

SHIFT TACTIC 8: SELLER STAGING STRATEGIES

STAND OUT FROM THE COMPETITION



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Perspective

The Issue

As we saw in *SHIFT TACTIC 7: Seller Pricing Strategies* there are three keys to getting a home sold—location, pricing, and condition. Given that you have no control over the location of your listings, your job as an agent is to deliver the one-two punch to get your listing sold for the most money in the shortest time possible.

- Price the home correctly
- Stage it effectively

A home can be sold in virtually any condition if the seller isn't concerned about price. But of course most people want the best price—and that's why sellers will go to the effort and expense of staging their homes for sale. In a shifted market, staging is more important than ever. In a competitive market, your seller's home must stand out!

1. Staging is a marketing tool that turns a home into a saleable product that will sell faster and for more money.
2. Stripped of the reality of daily life, the homes that are in the best condition create a fantasy lifestyle for your buyer—something they want to purchase.
3. Sellers either have to offer more for the same price as the competition or offer the same quality at a lower price. Staging creates value.

"Pricing and staging are the issues of the day. It's like a price war and a beauty pageant."

Terry Moerler
Westlake Village, California

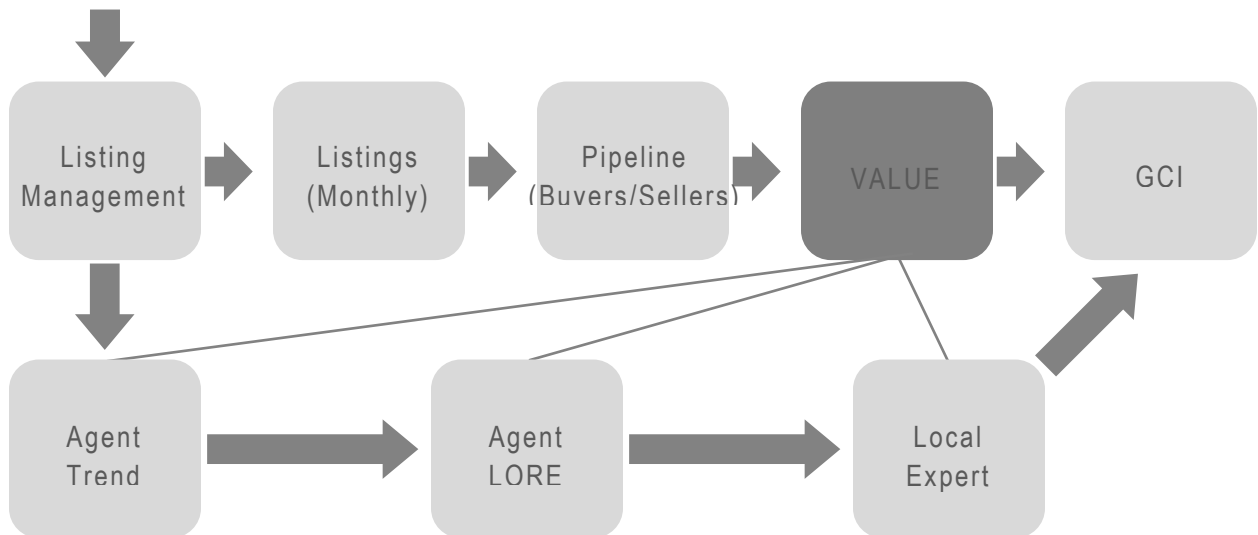
The Solution

Staging is your ticket to getting your listings sold. It is money that your sellers don't always get back, but can mean the difference between months of holding costs and mortgage payments or a quick sale. In fact, the newspaper *USA Today* cited a study which revealed that staged listings sold almost twice as fast as non-staged houses, and on average, at substantially higher prices.

- Buyers always gravitate to listings that look good and are in move-in condition. Staging a listing for sale in an area where the concept hasn't caught on will give sellers an advantage, particularly if there are many unsold listings similar to theirs on the market.
- Real estate agents like great-looking homes because they are easier to sell. When inventory is high, to a great extent your job as an agent is to get the other agents to see your listing. An attractive listing will be shown more often, meaning more market exposure—critical for a quick and profitable home sale.
- In a shifted market buyers are looking for value—they are pickier than when home prices are rising quickly. When appreciation has gone down or flat, they become wary about paying huge prices regardless of the condition of the property. They have to perceive the house is worth the price.
- Staging enhances your reputation as an agent. If your yard sign, with your name on it, is in front of a house, you want that house to represent your standards to other buyers and agents who are previewing your home.

Career Growth Initiative Power Tools:

The tools of the Career Growth Initiative are a synergistic system that fuel the Four Conversations with evidence.



Vision Tools

- **Listing Management:** A yearly plan for profitability through growth in market share.
- **Listings (Monthly):** Monthly tracking with adjustments to help you achieve your yearly goal.
- **Pipeline (Buyers/Sellers):** Identify on a daily basis whether your activities will turn your goals into reality.

