

# The Home Front

LEBLANC & ASSOCIATES

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## The Front Porch

The Broadway musicals of the 50's and 60's generated many terrific show tunes. One of the great shows of the time was *The King and I* and one of its terrific songs was "Getting to Know You." You are all fortunate that you are reading this and do not have to hear my rendition of this song. Ouch.

At times when I listen to the audio tapes or view the video profiles of sales agent's evaluations, I wish they knew this song. It amazes me to see or hear a sales agent go through a sales presentation, ask for the sale and when all is said and done, they never got to know their prospective buyer. That is, they never conducted a discovery process.

To me, learning a bit about to whom I am selling is so important! When selling someone a home, should not the agent know something more than the buyer is on the priority list because the lender said it was OK? Who is this person? Is he/she married? Do they have kids? How many? Ages? Home needs and preferences? Where does the family spend most of their time? Have they ever bought a new construction home before? What is important to them in a home? In a home site? In a community? So many questions that could be asked to create an effective sales presentation. Yet most agents either ask just the bare minimum to get by or never bother to ask at all. Some agents never even bother to introduce themselves or ask the buyer their name. Curious approach when asking someone to buy a home I would say.

Of course the agent must know where to draw the line in terms of the discovery process. Learning all the gory details of someone's divorce is really not anyone's business. (Yes I have heard those details on the tapes). However, a buyer still needs to feel they are of some importance. Well paced discovery questions interspersed



Mary LeBlanc, President  
LEBLANC & ASSOCIATES

throughout the sales presentation play a major role in showing the buyer that the agent does care. Showing some interest in your buyer is part of establishing rapport and trust, both essential elements of an effective sales presentation.

Sales agents have enjoyed a very fast paced and lucrative selling market over the last several years. However there is a market shift in some market segments. While it might be a temporary shift, for the first time in a long time, I see ads clearly offering incentives beyond the closing cost if you use our lender type. While this is a spotty situation for now, and let's hope it does not escalate, sales agents need to get with the program of selling again. It is the old adage of 'use it or lose it.' If the agent does not practice their sales skills, they will inevitably revert to being an order taker. That just does not make the grade for sales professionals. Buyers can be very non-committal in any selling environment ... priority list situations or inventory situations. Put yourself in their shoes. If you have two or three communities that are fairly close in terms of product quality, amenities, location, etc., which community would you lean to? The one that just wanted you to take a number and talk to their lender? Or the one who took the time to get to know you? All about you. ♥

## Reducing Resistance and Handling Objections

By Manny Schatz, MIRM

**Home Front:** *Sales associates will always be faced with objections or other resistance from prospective buyers. I have discovered that handling objections is not a strong point for most agents. What have you observed?*

**Manny Schatz:** It is unfortunate that overcoming resistance and handling objections are areas where sales teams usually do not excel. As a result, the sales professional prolongs the number of visits required to consummate the sale – or worse – loses the prospect to another builder.

**HF:** *Do agents have the proper skills/training to handle objections?*

**MS:** Part of the problem is the lack of proper training. Part of this responsibility belongs to the sales professional. However, much of the responsibility lies with sales management. It is imperative that sales teams constantly be coached in how to recognize both true objections and resistance and be familiar with successful methods to overcome them.

**HF:** *How does an agent recognize true concerns?*

**MS:** Early on, it is important to discern between true resistance and merely testing the waters for the beginning steps of negotiations.

**HF:** *Sounds like getting back to the rock solid basics ... being prepared.*

**MS:** Overcoming objections requires thorough preparation. The agent must be knowl-

*Continued on page 2*

## Inside This Issue

<i>The Front Porch</i> .....	1
<i>Reducing Resistance &amp; Handling Objections</i> .....	1
<i>Frequently Asked Questions</i> .....	2
<i>Avoiding Camp Outs III</i> .....	3
<i>Kudos Korner</i> .....	3
<i>Andiamo</i> .....	4
<i>The Eyes Have It</i> .....	4

## Frequently Asked Questions . . . by Charles J. Clarke III

**B**ulls, Owls, Lambs and Tigers®: *Personality Selling and Personality Marketing* is a personality-based concept of selling homes, based on an understanding of which “animal” personality you happen to be dealing with. In the BOLT System, Bulls are bottom-line take charge personalities, Owls are analytical and detail oriented, Lambs are people pleasers, and Tigers seek fun and excitement. BOLT runs on the premise that each animal personality wants to be sold in unique ways, and that if salespeople always sell the same way, they could be losing half to three-quarters of their potential sales.

