, and can be contacted for speaking engagements at (770) 287-7808. ♥*

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*The Home Front*

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## Kudos Korner

We have another series of agents who have demonstrated super star status during this last quarter of sales agent evaluations. This time around, we found them in several locations with several builders. Our Kudos to the following:

### KA TIE BROWNING – Monterey Homes

Katie is a true sales professional. While she thoroughly enjoys her job, without a doubt she is there to make her buyers feel important and to sell homes!

### JIM SCHAEFER – John F. Buchan Homes

Jim has the ability to blend casual conversation and humor along with detailed facts allowing for a more cohesive sales presentation. His community knowledge was unparalleled.

### JULIE BOA TNER – Ryland Homes

Despite numerous interruptions, Julie maintained her focus and provided her full attention to her prospective buyer. Julie also knows how to effectively utilize closing statements and questions in her sales presentation.

### JULIE HODGES – K. Hovnanian Homes

Julie knows how to close. She ascertained her buyer's needs, presented to those needs and asked for the sale. Very thorough presentation!

### ANNIQUE TORRES – Longford Homes

Annique utilizes a very effective conversational assessment process thereby allowing her to obtain essential information in an easy-going manner. Annique conveys the feeling that she has her buyer's best interest at heart.

### KARI HAL VORSEN – Quadrant Homes

Kari is another sales professional who takes pride in her company and product. Not only did Kari excel in her product demonstration, she also explained the building cycle to her buyer in order to better understand the purchase process.

### ANGIE FRIESL – Del Webb

Angie is superb at selling to the active adult market. She knows how to structure her sales presentation to her buyers 'hot buttons' in a friendly and easy going manner. Angie reinforced earlier selling points and created real excitement right up to the end of the encounter.

### JOE PROHASKA – Del Webb

Joe's upbeat demeanor and excitement for his active adult community was evident throughout the encounter. He confirmed the buyer's plan selection and then effortlessly assessed her needs in a home site to guide her to one that matched her needs. Joe also excels at informing his buyers about the purchase process.

**Congratulations to each of you!**

## Last Few Homes ...Continued from page one

concerned about their best interests, they will be comfortable with purchasing one of the few remaining homes without feeling they're being sold a problem home.

**HF:** How does that translate to the seller?

**MS:** An action plan such as this requires a dedicated and concentrated effort from the builder's staff. This person needs to start by being on-site and walking each home, experiencing each part of the home, anticipating buyer concerns, committing the necessary resources to mitigate those concerns, and then motivating and supporting the sales team in accomplishing their sales goals.

**HF:** What follows the on-site analysis?

**MS:** Following an extensive site visit, the UAP should be created. All items including the pricing for each home should be considered. The builder should analyze what needs to be completed or improved for each home and rate the homes as to which ones will be the easiest and the most challenging to sell. If your action plan is put together well, you should sell the homes that are the most challenging first. It means the homes were priced accurately for the market and the negatives were mitigated by the inclusion of additional upgrades or improvements.

**HF:** Any additional steps that should be included in the UAP?

**MS:** There are several. A few things to be included are focused sales management meetings concentrating on follow up, or it will not be done. Each sales professional needs to shop and review competitors comparing their available homes to the competition's available units. Closing skills can always be improved upon and always need to be practiced. Closing is a natural event if the sales consultant is prepared. The whole sales team needs to practice overcoming objections. Review your follow-up letters and consider more personalized letters. Consider accelerating your program with outside brokers.

**HF:** Any final suggestions?

**MS:** The primary focus of each community should be a strict mindset regarding the overwhelming necessity for urgency. Continuously work with your sales teams to review ways for them to create a higher level of 'urgency awareness' for each home that remains unsold. These tools and actions should go a long way towards helping you attain your close-out sales goals ... especially when you remember to take it 'one home at a time'.

*Manny Schatz, principal of Professional Builder Services, Inc. in Danville, has been involved in nearly every aspect of home building. He holds a general contractors license, a brokers license, and MIRM certification. In addition to his many professional affiliations, Manny was an associate of The Stone Institute, and worked closely with the late Dave Stone. For further information, contact Manny Schatz at (925) 837-1937. ♥*

## The Eyes Have It!

Even with the best product in the best of markets, success ultimately relies on the quality of representation in your sales centers. In our Video Profiles, we capture your agent's entire sales presentation through the eyes of the buyer. Get the whole picture.



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