Value and Validity Tools

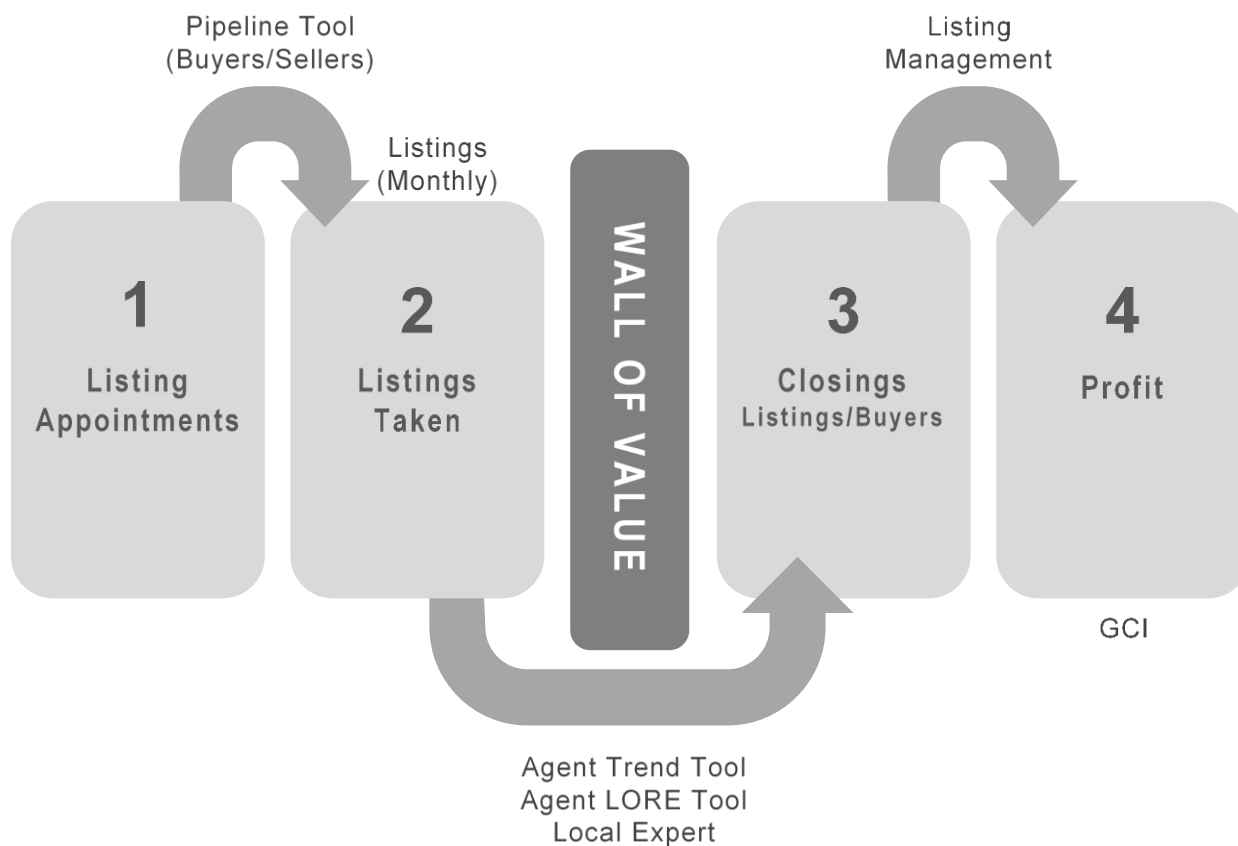
- **Agent Trend:** Report that tracks your growth in market share and critical levers in your business to assess performance and opportunities.
- **Agent Language of Real Estate (LORE):** Provides evidence of your value by comparing the growth of your business to that of your board, your subdivision, your Market Center, your Region, etc.
- **Local Expert:** The story of your expertise to underscore your validity to clients.

Thriving Tools

- **GCI:** Track your GCI against your expenses to identify your Break-even Day.

The Wall of Value

When you are able to quantify and communicate the benefits of the value you deliver, you will create a **Wall of Value** in your business that attracts listings and creates closings.



Communicate Value

Look for ways to share your Wall of Value to grow your business:

- Listing and Pre-Listing Presentations
- Buyer Consultations
- Marketing materials
- Conversations with allied resources

For more, go to the Career Growth Initiative page on [KWConnect.com](https://www.kwconnect.com)

Getting the Most Out of This Experience

There are often three types of people in a typical training class. Which one are you?

| The Prisoner | The Vacationer | The Explorer |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Has to be there, doesn't want to be there, and doesn't know why they're there.</i> | <i>A day in training is better than a day on the job.</i> | <i>Excited and curious about the new knowledge, skills, and tools they will discover in class.</i> |
| Doesn't engage | Spends as much time chatting as listening | Listens attentively, then participates fully in discussions and exercises |
| Spends class time catching up on their emails | There to have fun—distracts the class with irrelevant comments | Asks meaningful questions and contributes compelling aha's |
| Escapes by spending time in the hall on their phone | Returns late from break and lunch | Arrives to class on time and returns promptly from breaks |
| Holds on to limiting beliefs | Not purposeful in their learning goals | Adopts a posture of acceptance |
| Multi-tasks on their computer by working on side projects | OMG! Spends the day on their smartphone, texting and checking Facebook | Takes notes in their manual for future reference |
| Picks fights with trainer or other participants if they don't agree | Isn't paying attention | Respects the different learning styles and opinions of others |

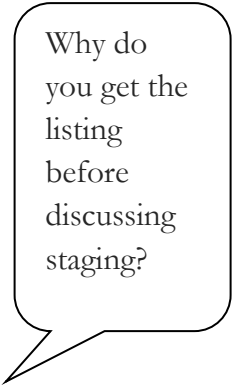
Notes

Convincing Your Sellers to Stage

Agents must have the skill to evaluate homes and see where staging can make a difference, the ability to explain this effectively, and the tact to diplomatically suggest the right staging. Your ability to get people to stage the home is going to have a direct impact on whether or not the home sells, how quickly it sells, and at what price it sells.

First Things First: Get the Listing

Staging can be a sensitive topic—don't risk losing customers over what they may perceive to be unnecessary, or worse, insulting recommendations. Don't discuss staging in detail until you have a signed listing contract.



Why do you get the listing before discussing staging?

