

The Home Front

LEBLANC & ASSOCIATES

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The Front Porch

Throughout our school years, we were required to read the classics. Some of these novels stayed in our memories and many stayed long enough to generate those dreaded book reports.

As I was thinking about our selling environment during the past couple of years, one classic quickly came to mind – Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*. Even at a young age, I thought its language memorable ... *It was the best of times and the worst of times*. How appropriate to new home sales!

In many ways, these have been the best of times for this business. How much easier can it get when you can't keep up with the demand? Just mention an upcoming new community and the floodgates open with e-mails, telephone calls and faxes. Management must make many decisions. Do we bother with models? If we model, do we just vignette? Do we model all our plans? Small releases? Timing of releases? Priority Lists? The decisions are many and not easy to make.

Sales agents also have decisions to make. With a demand-driven market, this can also create the worst of times for our industry. Many agents have decided, consciously and some unconsciously, that there is no need to sell. Why bother? Here is our pricing, look at the models (or renderings) and if you want to buy, fill out a loan application (or other pre-qual form), fax it to our lender and if they say you're OK, then we will place you on our list. At times, I feel this boom market has created the worst of times for our industry.

Most sales agents don't mean to be rude to prospective buyers. But that is what happens when you lose your focus. I hear it on the volumes of audio tapes and video profiles we generate each year for our clients. Little proactive selling is being offered. Greeting is kept to a minimum: Hello. First time here? Here's a brochure and there are our models. Qualification consists of: Do you have a home to sell? Can you wait until our next release and delivery of homes? Needs assessment consists of: Do you need a home?



Mary LeBlanc, President
LEBLANC & ASSOCIATES

Sometimes agents ask how many bedrooms are needed. But that's about it. Community Presentation? Almost non-existent. Product presentation? Minimal and unemotional. Purchase procedure discussed? Not in many agents' vocabulary. Closing attempted? Well, as I stated earlier, get qualified and sign up.

Agents must offer a full sales presentation to every serious and motivated buyer that enters their sales centers. With all things being equal in terms of competition (in the customer's eyes), buyers need a reason to buy from *your* particular community. If circumstances restrict agents from taking the time to offer a full presentation, then they must request a specific return appointment to allow them the time to tend to their buyer's needs.

Selling is both simple and difficult at the same time. The difficulty is the discipline and resolve required to fine tune and exercise professional sales techniques. The simple part is keeping it uncomplicated! Once agents define their craft, they can then focus on and follow recommended guidelines that have been tested and proven successful over the years. Managers must commit to an ongoing evaluation and training program for their sales teams. Sales agents must commit to an ongoing self-evaluation/improvement program. Once that commitment is made, then hopefully, it will always be *the best of times!* ♥

It's Time To Get Back To Basics

By Manny Schatz, MIRM

Home Front: *Manny, I know we have talked about this topic before, but it is a reoccurring problem in our industry. Complacency within our sales teams. Do you agree?*

MS: Complacency has become almost a 'plague' in our industry during times of prosperity. Not only by sales teams, but also at all levels of management.

HF: *How does complacency affect our industry?*

MS: Complacency impacts new home sales by convincing agents and management into believing their sales numbers are a direct result of their actions when in fact, agents have become order takers.

HF: *I know many agents will take issue with that statement. How do you convince agents that in spite of the campouts, priority lists, etc that they are not really selling?*

MS: During these times, agents do not practice all the sales techniques they have learned. They do not put their best effort forward with each and every sale. They do not even attempt to meet, greet, and/or qualify for dominant buying motives. Product demonstration is lacking and the agents will not ask any closing questions.

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Debunking The Myths by Charles J. Clarke III

ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST THREE MYTHS

People buy a home because of its kitchen and bathrooms.

Some people definitely do. But roughly half the population buys for other rooms or features. The kitchen and bath manufacturers have done a great job of PR in convincing people that everyone considers their areas the most important. Owls may agree because they want these rooms to contribute to the functionality of the home. Bulls often don't care at all about these rooms. Lambs want a good kitchen for family gatherings, but aren't so concerned with the bathrooms. And Tigers want the most luxurious master bath, but the kitchen isn't so important.

Bulls are men.

Lambs are women.

This is purely a stereotype. There are roughly

The same number of female Bulls as male Bulls (except on the farm, of course.) And likewise, there are about the same number of male Lambs as there are female. What this means for

This is the first in an ongoing series of articles in which I'll take a hard look at the most common myths about selling homes. Most every salesperson and sales manager will have an opinion on these widely held beliefs. Some of you will carry on your day-to-day operations by implementing these ideas. Some of you are betting your livelihood on them. Unfortunately, these beliefs turn out to actually be myths.

In this series I have put together a collection of myths I have observed or been told over the years, from all over the country. I will analyze each one and tell you what it is about it that makes it untrue. As you read through this discussion, think about how you can change what you currently do and say so you can stop losing sales unnecessarily.

The answers all depend on an understanding of which animal personality you happen to be dealing with at the time. In my BOLT System, Bulls are the bottom-line take charge personality, Owls are the logical analytical researchers, Lambs are the agreeable people pleasers, and Tigers pursue fun and excitement.

Back to Basics ...

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HF: *How does the agent get to this mindset?*

MS: Complacency exists because management allows it – and often encourages it – by rewarding performance based on sales numbers alone, rather than on ability or effort.

HF: *So how do managers cure the complacency plague?*

MS: It's called getting back to basics. When all else is equal, those with the best sales effort will succeed while capturing market share from those who are complacent.