For more information, see my website at [www.personalityselling.com](http://www.personalityselling.com)

I have been part of the home building and real estate industries for decades now, working extensively as a sales trainer and marketing consultant. In that time, I have trained the salespeople of hundreds of companies. These salespeople are a diverse group with varying degrees of experience, but the same questions always seem to arise. You may have wondered about some of these questions yourself, so I thought a little Q&A might be beneficial.

**How do you deal with opposites? If a husband is a Bull and the wife is a Lamb, which kind of presentation is best for them? Do I spend the first half of my presentation in Lamb mode to make the wife feel welcome, and the second half in Bull mode to close the sale with the husband?**

Ignore neither of them, but by the same token do not spend long segments of time in either BOLT mode. The best approach is to alternately speak briefly and individually with the husband and the wife throughout your presentation. Direct your first comments to the person that is more assertive, which in this case is the Bull husband, and speak to him using his Bull language. Then turn to the person less assertive – the Lamb wife – and speak to her as a Lamb. If you begin by focusing on the less assertive prospect, the assertive spouse may begin to walk away or to interrupt and demand your attention. Without fail, if assertive personalities have to wait for your attention they are soon lost prospects because of their boredom.

**Do people change over time? Do major life events (like becoming a parent or changing careers) change someone's personality?**

People can modify by degrees, but they rarely

change their fundamental personality type. Secondary personality types (like the Tiger in a Bull/Tiger personality) are more changeable, so a person's secondary BOLT could alter while the primary BOLT category remained the same. An Owl/Lamb, for example, could become an Owl/Bull, Owl/Owl, or Owl/Tiger. But in general, young Owls grow up to be old Owls.

**Which animal personality makes the best salesperson?**

Most people assume that Bulls or Tigers will naturally be the best salespeople. But this is not necessarily true, because not all prospects respond positively to the energy and enthusiasm of a Tiger, or the control-oriented directness of a Bull. Moreover, all animals have something positive to bring to a career in sales. Owls are usually more thorough and conscientious in follow-up than the other animals. Lambs are genuinely concerned that the buyer is pleased. Ultimately salespeople's success (or lack of success) is connected to how much of a Chameleon they are. If an Owl and a Lamb were highly flexible Chameleons, able to smoothly mirror and pace with each prospect, then they would close more sales than a Tiger or Bull with lower flexibility. Low flexibility Tigers and Bulls may shine in selling to other Tigers and Bulls, but they lose sales from Lambs and Owls.

**Is it manipulative to use the BOLT selling techniques? Am I just being a phony by changing my personality so much to fit the personality of my prospects?**

Your prospects won't realize that you are treating them any differently than the person who just left before them. By responding to your prospects' personality, selling them as they would like to be sold, treating them as an individual and different from the prospects who came before them, is the highest form of respect. You are demonstrating that you are listening to what they say. Regurgitating the same cookie-cutter presentation in the same cookie-cutter style does not require a listening salesperson. And producing identical, scripted answers to questions from different prospects is nearly as poor as not listening to the question at all. By now you know that the four different animals have different needs and different driving forces. Your job is to meet their needs in the way compatible to them, and that includes demonstrating, overcoming objections, and closing them in a speed, style and language they understand and find comfortable.

Charles J. Clarke III is the creator of personality based selling system, “Bulls, Owls, Lambs and Tigers®: Personality Selling and Personality Marketing,” and can be contacted for speaking engagements at (770) 287-7808. ♥

## Reducing Resistance . . .

Continued from page one

edgeable about the product, the community, the neighborhood, the competition, Internet information and any other important factors.

**HF: Sometimes agents have this information, but it just does not come across effectively during a sales presentation.**

**MS:** Sales associates must communicate succinctly. The better their communication skills, the more confidence the prospects will have that their needs have been heard and will be met.

**HF: In our reports, we rate rapport building skills. How does this apply?**

**MS:** A major part of establishing rapport, trust and confidence is the degree to which the sales professional is perceived as a knowledgeable specialist who has the prospects' best interests at heart.

**HF: How does management prepare their sales teams?**

**MS:** It is wise to challenge your sales team to list all the possible issues and objections that may arise (location, neighborhood, amenities, floor plans and home site.) Role play these challenges and solutions with them. Have them practice.