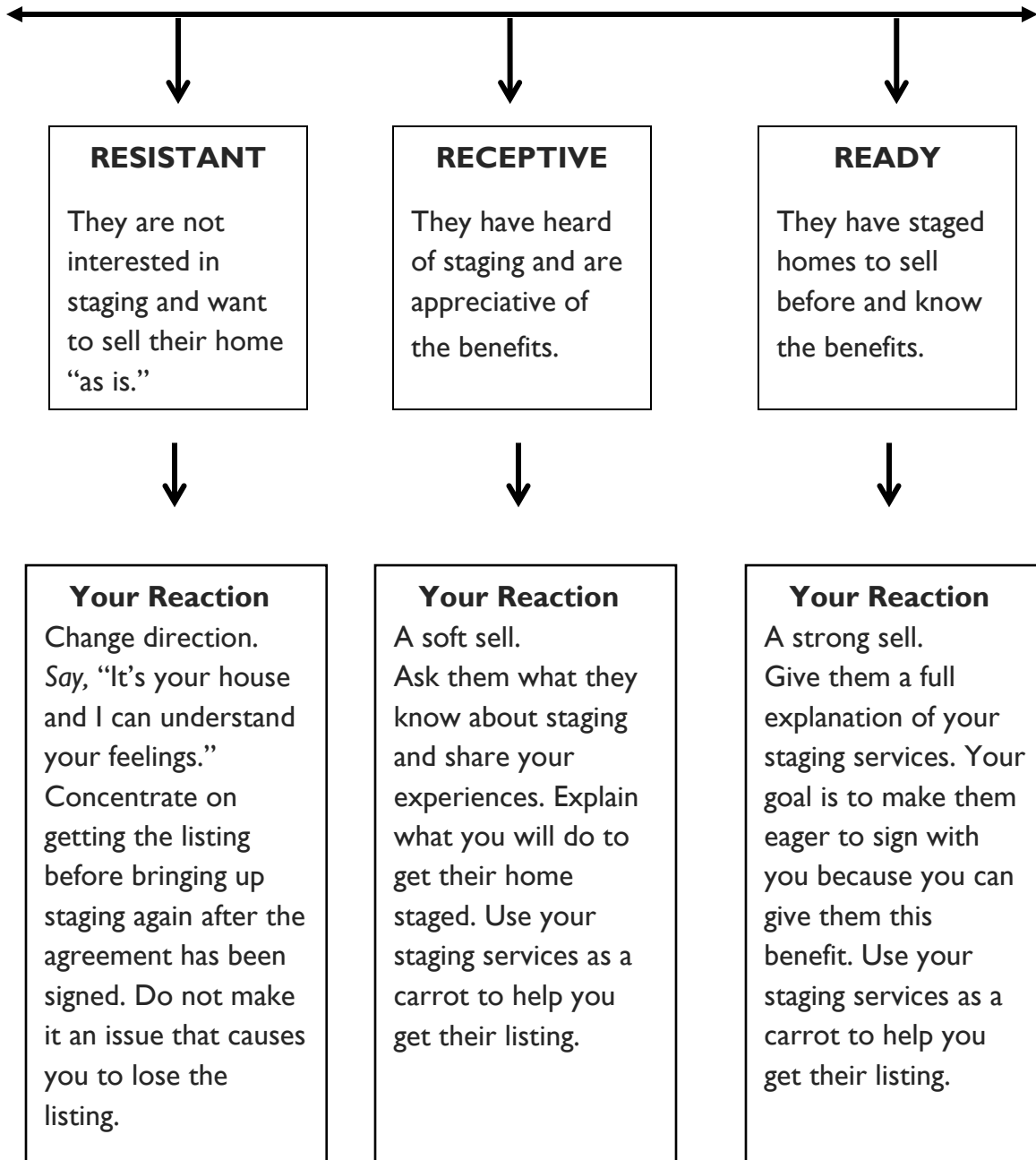
When Gary Gentry, a top-producing agent in Austin, Texas, presents his Comparative Market Analysis (CMA), it states that the price he recommends to the home owner is based on the house being “staged and in pristine condition.” “I tell them that it doesn’t matter to me if they want to sell their home in as-is or staged condition, since that is their decision. I will help them get it sold either way; however the condition will affect what the market will pay for the house and how long it will take to sell it. If sellers want to get the price I originally gave them, they will have to stage the home. If they balk at staging, I will redo the CMA with a new listing price recommendation, and they usually don’t like that number. This is why I always get the listing before discussing staging! Ultimately, almost everyone agrees to the staging and by closing, they have become raving fans of the results.”

Tips for Discussing Staging

Without bringing up any specifics about their home before they have signed the listing agreement, explain to your sellers that if they retain your services as their listing agent, the staging of their home is a service that you will offer to get it sold for the best possible price in the shortest time possible.

- Inform sellers that the return on investment will be higher with staging, and you will only recommend changes that promise a return for their time, effort, and money.
- Give real examples of staged properties in their area that sold for more money or in a shorter time than unstaged properties.
- Gauge their reactions and adjust your presentation accordingly.

Seller's Level of Interest in Staging



Explain Staging

If a home is not staged on the front end, you can never go back and do it on the back end. It will be too late—the buyers who snubbed or rejected the house because it was cluttered or in bad repair will never come back, and your sellers will blame *you* because you didn't tell them what needed to be done up front.

Remember, staging is being done for their benefit—to get their house sold quickly and at the best possible price. To help with their mindset, you will want to:

- Talk about what staging is.
- Give printed information from online resources. For a comprehensive list of informative articles, go to the National Association of Realtors site, www.realtor.org, and type “staging” into their search box.
- Give a checklist for the process. *Getting Your Home in Top Selling Condition* from the Toolkit in the KWU course IGNITE is an excellent resource.

TIP

Honesty pays off. Whether or not your sellers decide to stage, be up front anyway about what needs to be done. Feedback from buyers will confirm that your staging suggestions were correct – and the focus of why the house hasn't been sold will be on the sellers, not on you.

The Goals of Staging

Make sure your sellers clearly understand what the staging process is, and why it is so important. Staging starts with decluttering and depersonalizing, and can include reorganizing and neutralizing furnishings or even repurposing and redesigning rooms—all to allow buyers to easily picture living in the house.

- **Improve the overall condition**—cleaning, organizing, and enhancing the house to ensure a faster, more profitable sale.
- **Minimize clutter and pack up personal belongings** to make the experience about the buyers. They need to see past the life of the home's occupants and visualize how they would live in the house.
- **Create a vision for buyers** so they do not have to use their imaginations to visualize themselves in the house. Buying a house is partly an emotional decision because people are also buying a lifestyle. By making a positive impact on how they *feel* in the home, sellers can make a significant difference in how much it sells for and the number of offers they receive.



Why do you stage your listings?

Cesi Pagano, leader of the Cesi Pagano Team, in Mission Viejo, California, understood the importance of staging when she worked for builders, and learned how they furnished and staged their homes. Now, she brings most of the homes she lists up to model home standards. “Staging our homes has helped us have a better presentation in our marketplace, regardless of the market. It’s about the emotional appeal of the house. People fall in love with the whole package—with what the home represents for them psychologically and emotionally.”

Remember that you have a window of opportunity when the property is new on the market. Staging can help make a great first impression.

Take a Consultative Approach

Rather than telling your sellers what they need to do, take a consultative approach by putting the information in front of the seller and letting them decide. In this way, the information becomes a third-party entity—a demonstration of what needs to be done rather than a lecture. Try the following simple techniques.

A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

Take two pictures—one cluttered and one uncluttered—in each of these areas

- Family Room
- Kitchen
- Master Bedroom
- A Closet
- Yard

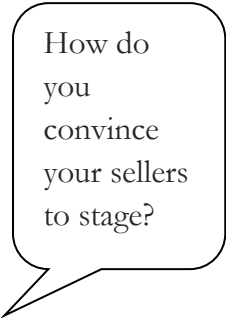
Lay out the pictures in pairs on the table in front of you, and use this script:

SCRIPT:

Here are some examples of what I'm talking about in terms of staging. Let me ask you a question. All things considered equal, which home do you think will catch the buyer's attention? *Let them decide. They will almost always choose the uncluttered rooms.* "You know, it's interesting, you have in every case picked the home that is staged properly. So I assume you are saying you want to stage yours that way?"

