

# Choosing a Real Estate Agent

BY JULIE P. HAWKINS

It's a tough real estate market. Finding a good agent will make all the difference.

**W**hen the time comes to sell your home or purchase a new one, the amount of information to sort through can be overwhelming. It is worthwhile to have a licensed professional on your side to help you navigate the tricky terrain of real estate. But how can you be sure to hire the best person for the job? While it's not an exact science, here are some tips to keep in mind before choosing your real estate agent.

## Ten questions to ask an agent

Don't be shy. Ask these questions of any agent you interview:

**1** How long have you worked in real estate, and how long have you been licensed? **2** Are you a REALTOR®? What professional designations do you have, and what special skill sets do they certify? **3** Do you work alone, or do you have an assistant or support staff to handle different parts of the transaction? **4** How often will we be in touch during the searching and buying process? Can I look at homes without you? How much of your time can you dedicate to assisting me? **5** What makes you stand out among your peers? Are there past clients who will serve as references for you? **6** If I am not satisfied with your performance, can I terminate our agreement? **7** Will you act as a buyer-broker or do you represent the seller? **8** How will you get paid? May I have that in writing? **9** How many homes have you found for buyers in the past six months? Have you been involved in difficult negotiations, and how did you handle them? **10** How many other buyers or sellers are you currently working with? Are you a full-time agent?

## Talk to me

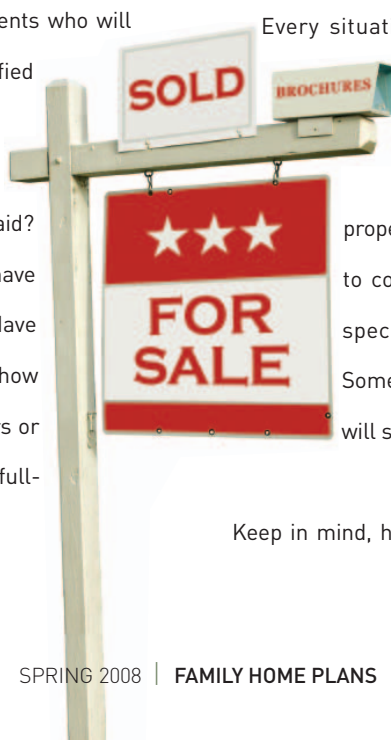
At least a portion of finding an agent you can work with should be based on your rapport with them. Do you sense that they are "on the same page" with you? Do they listen well and address your concerns directly, or are they hedging or providing canned responses? It's important that you establish trust early on. Buying or selling a home is a business transaction, but there are many elements that are emotional as well. Find an agent who feels comfortable to you and communicates well.

Along the same lines, you do not want an agent who is averse to sharing bad news. Real estate transactions can be (and typically are) very stressful. An agent who is not afraid to be open and honest with you, even when there are snags along the way, will help you make the best decisions to protect your interests or keep things on track.

## What's their specialty?

Every situation and every client is different. While it is very important to find an agent who knows the business of real estate, you may also have a particular interest in energy issues, healthy indoor air, historical property rehabilitation, etc. Luckily, real estate agents tend to come from a wide range of backgrounds, and many specialize in very specific topics related to real estate. Some agents have special designations or knowledge that will speak to your particular concerns.

Keep in mind, however, that real estate agents are. . .well, just real



Photos by: istockphoto.com



estate agents. Unless they are educated or licensed in an additional profession, they are not always qualified to give you specific advice about energy efficiency, green building, renovations, legal issues, insurance, or mortgages. A good agent will disclose to you what they do and do not know, and then defer to a licensed professional for further details. You would not take legal advice from your mechanic, so it is wise to recognize the limits of a real estate agent as well.

### Dollars and sense

It stands to reason that you want to hire the best agent you can. The obvious choice is someone who gets a lot of business in your area and sells the most volume of homes. Obviously, you think, they're doing something right. But be careful. You want an experienced agent, but you definitely do not want an over-extended agent. Some will see every client as an additional dollar sign rather than the commitment of time it will take to provide quality service to them. As question numbers 3, 4, 9, and 10 above are hinting, the amount of time an agent has for you is important. Would you rather have an agent with 4 years experience and 15 hours a week to devote to you, or an agent with 20 years experience who barely returns your phone calls? Experience is important but it should not be the only deciding factor. Honesty, intelligence, and a strong customer service ethic are key.

Get references and interview at least 3 agents before making a decision. When you have found one you are comfortable with, the process of buying or selling your home will go much more smoothly. ■

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## THANK A HERO

Most of us will never know the harsh realities of war. But there are those among us - veterans of combat - who understand its horrors all too well. They have bravely risked their lives in the heat of battle, only to return home to their families bearing unimaginable wounds. Often, these life-altering injuries require extensive modifications to their homes, just to allow for day-to-day living.

Homes for Our Troops is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that builds and renovates homes for war veterans who have lost limbs, are blind, deaf, or paralyzed; or have other severe injuries sustained while serving our country.

To date, Homes for Our Troops has constructed dozens of homes for wounded veterans - homes suited to their difficult physical needs. All of this has been accomplished through the help of volunteers on job sites, as well as through monetary donations from concerned individuals, businesses and a variety of organizations.

The Garlinghouse Company is committed to supporting the mission of Homes for Our Troops. We invite you to provide your support as well. To learn more about Homes for Our Troops and to discover ways in which you can make a positive difference in the lives of these wounded veterans, visit [www.homesforourtroops.org](http://www.homesforourtroops.org).



ABOVE: Sgt Peter Damon, of Middleboro, MA lost both arms when one of the tires of the Blackhawk Helicopter on which he was working, exploded. Here, Homes for Our Troops founder John Gonsalves, shares a hug with Peter after handing over the keys to his specially adapted new home.

LEFT: Peter Damon and his family at the construction site of their new home.