HF: *Our performance evaluation reports address the basics. The consistent pattern is that superstar agents are those who sell for companies that invest in time and training for their sales teams. Those that struggle are usually out on their own. What do you suggest?*

a salesperson is that not all women will respond to an emotional appeal, and some men want exactly that.

Focus groups are accurate reflections of the truth.

Only if the group contains equal numbers of each of the four animals. Suppose a focus group is all or mostly Owls. They would give completely different evaluations than a group that was all or mostly Tigers. Bulls would rarely sign up for a focus group because they've got better things to do with their time. And Lambs may participate, but they'll refrain from saying anything negative (not wanting to offend their host, and besides who are they to be imposing their opinions on others) and so this skews the results in an artificially optimistic way.

This could cause you to invest a lot of money in a particular design that tested well, only to discover that it doesn't sell with real customers. Before you even think about making business decisions based on focus group data, it's critical to know which animals were in those groups.

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

face-to-face selling scenarios. Successful selling is a process that involves definable steps and measurable skills.

HF: *For those who might not be fully aware of those steps, would you delineate them for us?*

MS: There are nine primary functions of the new home sales process:

1. Personal preparation
2. Prospecting activities
3. Approach and greeting
4. Qualifying and involving the prospect
5. Demonstrating
6. Reducing sales resistance
7. Closing throughout the process.
8. Following up until the prospects buy a home (from you or someone else).
9. Servicing your customers before, during and after move-in.

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Kudos Korner

We have another series of agents who have demonstrated super star status during this last quarter of evaluations.

DEBI KRICHBAUM – SeaCountry Homes

Debi demonstrated a stellar sales presentation from start to finish. From the beginning, Debi made her prospect feel at home. She built the proper foundation and asked for her buyer's commitment.

LAURIE MILLARD – Quadrant Homes

Laurie is able to efficiently discover her buyer's needs as well as other essential qualifying information and then progress to the point of gaining agreement on a plan, homesite, and then asking for the sale. All in a relaxed and natural manner.

KELLY KINCADE – Quadrant Homes

Kelly fluidly weaves her discovery and qualifications into her presentation making it seem very natural and logical. Kelly has a strong yet relaxed closing approach. Our field person notes that Kelly was so convincing, it was hard not to leave a check!

DEBBIE PARKER – Centex Homes

Debbie excels at using trial closing questions and does not allow a lack of available homes to limit her offering a complete sales presentation.

CARYL SCANLAN – Centex Homes

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

MARY STARK – Centex Homes

Mary delivered an outstanding sales presentation that was smooth and effortless as she uncovered her buyer's needs and preferences.

TRICIA LYNN – Centex Homes

Tricia demonstrates sales perfection with an interactive, informative and organized presentation. Tricia knows how to graciously transition from one stage of her presentation to another.

MICHAEL MURPHY – Centex Homes

Michael is a dynamic sales professional. Through humor and courtesy, he is able to personalize his presentation to meet his buyer's specific needs.

RENEE BALCAEN – Centex Homes

Renee not only has a solid sales presentation but her follow-up after the point of sale was outstanding.

MANUEL HERRERA – Fox & Jacobs

Manuel is an honest, straightforward sales professional who quickly earns the confidence of his buyers by responding to their individual needs.

Kudos to all!

Ten Commandments For Success in 2003

by Dave Harding

- 1 Thou shalt dirty thy hands involving thyself in politics...as a core requirement, not just as a reaction to thine one-off project;
- 2 Thou shalt take less risk in land acquisition and entitlement. My commandment #1 will come to thine aid.
- 3 Thou shalt be much more efficient in all parts of thy sales and marketing endeavors, and ye shall so measure after every Sabbath Day.
- 4 Thy designs and thy skills will be appropriate for all people, not only to those of thine own tribe. Honor all cultures upon my Earth.
- 5 Train ye and motivate all thy staff...not just thy sales and purchasing team...at least weekly, for this will give thee a competitive advantage.
- 6 Thou shalt deliver improved model presentations...even if they are virtual.
- 7 Insisteth thee upon a much closer relationship within thy entire Community Team, and include thy take-out lender, thy design center, thy customer care centurions, thy site sales team, thy inside and outside escrow professionals, etc. The time for thine lip service is over...or ye will be if ye do not insist on a true team...then tap all its resources.
- 8 Ye require a well-managed backlog of at least six months. A healthy builder has in escrow two quarters of backlog at any one time. Be thou healthy.
- 9 Ye shall turn every single customer into thy disciple...by surveying thy customers, then improving thy customer satisfaction rating...as a religion!
- 10 Avoid ye the judgment of those who wouldst banish thee from thine chosen craft, whether they be governors or judges for they know not the holy pilgrimage thou has, nor the purity of thy cause. Neither have they the wisdom of my son Solomon; they share not thy yoke of providing honest labor to shelter my people, and, verily, because of their burden, these oxen are a pain upon my ass. Avoid-ye this pain.

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HF: For some agents, that sounds like a scripted presentation that they can't differentiate from a structured presentation.

MS: Individuals possess a selling style that complements his/her personality. The intent is not to encourage a robotic approach to selling. Rather they should aim to build on his/her personal strengths, stimulating their confidence and freedom to fully explore their personal potential.

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. Managers and agents are able to see what our evaluation reports have reported. Denial of the report is eliminated. Training. Use a Video Profile from LeBlanc & Associates to show your best sales agents demonstrating their selling skills. Quality. Our company has



established itself as the premiere sales agent evaluation company in the building industry. Our expertise in the housing industry enables us to suit your needs and provide you with a quality video. Technically speaking. All work is done in-house so that we have direct control over the entire process. With our state-of-the-art editing suite, we can offer the best evaluation service in the industry.

Give us a call!
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The Home Front

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