Money Talks

What are the costs of not staging? If sellers resist making changes, visually give them a financial demonstration of how much each of the changes they are refusing to make could cost them.



How do you convince your sellers to stage?

Kiersty Lombar, an agent in Austin, Texas, uses Post-it notes to put a price tag on how much worn or outdated features are going to “cost” the sellers if they are not replaced or removed. “I know that buyers use home improvements as an excuse to negotiate. An old refrigerator is not expensive to replace, but if a buyer uses it as a negotiating point, it may end up costing the sellers several thousand dollars. That’s the number I will write on the Post-it note and stick on the fridge.”

Use Scripts and Dialogues

Agents must have scripts and dialogues at the ready during the explanation process to counter any objections or clarify any points the seller may bring up. Sellers’ agents will hear many of the same objections again and again:

SCRIPT:

Can’t we sell the house “as is”?

AGENT: Yes, you could. May I tell you what buyers say every time they see a home improvement concession? “Fixing up a house is too much hassle! Can you show me another one?”

AGENT: Yes, you could, and buyers often use outstanding repairs to negotiate a lower price. If they see a house that needs painting, they may want to drop the price by thousands of dollars. Paint is worth 20 dollars in the gallon, and thousands on the wall. Would you rather pay a couple hundred dollars up front or deduct thousands from the sale price?

We're moving out, why should we spend any more money on this house?

AGENT: That's a valid question. We don't have to stage. What do you want to do—spend a little to get a lot, or just lower the price? You decide.

AGENT: Let's say there are three apples for sale and they are all the same. The owner went to the time and effort to shine one of them, but didn't bother with the other two. Which apple do you think people will buy?

Set Expectations

To be smart sellers, your customers have to start thinking like buyers, and see their home through a buyer's eyes—because the minute they decide to sell, it is not their home any longer, it is someone else's.

“When getting ready to sell a home, think about the way the buyer wants it to look, not how the owner likes it to look.”

Gary Keller

Be Diplomatic

Tact is required when suggesting staging, as some sellers may believe that you are criticizing their taste or belongings.

TRUTH

Staging ≠ Decorating or Design

Staging is not about anyone's individual taste; it is about *everyone's taste*—turning a **home** that reflects a homeowner's personality and style into a depersonalized **house** that will appeal to the broadest market segment as possible.

See with Buyer's Eyes



Suggest that your sellers

- **Go to open houses** to see what their competition is.
- **Visit model homes** to learn how builders present fantasy lifestyles rather than everyday reality.
- **Read decorating and home magazines** to identify popular trends.
- **Watch HGTV shows on selling and staging.**

Sharing your agent-branded KW App?



1. Get the Keller Williams Real Estate app from Apple App Store or Google Play Store.
2. In the app, use “Agent Search” to find and select your name.
3. Toggle “Make this my agent” button to “Yes”
4. Use “Share App” to share with your contacts!

Are you skilled at convincing your sellers to stage?

(Areas to consider: discussing staging, explaining staging, taking a consultative approach, scripts, setting expectations)

| Area of Improvement | Action to Take |
|---------------------|----------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |

**Find More on
KWConnect.com**

Options for the Staging Consultation

As staging has become more and more commonplace, there are several options to choose from when deciding who should do the staging consultation.

Do It Yourself

Depending on your talents, interests, and workload, you may decide to do the staging consultation yourself. Good stagers are detail oriented, have a good eye, and are tactful and diplomatic communicators. Consideration of these pros and cons will help you decide.

| Pros | Cons |
|---|--|
| You will spend more time with your sellers, enabling you to build your relationship | You can become the bad guy |
| There is no monetary expense | It may cost you more in time (which you could spend lead generating) than it would to pay for a consultation |
| Control over the finished product | You may not have the skills or resources to stage different types of homes |



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Tips for Doing It Yourself

- Study the principles of staging. There is an abundance of online resources, as well as courses to get professional designation. Contact www.stagedhomes.com, www.IAHSP.com, or www.qcdesignschool.com to learn about professional accreditation programs. For general information and a series of informative articles all gathered in one location, go to the National Association of Realtors site, www.realtor.org, and type “staging” into their search box. Good reference books include *Dress Your House for Success*, by Martha Webb, and *Home Staging: The Winning Way to Sell Your House for More Money*, by Barb Schwarz.
- Prepare checklists. You can use the checklists in the final chapter of this session, or buy them from third-party providers. With time and experience you will develop your own checklists that reflect your personal standards.
- Have a network of professionals available for the big jobs such as painting, carpet cleaning, and landscaping. Establish your standards, work out fair prices that are a win-win for both the vendor and your customers, and have them provide a free estimate for each job.

TIP

Encourage sellers to use your subcontractors. Great subcontractors will perform to your standards and know your drill – they’ll do precisely what is asked of them, and go the extra mile where and when necessary.

Train Your Employees

If you have a team, you may want to consider delegating the role of stager, while still keeping it as an in-house service. Consideration of these pros and cons will help you decide.

| Pros | Cons |
|---|--|
| You can train them to your standards and have control over the finished product | Depending on their role on the team, it may cost you more in time than to pay a consultant |
| Sellers appreciate a specialized consultant | They may not have the skills to stage different types of homes |
| You don't deliver the bad news | May be difficult for team member to deliver bad news |

Tips for Training Your Employees

- Have them shadow you on both the listing presentation and the staging process for a number of months.
- Supply them with your checklists and reading materials.
- Explain all your procedures.
- Hold them accountable for results—follow up on their work by asking your sellers to evaluate the service they received.

Use Professionals

As staging has become more commonplace, professional companies with accredited stagers now offer staging services on a consultative basis. Check www.stagedhomes.com or www.qcdesignschool.com to find accredited professionals in your area. Consideration of these pros and cons will help you decide.

| Pros | Cons |
|--|--|
| Professionals deliver top-notch quality | You relinquish part of your perceived value in the eyes of your seller |
| You don't deliver the bad news | Cover their fees is an additional expense |
| Homeowners react more quickly when a professional delivers the news than when a real estate agent does | You have no direct control over the finished product |
| They have their own props and storage facilities – no overhead costs for you | If the professional has a negative interaction with the client, it reflects on you |

Tips for Hiring a Professional

- Before choosing a stager to work with, learn about their reputation. Ask for recommendations and talk with people who have worked with them before.
- Visit a listing currently on the market that was staged by someone you're considering working with.
- Go over your expectations and the standards you expect them to achieve and maintain.
- Professional, third-party stagers should be hired to do an hour of staging consultation after the listing agreement has been signed.

