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## The Home Front

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*Serving You, The Nation's Builder Community*

# The Home Front

LEBLANC & ASSOCIATES

ISSUE 37 • SPRING 2007

## The Front Porch

With over 25 years in the new home building market, and 17 of those years evaluating sales professionals through audio and video mystery shop services, I have observed that some agents can be truly classified as sales professionals. The professional agents are totally focused and structured. Several are featured in each edition of our Kudos Korner. These agents demonstrate confidence in their selling ability. They understand it takes hard work to learn and incorporate the necessary skills to 'make it look easy'.

Other agents just don't get it and *think* selling is easy. They pass along from builder to builder and refuse to make any effort to learn the necessary skills to become a solid sales professional. These agents can pass along in an order-taking market and make money. However, when the selling market returns, they are now handicapped in their ability to sell and move homes. They just meander through the motions and lack any focus or structure. Their mindset? If the prospective buyer likes it, they will buy it. My job is to do the paperwork. How shortsighted that mindset is.

The challenge for sales management is to determine who is representing you in your sales centers. The professionals or the 'pass alongs'. One obvious way to assess who you have is through the evaluation, i.e. secret shopping, process. Management must also be constantly monitoring their agents by being onsite to observe and train their agents. Outside trainers are also a critical element to the process.

Incorporating sales concepts from other industries is also good for our business. I was reading a column a while back by a sales trainer, Erin Flynn, from the retail business. His column stated that selling is



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akin to being a doctor. A doctor asks, "Where does it hurt?" This mindset is needed to proactively see how new home agents can help our prospective buyers. Flynn also states that the customer always gives you the road map to success. This means *listening* to your customer. What a novel concept.

Another trainer, Bob Janet, wrote, "Don't sell me a refrigerator. Sell me the solution to keeping my food cold." How does that translate to our buyers? How about, 'Don't sell me a unit. Sell me a home that meets our family's needs.' Janet states that customers don't want to be sold. Therefore we need to stop selling and start solving the customer's problems, needs and wants. So new home sales agents must insure their homes and communities will be a match for their prospective buyers. Where have you been looking? How long? What hasn't met your needs so far? Again, the proactive process of questioning and listening.

Some seasoned agents are whiz kids when it comes to offering community and product information. They do know their stuff. But

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## It's Video, Not Voodoo

By Dave Harding

To some, the rumor of another round of "shopping" sends shivers of fear. To others, it is a non-event. Both are inappropriate. The worriers should be impressed that their builder/client/manager is investing in one more tool to add to overall success. Those that "knew it was a shopper" and therefore saved their best work for a real buyer, missed an opportunity to build some skills ... and to SHOW their best work to whomever ordered the report. And perhaps others will see these skills.

Even in 2007, there are some who do not know the rule that "We shop to train, not to fire." If Tiger Woods KNOWS he is in a practice round, does he save his best work? Does A-Rod only swing at perfect pitches when he is training? ANY opportunity to train is a good one. Most sales professionals CANNOT tell if a prospect is "only" a video shopper. Why not treat every prospect like they ARE ... and show our best work? The worst that may happen is that the guest was a real buyer ... and they bought because of great service.

There are some jurisdictions that prohibit recorded shopping of competitors without prior approval, so check your local requirements. However, even a non-recorded report is EXTREMELY valuable.

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*It's Video, Not Voodoo . . .* Continued from page one**What are the uses of video shopping?**

- Training our own team (Not just the professional who is shopped. *See below.*)
- Evaluating the competitors' sales PRESENTATION . . . (i.e. NOT only the sales professionals' skills. *See below.*) . . . to see how we compare in a buyer's eyes.
- To see how we are being marginalized, if at all, by the competitors.
- To discover if they have any current specials, incentives, problems, etc.
- And to investigate potential new hires AT COMPETITORS' OFFICES.

**Team Building**

We once edited several video shops of our entire sales crew. We diced and spliced, kept several humorous events, a few tragic errors and some stellar sales skills. We then brought in all the sales team . . . and some other senior managers for an evening of humor, out-takes, and celebration. And some lessons for all to see. Non-sales people could see how the sales professionals practice their craft. Sales people could lessen the fear they had built regarding shopping. And we could all do some more bonding.

**What are the goals of video shopping?**

Video shopping takes a snapshot of the entire sales presentation. It is NOT limited to the sales professional. But it will be an objective record of his/her body language, smiles, and generally his/her professional APPEARANCE. It may show *orderliness* of the sales office, *cleanliness* of the models and even disclose *design* flaws. It can witness *merchandising* that conflicts with the overall sales presentation. It will help discover that the models are overcrowded, dark, or that they are perfectly in synch with a strong sales program. It will help see if all models are merchandised to a SINGLE buyer profile and thus limiting to the sales professional.

It allows for a better record of *more points of "touching"* the prospect. Rather than rely

on the shopper's evaluation of a friendly demeanor and a successful overcoming of a challenging site condition, the visual impact is stronger. It discloses "unconscious" *gestures*, the effect of distractions and, be a better-quality training tool.

It can be used, with humor, as a training aid to sales professionals and managers other than the ones directly involved. Unlike a written only, or even an audio-only, the video report can "frame" the engagement to be useful in other divisions, for other sales professionals in the same division, or even, with permission, in industry-wide sessions.

Therefore, its additional value is FAR greater than the marginal cost increase from a written-only, or an audio-only report. It provides an experience that is similar to what the real prospects receive. After all, they typically do experience the senses of HEAR, SEE, FEEL, SMELL. Until we get to "smellivision" this is the closest to what the customers experience at our sales facilities.

