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The Home Front

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The Home Front

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The Front Porch

Show and Tell days in elementary school have always been a fun and at times an embarrassing event. Fun for those observing. Embarrassing for the family member of the munchkin doing the telling. Sometimes the kid's presentation can be boring. That just usually means the child's imagination hasn't yet kicked in. The old Art Linkletter TV show, *Kids say the Darndest Things*, was a version of the *Show and Tell* experience. Some of the old clips are still very funny.

As you might expect, this past year the requests to evaluate sales agents from my builder clients have been borderline overwhelming. Now that agents have to sell, management is focusing on their agent's selling skills. I have heard from clients I haven't heard from in a few years who now are paying attention to their front line. For many agents, sales skills are woefully lacking. This is particularly true for those agents who just entered the market in the last few years when order taking was the norm.

What strikes me most, even for the most experienced of agents, is the tendency for agents to *Show and Tell* and not *Show and Sell*. There just doesn't appear to be the understanding of the difference between the two approaches. Some agents rely on reading their features list from the brochure. Definitely a *Show and Tell* experience lacking any imagination. What a boring and unproductive experience for the prospective buyer. By reading the features list, does the agent really think the buyer will remember any of it? Will there be a test at the end of the visit?

For those agents that do demonstrate their product, the experience also tends to fall into the *Show and Tell* category. I just wish it were as funny as Art Linkletter's kids. So many agents feel it is just mandatory to overwhelm prospective buyers with a plethora of product information. They just drone on and on. Here's the kitchen, the living room, the fireplace is included, the French doors are an option.... Sound



Mary LeBlanc, President
LEBLANC & ASSOCIATES

familiar? As I listen to the audio tapes or view videos of the agent, I just feel the need to shout at them to take a time out! My eyes glaze over listening to their lackluster delivery of information overload. And I have been in this business a very long time. Can you imagine how a prospective buyer feels who only goes through the process 2-3 times in their life?

So what is the difference between *Show and Tell* and *Show and Sell*? Preparation. Sales agents who think they can wing an effective sales presentation are sadly mistaken. To effectively sell their product and community, agents must have an organized and focused sales presentation. By building trust and rapport, the agent will be able to then conduct an effective discovery and assessment process. Who am I selling to? What does this person/family need in a home? What is their lifestyle? What is of most importance to them in a home? With this information the sales agent then can get beyond the 'tell' aspect and transition into the *selling* of their product. If you know you have a buyer whose life revolves around the kitchen/family living area, then that is where you focus your sales presentation. Point out the wonderful features of your kitchen, and the sell the benefits as it applies to the information you have obtained in your discovery process. When

Continued on page three

Effective Sales Meetings

By Manny Schatz, MIRM

Home Front: Manny, many of us who have been through weekly sales meetings know how they can easily become tedious with little accomplished other than status updates. When you work with sales management teams, what do you suggest?

Manny Schatz: Leading sales meetings is one of the most challenging aspects of a sales manager's position. They require solid planning, good teaching skills and strong motivating practices. The sales manager must have the ability to motivate and involve those in attendance. It is critical to create an atmosphere in which success can occur.

HF: Could you define what you mean by a planned sales meeting?

MS: Many sales managers plan in advance an annual calendar of meeting topics and an intense but compact meeting agenda. Having a plan will allow a direction be set for the team and an opportunity to focus on specific areas that need attention.

HF: How long should sales meetings last before 'wasted time' kicks in?

MS: Effective meetings last between 60 to 90 minutes. It is estimated that 40% of time spent in meetings is wasted. An efficient meeting starts with an agenda distributed to all participants in advance. The agenda should be followed with no deviations.

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Kudos Korner

Kudos to the following agents who have demonstrated super star status from sales agent evaluations conducted by LeBlanc & Associates.

JEFF DIMM

Centex Homes

Jeff offered a textbook sales presentation. He controlled the direction of the encounter and in a conversational manner, he demonstrated perfect discovery and assessment skills. Jeff easily transitioned from his greeting to his closing without missing a beat.

SHARON TRUPIANO

Pacifica Companies

Sharon is a true sales professional. She demonstrates a caring attitude and controls the sales presentation from start to finish. She conducts an effective discovery process and presents her product to those discovered needs and preferences.

BRANDEN JORDAN

Team Builder

Branden offers his full attention to his buyer with a high level of personal service. He controls the sales process and not only demonstrates his product well, but skillfully summarizes the benefits of his product.

KEVIN DUNN

K. Hovnanian

Kevin is a confident sales professional. His relaxed nature and friendly demeanor makes it easy to work with him. He controls the direction of the sales encounter, demonstrates strong product knowledge, creates interest and desire in the homes and then asks for the sale.

SUSIE PURDY

Homebuilders Marketing

Susie demonstrated a fantastic sales presentation. She offers her full attention to the buyer, immediately places the buyer at ease and showed great skill at developing rapport. Her enthusiasm for her product was contagious. Susie showed skill at qualifying her buyer and assumed the sale.