- Provide the consultation as a free service to the seller. Consultants who are confident in your ability to close may defer payment until closing.
- Maximize your relationship with your home stager by putting them in touch with every seller you contract with. The key lies in getting the staging professional inside the home to offer their recommendations. It is a win-win situation—if the staging consultant makes significant recommendations and the seller wants to implement them, the seller can retain the services of the stager beyond the front- end consultation and cover that cost themselves.



Who is going to do the staging consultation? Circle one:

YOU

AN EMPLOYEE

A PROFESSIONAL

What are you going to do to either prepare yourself or your stager to work at a high level?

Notes

Evaluate the House

Now that your sellers have agreed to stage their home, either you or your stager needs to evaluate the property and make recommendations to the seller. (For the sake of convenience, we will refer to *you* the agent as the stager from now on, but please note these recommendations apply to a professional stager or assistant if you have hired one.)

Review the Property

Make the appointment to go through the home as soon as possible after the listing agreement has been signed. Ideally, review the property when the sellers are not at home—the evaluation will go more quickly and you will be more focused if the seller is not following you around.

TIP

Your sellers will be more receptive to your recommendations if you develop their mindset during the process. Between making the appointment and sending them your recommendations, ask your sellers to watch HGTV's Design to Sell and Curb Appeal, or give them a commercially made DVD that explains staging and their role in it as the homeowners.

Walk through the house and make written notes on the condition and what may need to be changed or updated.

- Start by evaluating the curb appeal. Note any maintenance or landscaping issues.
- Inside the home, look at the layout and determine where extra furnishings may be distributed throughout the house.
- Note rooms that are painted bright colors or have strong wallpaper that won't have mass appeal.
- Note clutter, imbalance, and light.
- Check flooring for wear or bad color/pattern.
- Check ceilings, baseboards, windows, and doors for cracks.

Hold Your Sellers Accountable

Even if your sellers agree to all your suggestions, there is always a risk that they will not complete everything that needs to be done. Once they have received their checklists and calendar of the staging requirements, let them know that you will only schedule the virtual tour, put a sign in the yard, and enter the house in the MLS once everything has been completed. Gail Crann, from Austin, Texas, never shows a house before it has been completely staged. "Once a buyer has seen a house that is not ready, I can never get them back in to see it again."

Make Your Recommendations

Once you have evaluated the house, email the recommendations to the sellers within twenty-four hours. You want to ease the process as much as possible, so along with your recommendations, also supply:

- **A calendar.** Staging can be a lot of work, and sellers need to know how much time they will need to get the work done. As a rule of thumb, allow two days for cleaning, two days for decluttering, four days for repairs, and one day for setting the stage. Remember, however, that most people work and will only have time to do these jobs over the weekend—it may take several weeks before the house is fully prepared. Give them a realistic time frame.
- **A list of your subcontractors.** Depending on the size of the job, their budget, and their time constraints, your sellers may be more than happy to have professionals do the job. Include their contact info.

If sellers have any questions, they can call for clarification. Big jobs may require another face-to-face consultation.

TIP

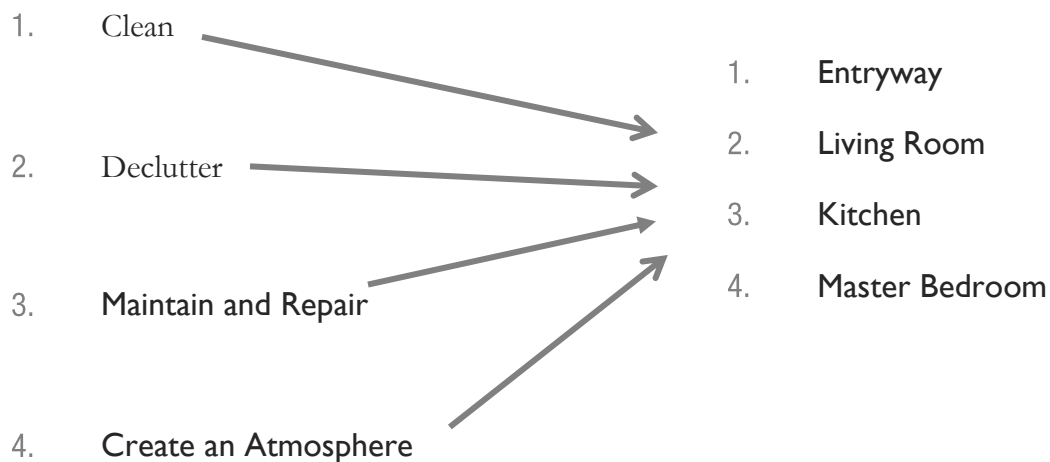
To encourage your sellers to get their homes staged as soon as possible, tell them that the property cannot be sold until it has been completely staged to your satisfaction. To formalize this decision, take your listing agreement and, in the section title “Special Provisions,: leave the date blank and write this phrase: “This listing will go on the market and in the MLS on the date the agent determines the house is read..”

Notes

Implementation

Staging is detail-oriented work that falls into four main categories, and is generally concentrated in four main areas of the house—although no room in the house should go untouched.

| Your Buzzwords |
|----------------------------------|
| Lighter, Brighter, More Spacious |



"One of the key skills of a successful real estate agent is mastering the basics of how homes should be presented and staged properly."

Gary Keller

Overall Considerations

Levels of Staging

Different homes will require different levels of service. While there are elements of staging such as cleaning and decluttering which are applicable to every property, some houses will require more time, effort, and expense than others. The level of staging will depend on the value of the house, the size, and how it compares to similar properties on the market.

| Simple | Extensive |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Remove Clutter | Significant home repair |
| Clean | New flooring and window treatments |
| Paint | Upgraded kitchen features |
| Rearrange furniture to create space and flow | Rented furniture and plants |

Pets and Children

The whole family—including Spot and Fluffy!—are part of the staging process.

Pets

Don't let pets scare off prospective buyers by their presence or smell.

- Take the dog to a “dog salon” so it smells clean and fresh.
- Keep food areas and litter boxes fastidiously clean.
- For open houses and showing appointments, put the dog in doggy day care.
- Small dogs can be crated, but only if they never bark.
- Cats should be left outside or crated indoors during showings or open houses.

Children

From toddlers to teens, everyone has to pitch in with the family's efforts to get the house ready.

- Small children need to select their three favorite toys and put the others in storage.
- Teens need to remove all personal photos and take down their posters.
- All children must keep their rooms tidy and help out in at least one area of the home.

Involve your children in the decision-making process by letting them select where they would like to help out in the house, and how they will keep their rooms clean—they will be more likely to get on board.