**From the client side . . . How to maximize the value of a video shop.****Do's and Don'ts**

- DO schedule at least two shops of the same professionals at the same time.
- DO separate them by at least a month.
- DO use the difference between the two to measure your training.
- DO use one to see if you got a "migraine day" or a "lottery day" or consistency.
- DO let the shopping service know of special

worries . . . in the community, the competitors, the sales objections, etc.

- DO give as much detail as possible regarding demographics, psychographics, etc.
- DON'T set up ANYONE, including the client, for failure.
- DON'T send a male "one legged up" where there are single females on site, especially if it is a high crime area or when the office is far from production.
- DON'T send shoppers with "rock star rings and blings" to an entry level community;
- DO allow the shopper to discover overcoming-objection skills. GIVE THEM THE MAIN OBJECTIONS.
- DO let the shopping service KNOW if there's a last minute change in site staffing, . The replacement staff may not be knowledgeable about the community . . . or they may recognize the shopper from another site visit elsewhere.
- DO engage the shopping service to receive and evaluate the follow-up programs.
- DO watch the video yourself
- DON'T rely on the evaluator's score alone.

*Dave Harding is President of Ultimate New Homes Sales & Marketing based in Los Angeles. For over 20 years, his practice locations have included California, Washington, Arizona, Nevada and Canada. He is the 2004 NAHB Sales Manager of the Year. His articles have been published in The Journal of the Community Associations Institute, The Home Front, Builder and Developer Magazine, Big Builder Magazine, Builder Magazine and Master Builder Magazine. In 2004, he won the NAHB Design Center of the Year for the States of California, Nevada and Hawaii, prior to his Design Studio being open a full year. Dave is Past President of the Los Angeles-Ventura Sales & Marketing Council and a frequent and popular instructor to the profession in the United States and Canada. He can be reached at [dgh@unbs.com](mailto:dgh@unbs.com) or 310. 463. 0454. ♥*

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**Kudos Korner**

**This past quarter was a welcome relief for our Kudos Korner. There were so many superstars that it was hard to select which agents to include. So from both our Audio and Video Profile series, Kudos to the following:**

**MAGGIE DIFUNTORUM**

*Dunmore Homes*

Seldom do we find an agent scoring 100%. Maggie did! Maggie is an outstanding sales agent who demonstrated a structured and comprehensive sales presentation which was delivered in a relaxed, non-scripted manner.

**RITA DONATO**

*Dunmore Homes*

Rita is another exceptional agent who scored 100! Rita demonstrated a logical, thorough, informative and personal sales presentation. She controlled the flow and direction of the information from the start.

**RAQUEL MARCHANT**

*K. Hovnanian*

Raquel's near perfect 99% score reflected her professionalism in an informed, attentive and comprehensive sales presentation.

**BRIAN TAYLOR**

*Fieldstone Homes*

With a score of 98%, Brian provided a structured presentation. He immediately took control of the sales process, offered a high level of service and frequently engaged the buyer to visualize her family in the home.

**LOUIS MARTINEZ**

*Longford Homes*

Louis proved to be a knowledgeable sales professional who listens attentively and offers his buyer a thorough presentation.

**MICHELLE MAGNO**

*IntraCorp*

Michelle demonstrated her ability to apply newly learned sales skills from her recent training. She was professional, attentive and offered a comprehensive sales presentation.

**NANCY GRIGAS**

*Richmond American Homes*

Nancy excelled at building value in her homes, proudly speaking of her company, creating urgency and of utmost importance, creating a reason to buy. Nancy demonstrated superior closing skills.

**JILL STAYBOLDT**

*Cambria Homes*

Jill demonstrated solid product and community knowledge, pride in her builder and provided her buyer with a personalized sales presentation. Her buyer left the community with all the tools needed to make an informed purchase decision.

**TARA JACOBI**

*Arbor Custom Homes*

Tara provided her buyer with an exemplary sales presentation. Tara is skilled and demonstrated her product knowledge creating confidence for the buyer.

**JENNA KEIDERLING**

*Arbor Custom Homes*

Jenna's easy going, open, and enthusiastic demeanor creates the perfect sales environment for her buyers. She creates excitement, urgency and a reason to buy.

**JOHN PLITT**

*Homes By Towne*

John's enthusiasm for his product and community were contagious. Uncovering the specific needs of his buyer, he then personalized his presentation to those needs. John offered his buyer his full attention, listened well and answered questions well.

**Finally, a summary Kudos to the following agents demonstrating excellence in sales:**

*Lucas and Mercier*  
**MARCIA THORNE**

*Longford Homes*  
**ERIC TUNNELL**

*Arbor Custom Homes*  
**JOE BUFFINGTON**

*Capital Pacific Homes*  
**STEVEN OSBORNE**

**Congratulations to all!**

**Front Porch . . .** from page one

many lack the ability to *listen* to their prospective buyers. They don't listen because they don't question. They don't question because they are too busy talking and downloading information. The end result, they are not persuasive and the buyer stops listening. Over the years I have observed the true sales professionals astutely incorporate the delivery of information with effective discovery and assessment questions. They wisely use casual conversation to allow the buyer to provide essential information. They periodi-

**Over the years I have observed the true sales professionals astutely incorporate the delivery of information with effective discovery and assessment questions.**

cally check with their buyers to test their interest and commitment level. Once they obtain that information, they then know how to incorporate it into a personalized sales presentation to match their product to the buyer's specific needs and desires. They then became the 'doctor' who can solve the 'hurt'.

To sales management, provide the necessary tools for your agents to succeed. You must work with your sales team so the agents know how to build a sales presentation that *creates* needs rather than just covering the standard needs analysis. They need to design a sales presentation that *anticipates* objections and overcomes them *before* they become reasons not to buy. So management, build a good sales team. Continually evaluate your agents. Reward the good ones and encourage the weaker ones to become better. In the end, your whole team will 'make it look easy'. ♥