MICHAEL LUCIANO

Brehm Communities

Mike offers an informative and thoughtful sales presentation. He manages a busy sales office well and uses solid discovery and needs assessment questions. His sense of humor is used wisely.

Special Kudos from our VIDEO PROFILE SERIES

Each of the following agents demonstrated superior selling skills.

WCI Communities

PATRICIA AGRANOFF

JOE ANASTASI

SHARON MAZZA FINK

Richmond American

SARAH SAMMARTANO

DEBI BAKER

K. Hovnanian

BOB COSCARELLI

CANDICE MEREDITH

D. R. Horton

JEFF HARGREAVES

Jackson Pendo

MARTHA HALDA

Congratulations to all!

“Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.”

—THOMAS EDISON

Holiday Schedule

LeBlanc & Associates wishes all of you the happiest of holidays. Please note our office will be closed from December 25 through January 1 so our staff may enjoy the holiday season with their families. We will be open for business again on Tuesday, January 1, 2007.

May the coming year bring greatness to your sales staff and a year of turn-around growth in sales.

A Very Merry Christmas and a most Prosperous New Year to all!

Mary



Effective Sales Meetings . . . Continued from page one

HF: Sales people are known to deviate. How do you corral their attention?

MS: Sales agents are very proficient at digressing. Diverting attention away from the agenda reduces the amount of time used to learn new sales techniques, discuss new direction and/or assign new tasks. It is the sales manager's responsibility to assure that their meetings are an extremely efficient use of everyone's time.

HF: What should be the goal of a sales meeting?

MS: The desired outcome of a sales meeting is to help the sales people focus on their responsibility of selling homes and servicing the home buyers. It is an opportunity to provide recognition for noteworthy accomplishments, present achievement awards and share success stories.

HF: Are there any other areas that could be included in a sales meeting?

MS: Sales meetings can serve to enhance cooperation among the sales team, sales management, marketing, and at times construction. Construction can keep the sales team abreast of new products or construction methods that will help sales professionals to be better informed. Together, the team can solve common challenges, share information and exchange views. We also suggest that at least once per month the owner, president or division manager of the company attend the sales meeting to personally deliver sales awards and show appreciation for special effort or outstanding performance.

HF: What do you recommend for the needed gathering of 'sales stats'?

MS: The assessment and management of sales traffic, etc. are most efficiently accomplished through focused meetings. These are one-on-one meetings between the sales manager and each sales professional.

HF: How does management maintain timely and effective communication?

MS: Every sales meeting should have some time devoted to making sure pertinent information about the company is shared. People need to feel a part of the bigger whole. The less they know, the less teamwork and esprit de corps you will have. Share information about the business plan, upcoming communities, how the company is doing, etc. Sharing the 'big picture' is a powerful motivational tool.

HF: Regarding training, what should sales managers consider for the overall program?

MS: Training can be led by sales managers, guests, individual sales professionals, through audio or video tapes, or an internet program. Training should be timely, specific, to the point, as well as professionally prepared, rehearsed and delivered. Any minimal time used for training at sales meetings should not replace regular, in-depth sales training sessions offered throughout the year. This training should be conducted by a trainer outside of the company who will bring a fresh perspective and positive outside influence.

HF: Finally, recognition. The sales personality requires the occasional 'Kudos.' What do you recommend?

MS: Recognition that enriches self-esteem is a very powerful motivator for most sales professionals. Use every opportunity to publicly praise the team and individual members. The adage of 'praise publicly and criticize privately' is also applicable to the sales meeting. Constructive criticism should be given in private, with a request for change or improvement.

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. ♥

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Front Porch... from page one

an agent lists features that *they* think are wonderful, they could very well be losing the attention of the buyer. Agents need to sell to the interests of *the buyer* and realize one size does not fit all. This is the personalization of the sales presentation.

It is also critical that the agent observe their buyers while demonstrating their homes to see where the buyer's eyes focus. Check with your buyer to see if that feature is one of interest to them or not. Then you can start selling the benefits of that feature. If it is not of interest, just mention it and move on.

***As with most things in life,
planning a course of action
is critical for our sales
professionals. Without a
structured sales presentation
the agent will stay in the
Show and Tell world . . .***

The agent must also consider their competition during their *Show and Sell* presentation. If all your competition has slab granite countertops as standard, then you don't want to over sell your slab granite countertops. It falls into the 'so what' category. However, if any of your competition offers tile countertops as standard, then you can sell against that dreaded grout factor. Not every buyer can go crazy at the design center, so any included feature that doesn't require more out of pocket expense for the buyer should be part of the discussion.

So as with most things in life, planning a course of action is critical for our sales professionals. Without a structured sales presentation the agent will stay in the *Show and Tell* world and not achieve the sales demanded in today's buyer's market.

And agents should not forget their humor. It goes a long way in the *Show and Sell* process since most buyers experience mostly very boring *telling* home tours. ♥