Make a Good First Impression

As the old saying goes, you only have one chance to make a good first impression. In home staging, this opportunity comes at the front door. As the buyers arrive, they are focused on the entrance, and as they stand there, waiting for someone to answer the door, or while the agent fumbles with the lockbox, they will be forming their first impressions of your seller's house. Pull out all the stops!

- Paint or replace the front door.
- Clean and polish the doorknob, or replace with a new one altogether.
- Polish or replace metal kickplate on door.
- Clean windows on door.
- Make sure the doorbell works.
- Clean and polish the street number, or replace with a new one altogether.
- Buy a new welcome mat.
- Put a seasonal wreath on the door.
- Buy some potted plants to place on either side of door.
- Repair any cracks in the paving on the steps.
- Keep the entrance swept and clean.

Decluttering and Cleaning

Decluttering and cleaning are the two most important steps in staging. By doing them first, you will create a clean palette against which you can make all your other improvements.

Step One: Declutter

Potential buyers react well to open spaces. There's nothing worse than walking into a house and becoming claustrophobic in a maze of furniture and clutter. Our clutter is part of our lives, but it works against sellers when they are trying to sell their house.

TIP

One hidden benefit to decluttering is that your sellers will be halfway done with their packing by the time they have finished!

Once your sellers have finished decluttering, they will be faced with a decision—what to do with all their belongings? There are two possible solutions.

1. Put everything in storage. The little money they spend on storing their belongings will be well worth it if they save on a month or two of mortgage payments.
2. Hold a garage sale. The money they make can go toward the improvements their house needs.

These solutions are not mutually exclusive—your sellers may decide to do both.

Your Decluttering Checklist

Use the following checklist when you are doing your evaluation of the property. Once you have checked off the items that need to be done, print up only those tasks your seller must execute on a fresh checklist you will give to them when you make your recommendations.

| DECLUTTERING | |
|--|--|
| OUTSIDE | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Clear the street in front of your house so it is free of debris from the corner to your house.<input type="checkbox"/> Mow the lawn. Re-sod as needed.<input type="checkbox"/> Weed yard and shrub areas.<input type="checkbox"/> Rake up leaves and twigs.<input type="checkbox"/> Remove any dead plants. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Remove any tools and gardening equipment.<input type="checkbox"/> Trim shrubbery, especially in front of windows.<input type="checkbox"/> Coil water hoses neatly.<input type="checkbox"/> Clear away bikes, toys, and extra cars from driveway and sidewalks. |

| DECLUTTERING | |
|--|--|
| INSIDE | |
| ENTRYWAY | KITCHEN |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Clear closet of extra coats and jackets; hang everything on wooden hangers, facing the same way. <input type="checkbox"/> If you collect mail on your hall table, store it elsewhere or gather it in an attractive basket or wooden box. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Clear off counters. Store small appliances, gadgets, pots, pans, and bowls. <input type="checkbox"/> Sort through cupboards, drawers, and cabinets. Store whatever you don't need. Face contents, leaving a small space to show rear wall and a small space on each shelf to show potential storage space. <input type="checkbox"/> Remove and consolidate extra items in refrigerator. |
| BATHROOMS | BEDROOMS |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Clear off counters and store all personal care products out of sight. <input type="checkbox"/> Sort through vanities, medicine cabinets, and linen closets and remove and consolidate extra items. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Sort through drawers, closets, and built-ins. Store whatever you don't need. Clean or paint interiors, clean and face contents. <input type="checkbox"/> Clear off dresser tops. Remove all knickknacks under 10 inches tall. <input type="checkbox"/> Remove 25 to 50 percent of all furniture to create space. Store if necessary. <input type="checkbox"/> Sort through children's play areas. Box extra toys and recycle or sell old ones. |
| LIVING/DINING ROOM | ATTIC/BASEMENT/GARAGE |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Remove all papers and magazines from coffee and end tables. Remove excess books from bookcases. <input type="checkbox"/> Remove 25 to 50 percent of all furniture to create space. Store if necessary. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Sort, box, and store tools, shop equipment, projects, and memorabilia. Do not block view of storage space. <input type="checkbox"/> Hang tools and sports and gardening equipment on the wall. |

Step 2: Clean

Cleanliness is essential to the home staging process, and goes beyond basic dusting and mopping. From the baseboards to the ceiling fans, and from behind the couch to inside the oven—everything must glow, shine, and be squeaky clean from top to bottom.

Buyers will notice, even if only subconsciously, that the house smells better and has a fresh feel to it.

TIP

Recommend that your sellers consider hiring a professional. Having someone come in and do a thorough, deep-cleaning after maintenance work and other big jobs like painting have been done will give them a clean canvas to start from. Then, all they have to do is a lighter cleaning for the showings.

Your Cleaning Checklist

Use this checklist when you are doing your evaluation of the property. Once you have checked off the items that need to be done, print up only those tasks your seller must execute on a fresh checklist you will give to them when you make your recommendations.

CLEANING**OUTSIDE**

- ☐ Sweep sidewalk and walkway completely clean, then hose down.
- ☐ Remove oil and other stains from driveway.
- ☐ Wash and wax any cars that sit in driveway.
- ☐ Free gutters of debris.
- ☐ Wash down siding and eaves.
- ☐ Clean outside of all windows, including garage windows and skylights.
- ☐ Dispose of any and all pet debris.

CLEANING**THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE**

- ☐ Clean or paint walls and ceilings.
- ☐ Launder curtains or drapes, replace if necessary.
- ☐ Clean inside of all windows, including garage windows and skylights.
- ☐ Wash and polish floors to a shine.
- ☐ Professionally clean carpets, replace if necessary.
- ☐ Clean woodwork and doors and polish stained woodwork with a wood feeding product.
- ☐ Polish doorknobs and light fixtures.
- ☐ Vacuum and dust.
- ☐ Clean or replace AC filters.

| CLEANING | |
|--|---|
| ENTRYWAY | BEDROOMS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clean or paint interior of closet. | <input type="checkbox"/> Launder or dry-clean bedspreads or comforters. |
| BATHROOMS | KITCHEN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Polish chrome. <input type="checkbox"/> Remove all rust stains. <input type="checkbox"/> Clean all mildew buildup. <input type="checkbox"/> Clean all tile grout. <input type="checkbox"/> Wash shower curtain, replace if necessary. <input type="checkbox"/> Clean shower doors, remove soap residue. <input type="checkbox"/> Add toilet bowl cleaner and sanitizer. | <input type="checkbox"/> Wipe down interiors and exteriors of all cupboards and drawers. Also wipe down small appliances stored inside. <input type="checkbox"/> Wipe down inside and outside of refrigerator. <input type="checkbox"/> Clean stove and oven, replace oven light bulb, clean burner liners, replace if necessary. <input type="checkbox"/> Polish and clean sink, clean tile grout. <input type="checkbox"/> Polish chrome. |
| LIVING/DINING ROOM | ATTIC/BASEMENT/GARAGE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clean all stained woodwork and polish with wood feeding products. <input type="checkbox"/> Clean inside and outside of fireplaces, polish fireplace tools. | <input type="checkbox"/> Call exterminator if you see signs of insects or rodents. <input type="checkbox"/> Sweep floors, remove grease from garage floors. <input type="checkbox"/> Wipe down all appliances—washer, dryer, water heater, etc. |

Maintenance

Maintenance of the home is where the bigger jobs come in. Often, the decluttering and cleaning will make the need for maintenance and repairs more obvious.