**HF: How would you define the essential steps for reducing buyer resistance?**

**MS:** The essential steps to use are:

- Always hear out the prospect before responding, and then respond with empathy.
- Provide credible third party examples and responses.
- Reduce the objection to a manageable point.
- Always confirm areas of agreement and close on these points.
- At times employ reverse psychology: “This may not be the home you are looking for.”

**HF: Your final thoughts on this topic?**

**MS:** Buyers do not want to make mistakes. Objections and negotiation issues are all part of the buying process. Objections are often ‘trial balloons’ to see if the buyer can win concessions. They could also be valid concerns that must be resolved or the sale will be lost.

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 professional affiliations, Manny was an associate of The Stone Institute, and worked with the late Dave Stone. For further information, contact Manny Schatz at (925) 837-1937. ♥

## Avoiding Camp Outs III ... by David Harding, CMP

In HF editions 24 and 25, we examined techniques for successfully avoiding Camp Outs. In this final article in the series, we learn how to deal with the belligerent prospect, establishing premiums and options and techniques for keeping prospects warm while they wait. These comments are timely in markets that are strong, and where prospects arriving at the sales office today are not even allowed to buy a home despite their own ready, willing and able status.

Because customers do not get a specific priority number, or a fixed position in line, we are able to better serve them as well as ourselves. If we have qualified the prospect throughout, we have a refined picture of their "absolutes"... what they must have and what they want to avoid. As such, we do not call them unless we have an opening for a home that meets all their "must haves" and has none of the "must avoids."

As we qualify, we have been taking the pulse of every prospect regarding preferred location as well as the ranking of elevation preferences. This helps us attribute relative popularity, and aids us in determining premiums for location and elevation. Sometimes we are surprised that the customers' preferences are different from our beliefs. Customers do NOT care that some locations or elevations COST us more to deliver.

We must price the release to ensure that "base" values are given to basic preferences and higher prices are given to higher-valued homes and locations. Otherwise the phase or community may stall while we react with price reductions. Therefore, it is critical that the sales team collect detailed information about preferences well before the release and pricing.

We are aware how frustrating it is for prospects who are waiting for a release... typically waiting on multiple builders' lists, each builder having a different methodology. Some builders still encourage a camp out or auction. Some find it more convenient to do little prequalifying, relying on a hope that opening day for that phase attracts a strong crowd who will encourage other members of the same crowd to bid ever higher.

Our sales teams must have an ongoing program of collecting information. However, they have a similar obligation to inform the prospects of how the release and sale process will transpire to properly respect our buyers as well as be certain we are reacting to prospects that are still current in their need and still capable in their capacity to buy. To their detriment, some builders do not trim their prospect lists and do not confirm if former prospects were still in the market.

Every time we solicit feedback from the prospect, we need to determine if they are still in the market. We should ask them if they have bought elsewhere... if they are still current in their financial ability, or even if they have decided to stay in their present house. We can gently ask for a response by xyz date. After several one-way communications, we should recognize the obvious.

By avoiding assignment of a fixed place in line, we are able to manage a disruptive prospect. Despite what some believe, they have no entitlement to a home. So long as we do not discriminate based on any of the seven protected classes, we can discriminate against a prospect that harasses our team. And, this behavior happens BEFORE they even select, and pay, and close, and move in. It is not going to get any better than it is now.

Our task is to sell the LAST (not the next home). Why would we introduce a customer that has abused our staff or requires service that is different from what we have promised every single prospect? Why inflict these people on a community we are trying to build and be proud of? We can simply pass them over as we communicate to them that we are about to release a home that meets their specifications and motivations.

In turn, that requires us to be consistent, to be clear with every prospect, to be respectful of the anxiety they experience. Let's tell them often how we are going to release, price, etc. After all, for us, this community is the only one we believe they may buy from us. However, they are very likely to be on several builders' lists, they may confuse us with others, or may simply be on info-overload. Let's give them a break!

The measure of our success? We have a release with little public fanfare and no Camp Outs. We sell everything that is released. We match customers with homes and locations they really want. We have smiles of accomplishment rather than grimaces of anger and manipulation. We have smoother escrows. More referrals. Lower marketing costs. Higher profits. We deserve this and so do our communities.

