

'Top Ten Things to Look For In A Realtor'

by Broderick Perkins

To Connie De Groot, a rising-star of a Beverly Hills real estate agent in Coldwell Bankers No. 1 office worldwide, choosing a full-time real estate agent isn't about anti-competitive behavior or shutting out part-time discounters.

It's about obtaining full-time service for the full-time job of selling or buying what's likely the owner's or buyer's greatest asset, says De Groot whose agent-to-the stars position in the high-priced West Los Angeles market doesn't hurt when it comes to her sales consistently ranking in the top 2 percentile among Coldwell Banker agents worldwide.

With full-time service, says De Groot, comes value that offsets savings customers expect from a discounter.

"If someone represents a client ever so often, how can they negotiate with someone who is out there looking and negotiating week after week?" she asks.

In order to have knowledge about the market you must be always involved. An agent who is seeing new properties every week, and or looking on the weekends, will offer that advantage to a buyer or seller," she adds.

With a full-time agent as the No. 1 quality to seek in a real estate agent, here's De Groot's "Top Ten Things to Look For In A Realtor."

- Get a licensed agent working full time. Full service means the agent is working for you whenever you are in need. Full time agents are best prepared to resolve problems that crop up during negotiations and inspections as well as those that occur after the purchase.

"How can you possibly advise someone on an offer price when you haven't seen many of the homes that sold recently? It makes sense that someone who is doing something full time can offer more than someone who is part time or with a partial commitment to this industry. The top firms offer education and national and international networks to promote a property. There are reasons why agents stay with these firms even when the commission splits with discount firms seem better," says De Groot, who, with her own celebrity-style visage, was recently featured on "Real Estate Confidential," a behind-the-scenes look at the business of buying and selling real estate. The show runs on E.W. Scripps Co.'s Fine Living Network, a sister network to HGTV.

- Get an agent with passion, enthusiasm and dedication. This is the agent who goes the extra mile to get the best results, even with the going gets tough.
- Get an agent with market savvy. Consistent sales in a given neighborhood reveals geographic market smarts that can save money. Knowledge is key.
- Get an agent who is creative. Look for someone who can write purchase offers that excite a seller and satisfy the buyer.

De Groot says a primary concern in today's market is tighter lending requirements. Buyers need to be schooled in their risks and obligations to lenders.

An experienced agent will know the right questions to ask and have strong relationships with lenders they trust.

"The point is to avoid having a client get into trouble. There is a delicate way of speaking about money and it is crucial

that a serious talk is had before moving forward," she said.

But money isn't everything.

"Money is not the only solution to every problem. There are many things a seller can offer to make a hesitant buyer reconsider -- time, financing conditions, offering personal property in the deal, making property adjustments that aren't costly but a time saver for the buyer. Each situation is different. A list of motivators can help sort out options that keep the deal together," De Groot advised.

- Get a tech-savvy agent. Most home transactions today begin on the Internet. All eventually get a technology assist.

"In this day and age, people expect information the moment that it becomes available. Imagine, for instance, that your dream home comes on the market on a Monday evening. Now imagine that three or four days pass before your agent becomes aware. That gives other buyers just enough time to get their offer in and possibly take away your shot at that perfect home," De Groot said.

- Get a team player. A real estate agent with a network of professionals at his disposal can take the screws out of finding a good handyman, insurance agent, mortgage broker, home inspector or a variety of other home buying and owning professionals you will need.

Beware.

"Referrals are many times due to conflicts of interest. Get them to disclose, disclose, disclose their relationships," she said.

- Get an agent with a licensed right hand man or woman. You'll often need someone to talk to when your agent isn't available. The assistant should have knowledge of the pertinent facts related to your transaction.

"A full time agent has more than one client. It is no different than an experienced attorney or doctor. In order to be available for clients every day, an assistant is necessary. For example, a listing appointment could last for three hours and during that time someone could call to discuss an offer on your property. Would you want that call to go unreturned for hours? It is crucial that this kind of call be returned immediately," De Groot said.

- Get a well-respected agent. Other agents make deals with agents they respect, trust and with whom they enjoy working.
- Get the scoop on your agent. Ask to speak to past and present clients and ask to review multiple listing service (MLS) reports of his or her sales.

"Everyone understands the value of referrals. The MLS details will show what in fact that agent has sold and when those sales occurred.

- Get an agent you trust.

"It is imperative to select a Realtor who understands you, one that you respect and with whom you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and concerns. Without a level of trust the client will not experience the full benefits of a full-time Realtor," De Groot said.

- Do you have a complete Top 10 list for finding a real estate agent and that agent could be a part timer? Tell us why, in some detail, and send your full list and contact information to Broderick Perkins.