RESOURCE

Checklists are available for download at www.KWConnect.com.

| MAINTENANCE |
|--|
| OUTSIDE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oil or replace squeaky hinges and catches on fence gates. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repair cracks or any broken or crumbling steps on walkway and entrance. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tighten railings on porch and deck. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trim back hedges and trees to allow light through windows. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Replace broken or missing roof shingles, consider putting on new roof if it is in very bad shape. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repair or replace gutters and downspouts. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repair cracks or separations in driveway. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oil door hinges and tighten doorknob on front door. |

| MAINTENANCE | |
|--------------------------|---|
| THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Replace any cracked or broken panes on windows, repair any wood rot, and make sure they all open smoothly. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Patch any cracks or nail holes in the walls and ceiling. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Replace and match broken or chipped switchplates or outlet covers. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Remove old wallpaper and paint all walls a warm neutral color—not flat white, it's too cold. The same palette will create the illusion of size. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | If carpet is too dirty or worn to be cleaned, replace with neutral, durable carpeting. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Light fixtures are often too discolored or outdated to clean. Replace them with modern fixtures. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Refinish wood floors. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Replace missing tiles or scratched linoleum. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Make sure no faucets in kitchen or bathroom are leaky. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Check lights and timers on all appliances. |

Create an Atmosphere

This is where staging gets truly creative. By creating an atmosphere, buyers will be able to see, touch, and feel the many qualities your seller's house has to offer. Set the mood by using music, lighting, good smells, and props.

TIP

Think function and form. For example, if the light is good in a particular corner, place a chair with a throw cover and an open book that will suggest how relaxing that room is to potential buyers. In the bedroom, put a breakfast tray on the bed. In the bathroom, set out a collection of spa soaps and fluffy white towels. In the kitchen, have some cookbooks on display.

CREATE ATMOSPHERE**OUTSIDE**

- ☐ Plant flowers.
- ☐ Create beds around trees.
- ☐ Set up inviting outside furniture in the shade under trees or on a deck or patio.
- ☐ Homes will often be shown at night—put in ground lighting along the walkways.

CREATE ATMOSPHERE**THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE**

- ☐ Play music. Set up an iPod—it will suggest the house is set up for modern technology.
- ☐ Bake cookies or bread before an open house or showing. Cinnamon is the most popular scent. Do not, however, try to mask odors. If there are smokers or pets in the house, cleaning is the best remedy.
- ☐ Put a centerpiece on the dining room table. Don't set the table—it looks too artificial.
- ☐ Put bouquets of fresh flowers in the living room and master bedroom.
- ☐ Use lighting to create a mood. Update all wattage to the highest safe level, keep blinds open. Houses are often shown at night—use nightlights in every room to create a warm pool of light.
- ☐ Make the most of views—direct eyes to a pool, yard, or skyline by opening windows or patio doors.
- ☐ Set AC to no cooler than 75 and heat no warmer than 72.

Keep Up Appearances!

Now that the home has been properly staged, your sellers must be responsible for maintaining the new look for as long as it takes the property to sell. Give them a checklist to follow, so they will be able to keep up appearances easily.

| KEEP UP APPEARANCES | |
|--------------------------|---|
| WEEKLY | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mow and severely edge the lawn. Weed the lawn and flower beds during the growing months, rake leaves and shovel snow during the winter. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Wash the car. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Dust. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Clean the bathroom and kitchen. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Organize laundry area and keep clutter free. |
| EVERY MORNING | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Wipe down sink and shower in the bathroom. Put down toilet lids. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Do not leave any dirty dishes in the kitchen. Put them in the dishwasher and run it. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Wipe down counters and sink in kitchen. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Vacuum the floor. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Clean and freshen the pets' water and food bowl. Empty litter boxes. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Pick up toys and daily clutter. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Put away bills and paperwork. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Sweep front porch, steps. |

Staging an Empty House

Why Stage an Empty House?

Most agents agree that an empty home is tough to sell, as buyers will have difficulty imagining cold, bare rooms as their new home. However, sometimes a vacant listing can't be avoided. The sellers may have been transferred suddenly, investors may have just completed renovations, or the owners may have already moved into their new home.

Selling a vacant house is always difficult, but in a shifted market, where buyers are often spoiled for choice, it can be even more problematic. Staging is the key. It will help buyers mentally place their own furniture and belongings as they visualize living in your sellers' house.

Don't Leave Rooms Empty When Selling a House!

1. Empty houses lead buyers to question why the house is vacant. If they suspect the home is empty because the owners have already left town, have financial problems, or a divorce is involved, they will be tempted to make a lower offer.
2. Size is difficult to visualize when a room is empty—and a vacant room actually looks smaller than a furnished room!
3. Without furnishings, buyers will get bogged down in negative details, rather than experiencing the overall feel of the home. They will wonder why there are bumps in the carpet or decide that the light switch covers are the wrong color.
4. Buyers are looking for a house that will give them the lifestyle they want—and they need clues and props to indicate what that lifestyle could be.

How to Stage an Empty House

Clutter is not an issue when staging an empty house, but the basics of staging—cleaning, maintenance, and yard work—will be the same as in an occupied home. Good curb appeal, a house that is in ship-shape condition, and a sparkling clean exterior and interior are more important than ever as potential buyers will have nothing else to focus on besides blank walls and floors. Even if some furniture is rented, any nail holes, cobwebs, and cracks will be much more obvious than in a fully furnished home.

Refer to your checklists and follow the same procedures as you would for an occupied home—merely omit the jobs that have anything to do with furnishings or belongings:



- Making a good first impression.
- Cleaning, both inside and outside the house.
- Maintenance.