*Dave Harding is a well-known sales and marketing expert based in Los Angeles. For over 20 years, his practice locations have included Washington, Arizona, Nevada and California. He has twice been acclaimed by Builder and Developer Magazine as one of Who's Who - The Industry's Finest, was twice Sales Manager of the Year in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties, and is the 2004 NAHB Sales Manager of the Year. He can be reached at [daveharding@email.com](mailto:daveharding@email.com) or [dgharding@adelphia.net](mailto:dgharding@adelphia.net) or 310. 463. 0454. ♥*

## Kudos Korner

*This series of agents have demonstrated super star status during this last quarter of sales agent evaluations conducted by LeBlanc & Associates. Kudos to all!*

### SANDRA CHRISTIE

*Osborne Homes*

Sandra gives positive feedback to her prospective buyers while offering a complete and value-based sales presentation. Our field people felt as if they were visiting with an old friend. Seldom found today, Sandra methodically takes first time buyers through the purchase process and instills a 'can do' attitude.

### JAMES STEPHENS

*Centex Homes*

James is an attentive and patient sales professional who also systematically takes an uninformed buyer through the sales process in a logical and focused manner. James excelled at setting his community apart from the rest of the pack creating uniqueness.

### WENDY MARGRAVE

*K. Homanian*

Wendy has the unique ability to offer a comprehensive and positive sales presentation. When faced with a dominating buyer personality, Wendy gently took control of the sales process. Wendy asked excellent discovery and qualification questions and then provided her buyer with the best options available.

### RICK GESSEY

*Shea Homes*

Rick is a professional superstar offering the highest level of personal service and shows his buyer he has their best interests at heart. One of the things we liked best about Rick was his ability to offer a one-of-a-kind sales presentation and to make included features seem specialized for his buyer.

### SHARON DUNN

*Richmond American Homes*

Sharon is an exceptional sales associate who presents her product with true pride and respect. She positions her homes to the customer's needs. Her listening skills are excellent as she wove the discovered buyer information back into her benefit statements. Sharon is also a tenacious closer.

### LOUISE EASTON

*Richmond American Homes*

Louise is a superstar who describes the many possibilities offered in her product. She helps her buyer envision their family living in the home. She frequently assesses the buyer's needs by asking for the buyer's opinions or how they would utilize a space.

### MYLE PHAN

*The Olson Company*

Myle exudes warmth and has a disarming personality - effervescent and upbeat - which places her buyers at ease. This superstar offered a meticulous product presentation and was not afraid to use sample boards to further educate her buyer.

### MARLO LASKO

*Centex Homes*

Marlo is an energetic sales professional who does a wonderful job assessing her buyer's needs and then customizing her sales presentation to address those requirements. Marlo was able to personalize her product demonstration and even spoke of the home as though it were already her buyers'.

## The Eyes Have It!

**SEEING IS BELIEVING.** No matter how good the selling market might be, a community's success ultimately relies on the quality of the sales agents. **Video Profiles** from LeBlanc & Associates capture your agent's entire sales presentation through the eyes of the buyer.

**TRAINING.** Eliminate the doubt. Use a **Video Profile** from LeBlanc & Associates of your best agent(s) to demonstrate what you expect from the rest of the team. What better way can an agent learn than from the best of their peers? LeBlanc & Associates can provide a self-evaluation guide to reinforce the training aspect of the program.

**TECHNICALLY SPEAKING.** All work is done in-house so we have direct control over the entire process. We also offer our clients options including processed or non-processed formats, and VHS tapes or CD ROMS. **QUALITY.** LeBlanc & Associates has established credentials as the premiere sales agent evaluation company in the industry. We have one expertise...new home sales. Fast food restaurants, banks and car dealerships are not our game. We have the best agent capture rate around. Our people are personally trained to focus on the agent. We realize you know what your models look like! **Have you have tried the rest and found ill prepared field personnel? Have you seen more walls than agents? Do ceiling shots make you dizzy?**

**THEN BE PREPARED FOR THE BEST. GIVE US A CALL!**

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## The Home Front

LEBLANC & ASSOCIATES

5055 AVENIDA ENCINAS, SUITE 230

CARLSBAD, CA 92008

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800.838.1779

FAX 760.438.1154

EMAIL [mary@mleblanc.com](mailto:mary@mleblanc.com)

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT [www.mleblanc.com](http://www.mleblanc.com)

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