

CHAPTER 1

GET SET, GO!

It begins with one single step.

BARB SCHWARZ

SELLER'S NOTE

In this chapter you will read about the importance of the Agent's or the Stager's sharing the truth with you. At first glance you may say, "Well, of course, people share the truth." In general, people do tell the truth. I am not suggesting at all that they don't. What I am saying is that people often don't want to hurt others' feelings, so it is much easier for an Agent—especially Agents—or Stagers not to tell you something that they think you don't want to hear. You the seller need to make it clear to these professionals that you want to hear the truth, not something that they think you want to hear. True professionals come from that place. The key is that they would rather walk away and not serve you rather than tell you something that isn't true. This is especially pertinent in pricing a home or in Staging a property. So read, take note, and make sure that you make it clear as a seller that you want to know what

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is actually taking place in the market—and then be ready to hear it because sometimes it is as tough to hear the truth as it is to tell it. And selling a house for top dollar in any market takes speaking the truth about market conditions, appropriate pricing for the property, and what needs to be done to have the property Staged for sale so that it sells!

Whether you are a seller, a Real Estate Agent, or a Home Stager, I ask you, “Do you want to make more money in real estate?” I can hear your answer—a resounding “yes.” That’s good, because you are looking in the right place. This book can help you make a lot more money than you are now making—if you will trust the ideas and techniques that I will share with you and apply them. You may be saying, as a seller or an Agent or a Home Stager, “Is this a good market to sell in?” My response is always, “Yes, it is a good market to sell in because it is a good market to buy in!”

These techniques work, if you are you are willing to work. And they do take work. There is no other way. They take rolling up your sleeves and digging into projects and marketing to get the property sold. Sellers, as you do your homework to find the right Agent and Home Stager, you will earn the equity that is there for you. Just living in a certain city, state, or country does not mean that we automatically get to sell our house for more money. It takes time and work on your end as a seller, and it takes time and work by the Agent and Home Stager, too.

Agents, my complete philosophy is to serve the seller—first, last, and always! If you do that, the money will follow because, just as sellers receive their equity at closing, you will earn the commissions that you deserve.

Home Stagers, your role is crucial. You provide the creative third eyes that are vital to preparing homes for sale. Too many sellers are overworked and stressed by life today and selling a home at the same time, too; so as a Stager your role is to bring in your creative talent so that the house shows at its very best from the first viewing until the close of the sale.

Now, a lot of real estate salespeople in the real estate industry are doing things the same way they have always done them. For years, Agents have walked into properties, looked around, and said, “Well, gosh. I think you can get about \$400,000 for this home. I’m sure I can sell it. Sign here and I’ll put an ad in the Sunday paper.” The sign goes in the yard, the ad

shows up in the Sunday paper, and that's what they call marketing. Those days must come to an end.

When I got into the real estate business many years ago, I saw what I still see today in many cases: a lack of service. I saw that a lot of people did little to market properties they had listed. Unfortunately a lot of Agents in this business still continue to approach real estate that way. But the true professionals in real estate know that the secret to success in our business is to serve the seller—first, last, and always—and to be creative in doing so.

It is called marketing—marketing, marketing, marketing. And Staging is a very critical marketing tool, especially in today's difficult market!

THE RECIPE FOR A GREAT STAGER

Did you know that Real Estate Agents do not have a very good reputation? In a survey conducted by George Gallup Jr. and reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, people were asked how they viewed the honesty and ethical standards of those in various careers. The results of the survey indicated that out of 25 occupations across the country, Real Estate Agents rated among the bottom five. As far as the public is concerned, when it comes to honesty and ethics, we rank right down there with used car and insurance salespeople! This is amazing but true.

I believe a lack of service has cultivated that poor reputation. So the best way to wipe out that poor image is to give sellers and buyers more service than ever. Let me ask the Agents reading this book. Do you work long hours in this business? Of course, you do! Do the sellers you represent know everything you do for them? No, they do not because many times we simply don't tell them! Somehow we expect sellers to know many of the ins and outs of real estate, and, although most sellers *think* they know how the real estate market works, most really do not and need our guidance. My strong contention, throughout this book, is that we need to educate our sellers as to how we work and what we do for them. The key is to tell them up front. Sellers have the right to know, and you have the obligation as an Agent to tell them.

Good service gives any Agent the edge, and it gives the home owner and house a much better chance of selling, selling more quickly, and selling for more money. And the best service you can provide to a seller is to make sure that the seller's home is prepared for sale.