Once the property is thoroughly cleaned, the yard is well-maintained, and the walls and flooring have either been cleaned or redone in a neutral palette, the issue becomes how to create a warm, lived in, and cared-for feeling.

Creating a Lived-In Look

Empty rooms have a lifeless feel. Footsteps echo as buyers tour the home, and the rooms will appear smaller without any furnishings as a reference point. If you have hired a staging company, they will have the furniture and props to furnish the home. If you are doing the staging yourself, you will need to arrange for the following:

- Rent furniture. Several items can typically be rented for a few hundred dollars from furniture rental companies or rental centers. A few pieces in the most commonly used rooms—master bedroom, living, and dining room—will create a lived-in feeling.
- Create atmosphere and comfort by adding vases of silk flowers or low-maintenance potted plants on dining area tables, and kitchen and bathroom counters. Hang prints and mirrors and place cushions on the couch. Add a reading lamp next to an armchair and place a book on the seat or side table.
- A closed-up home will develop a musty smell no matter how clean it is. Use room fresheners throughout the house.
- Inexpensive window treatments will help the property look more appealing from both the inside and outside.

Maintain the Property

An empty home will quickly get a neglected air if no one is taking care of it. Leaves and debris can gather in the yard, and dust and cobwebs will soon collect inside.

Both the inside and outside of the property will need light maintenance:

- Pick up junk mail and circulars.
- Check-up on the heating/cooling systems.
- Dust any furniture, sweep for cobwebs, vacuum carpeting, and dust mop flooring.
- Take care of whatever yard work is required for the season

If your sellers are still in the area, they will need to come by the property on regular basis to keep up appearances. If your sellers are not in the area, they or you will need to arrange for a caretaker to make regular visits.



Who takes
care of
your vacant
listings?

Bruce Hardie, regional director from Spokane, Washington, used a specialist on his team when he was a mega agent for every need. “A retired schoolteacher took care of my vacant listings. He goes into the houses twice a week with a vacant property checklist and checked all the doors and windows to make sure they were secure, made sure the heat had not been turned up or down, reported on the condition and ‘showability’ of the house. When it snowed, he shoveled the walk to the front door! He got paid minimum wage plus miles—that was a very affordable deal for me and gave my sellers a high quality of service.”

The Bottom Line

Staging is not about trying to put lipstick on a pig! You don't want your sellers to disguise problems or mask flaws; you merely want them to show their home in its best possible light—clean, decluttered, and repair-free.

Buyers should only see what is right with the house, not get focused on what is wrong. What may seem like small problems to the owner equal big messes to a buyer. As they tour the home, they will be making a mental list of all the little fix-ups that need to be done. If the list gets too long, they will feel overwhelmed. But if a home is properly staged, there won't be any messes to distract them from the value of the overall property.

When people think of staging, they picture the combination of work and fun that always goes along with any form of home improvement. But as an agent, your role in the staging process begins long before that. Your job is to explain staging to your sellers, convince them to stage, and then ease them through their staging as painlessly as possible.

"Price gets you in the game. Staging gets you the offer."

Tony DiCello
KW MAPS Coaching

Notes

Scripts

A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

AGENT: Here are some examples of what I am talking about in terms of staging. Let me ask you a question. All things considered equal, which home do you think will catch the buyer's attention?

Let them decide. They will almost always choose the uncluttered rooms.

You know, it's interesting. You have in every case picked the home that is staged properly. So I assume you are saying you want to stage yours that way?

Can't we sell the house "as is"?

SELLER: Staging is too much hassle. Can't I just give a concession?

AGENT: Yes, you could. May I tell you what buyers say every time they see a home improvement concession? "Fixing up a house is too much hassle! Can you show me another one?"

AGENT: Yes, you could, and buyers often use outstanding repairs to negotiate a lower price. If they see a house that needs painting, they may want to drop the price by thousands of dollars. Paint is worth 20 dollars in the gallon, and thousands on the wall. Would you rather pay a couple hundred dollars up front or deduct thousands from the sale price?

We're moving out, why should we spend any more money on this house?

AGENT: That's a valid question. We don't have to stage. What do you want to do—spend a little to get a lot, or just lower the price? You decide.

AGENT: Let's say there are three apples for sale and they are all the same. The owner went to the time and effort to shine one of them, but didn't bother with the other two. Which apple do you think people will buy?

My Action Plan

Don't put away this training guide without developing a plan to put what you have learned into action!

Review the key “challenges” listed below and assess your current ability to meet each challenge on a scale of 1–5.

1 = “I have no experience with this.”

2 = “I am not very good at this.”

3 = “I am pretty good at this.”

4 = “I am confident with this.”

5 = “I am an expert at this.”

For any rating of 3 or below, write down the action steps you will take to increase your understanding, build your skills, develop your confidence, see greater results, and take home more money!

| Challenge | Rating | Action Steps |
|---|--------|--------------|
| 1. I can explain the goals and benefits of staging to my sellers. | | |
| 2. I have learned scripts and dialogues that will help me convince my sellers to stage. | | |
| 3. I understand how to approach the subject of staging during the listing presentation. | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| 4. I know whether I should do staging myself or hire a professional. | | |
| 5. I know how to evaluate a property and make recommendations to my sellers. | | |
| 6. I am familiar with all the different phases of staging and can walk sellers through each. | | |
| 7. I have set goals for next year for number of listings, transactions, etc. in the CGI Calculator with my MC leaders. | | |

From Aha's to Achievement

AHA's

What are your Aha's?

BEHAVIORS

What behaviors do you intend to change?

TOOLS

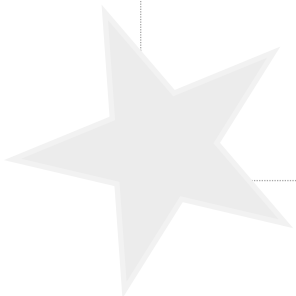
What tools will you use?

ACCOUNTABILITY

What does accountability for this look like?

ACHIEVEMENT

What will you achieve?



Don't Forget Your Evaluation!

To fill out the evaluation:

1. Go to KWUeval.com on any mobile device.

Select the course and instructor.

Share your feedback.

AT&T LTE 9:35 AM 97%

surveymonkey.com

KWU Course Evaluation

* 1. Name of course

2. Event Type?

☐ Market Center

< > Done

ALC Clinic for MC Leadership

Drive

ESO

Franchise Systems Orientati...

Ignite Session 1

Ignite Session 2

Ignite Session 3

Select drop-down to
scroll for title of this
course

Thank You for Sharing Your Feedback