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## **Six Steps to a Successful Home Sale**

*Selling your home requires more than just hanging up a “For Sale” sign. Knowing how to handle the process may mean more money, a faster sale and less stress.*

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Perhaps your starter home is starting to feel too cozy. Or a new job is taking you across the country. You already know how to buy a house, but do you know to sell one? Doing it right improves your chances of a smooth and speedy transaction at the price you want.

### **1. Get your House in Selling Shape**

Several months before you plan to put up the “For Sale” sign, look at your home through buyer’s eyes. The crayon marks Junior made on the wall may be cute to you, but they won’t be to a potential buyer. The crack in the ceiling you’ve always overlooked won’t go unnoticed by someone seeing your home for the first time. As you do your walk-through, make a list of things to repair.

Then walk outside and look at the *curb appeal* (how buyers will view the house when driving up). Is the lawn brown? Is the window trim peeling? Is the fence falling over?

Call up a few realtors, even if you think you want to sell the home on your own. Besides interviewing them, you’ll learn what they think you should do to get your house ready for sale. They can also give you a *comparable market analysis* (CMA), which tells you what similar homes have sold for in your neighborhood in recent months. Agents use *comps* as a starting point for determining what price tag you should put on your home.

Make repairs and changes that are not costly to you, but could raise the selling price. Painting the walls and replacing worn carpet freshens up a house quickly. Mend the fence and add some flowers outside. Clean out your house so it looks bigger and less cluttered. Move excess furniture and trinkets to the garage, or rent a storage space if necessary.

### **2. Decide Who Will Be Selling the Property**

Decide if you’re going to use a real estate agent or if you’re going to sell the property yourself. Real estate commissions typically run about 6 percent of the sale price (half goes to the buyer’s agent), though they might be negotiable. Many sellers decide to do the job without an agent to save a big chunk of change. Many of those sellers also change their tune after they realize how much

work and specialized knowledge it takes to make a successful sale. If you still want to avoid paying an agent a commission, at least hire a real estate agent or attorney on an hourly basis to give you advice and help you through the paperwork once the offers come in.

### **3. Get an Inspection**

It's worth the few hundred dollars it costs to get a professional home and pest inspection. Do this shortly before listing your home so that the information in the report is as current and accurate as possible when prospective buyers start to consider the property. The inspection report gives you an idea what items might trigger an interested buyer to start bargaining. While the buyer will most likely still want to have their own inspections done, having one done yourself and making copies available to home shoppers prepares you for negotiations, shows buyers you have nothing to hide, and improves the quality of initial offers. Your real estate agent or the American Society of Home Inspectors can provide you with names of certified inspectors in your area.

### **4. Set the Price**

If you haven't already gotten comps from your real estate agent, now's the time. He or she will recommend a specific price or range based on the recent sales prices of similar homes in your neighborhood. You might also want to go to neighborhood open houses on your own to compare them to your property and see what the sellers are asking. Research prices on the internet. Check your local newspaper if it carries recent home sale information. Home prices fluctuate based on both the national and local economy, so pay attention to the news. If you're still not sure what to ask, you may want to pay for a professional appraisal.

### **5. Show Your Home**

Your agent may schedule open houses, and will probably also bring prospective buyers through individually from time to time. If your housekeeping skills are not outstanding, hire a professional cleaner – and always keep your home neat. You never know when you'll get a call that a buyer wants to see your place in 30 minutes.

Keep your valuables hidden; if possible, remove them from the home entirely. Buyers will open doors and look in closets. They're not being nosy -- they want to know if there's enough room for their own things.

Even if you've already moved out, keep the temperature at a comfortable level and add a few pieces of furniture or plants to make it look more like a home.

## **6. Make the Sale**

All your preparation is paying off - you're finally getting offers from interested buyers! Your realtor will help assess the strength of each offer, considering not only the offer price, but also whether the buyer is preapproved (already has a mortgage commitment from a lender) and what contingencies he or she has written into the contract.

Once you've accepted an offer and the deal goes into escrow, it's time to plan your move. You'll need to be out by the escrow closing date, unless you've agreed to rent the house back from the new owner for awhile.

After all this effort, you can finally put the money in the bank and take the realtor's number off your speed dial.