I believe good service is the difference between a good Agent and a poor one, between a successful Agent and a struggling one. If you want

to be ahead of the game, serve your sellers professionally and efficiently. I have developed a simple but comprehensive three-step program that can help you do just that. It starts with service when you first meet your potential sellers and goes all the way until the sale closes. And your sellers deserve that kind of treatment.

Leadership is also important. As an Agent and as a Stager, you have to be in the role of leadership; that is what you are being paid to do: lead. To be able to serve your sellers to the best of your ability, you must have control of the situation, in much the same way you have to let your doctor have control over you in order to help you when you are sick. Now, when I talk about control, I'm not talking about being mean or rude; that's not what I mean at all. "Control" doesn't need to be a negative word. Control simply means managing the situation. Control is taking on the role of leadership. And sellers want to work with Agents and Stagers who know what they are doing and who show that they know what they are doing. For if the Agent and Stager cannot lead, then there is little chance that they will lead the buyer as the Agent or the Staging as a Stager. Leaders and persons who are passionate about what they do are the types you want on your side. I've never met a seller who wanted to work with a dud!

As a real estate professional, you can't do your best job or best work if you don't act as a leader. You need to price the home to sell in order to get top dollar for the seller. That means working to price the property right, making sure that the home is Staged to sell, and directing the marketing process so that the sale will go smoothly and quickly to bring the best price possible for the seller. That is why sellers hire you!

Control is necessary, but many of us lack it when we work with prospective sellers. We are afraid to control, mainly because we fear it will cost us the listing. We assume our potential sellers will react negatively and that we might therefore lose a listing. I know. I learned all this the hard way.

WHAT STAGING CAN DO FOR YOU!

Experience is the best teacher. There is therefore a lesson to be learned behind everything I'm going to share with you in this book. Those lessons have come from mistakes that I have made. Actually, I don't believe there is any such thing as a failure. Rather, I have learned from the mistakes I have made, and so I call them "experiences." I have worked hard to correct my mistakes and to put what I have learned from them to work in

my business. Some of the experiences I am going to share with you come from the times I didn't do so well. At such times, I would say to myself, "I'm not going to let that happen again. I fell flat on my face." I learned it all the hard way most of the time, and yet the key was to persevere and to keep on going. The key was to say to myself, "What went well in this experience, what will I do differently next time, and how will I do it?" Specifically, I had to tune into the how and to keep at it until I came up with the ways that allowed me to serve sellers better and be more successful for them and with them. In sharing this information with you, I want to save you from those poor experiences, whether you are a seller, an Agent, or a Home Stager.

I am going to show you the ideas and techniques that I have developed over a long period. They are ideas that work, ideas that can save you a lot of learning time, and ideas that can definitely make you more money!

This book will teach you ways you can work and get the property sold and to do so in a way that the house should sell more quickly and/or for more money, no matter what the market is doing. And that should make you more money in any role you choose:

1. **Addressing objections before they come up.** If we head off an objection before it comes up, we're not going to face an objection. If we put the seller's mind to rest before the objections ever come up, then we are not going to have to deal with them! I do not believe that people have objections anyway; they have concerns. Treating objections as concerns places the professional and the seller in a more positive place, instead of a state of fear of—"Oh god, what will they bring up next?" Concerns it is, not objections. Say the two words yourself, and see which feels better to you depending on which role you are in.
2. **As professionals, developing your own *Career Book* and *Marketing Portfolio*.** These tools are priceless for Agents and Stagers when it comes to creating credibility, educating your seller, and answering concerns long before they are expressed. As a seller, you want and need to see what the Agent and Stager are going to do for you and what they bring to the table.
3. **Sharing many of my phrases or sayings that are absolutely dynamite in defusing concerns before they come up.** My Staging sayings have built an industry; I am told so all the time.
4. **Getting the seller to prepare the home for sale, that is, to get it Staged.** This can be a tough one for many Agents. It is important that sellers know that a lot of Agents don't know what to say or how to say

it because they are afraid they are going to hurt someone's feelings. Many Agents don't know what to tell sellers to get their property ready to sell. My contention is that when Agents list property, their *job* is to say, "Here is what we need to do, Mr. and Mrs. Seller, to get your property ready to sell." We are talking about marketing probably the most important product in your life: your home. Sellers look to Agents for guidance as to how to do that. I strongly believe that teaching the seller the benefits of Staging is crucial! The Agent's job is to teach sellers why they should Stage, and the Stager's job is to Stage the property. Stagers should always be part of the selling process. Remember, even used car dealers Stage their merchandise. The key is to teach the sellers why Staging is important and then get the house Staged to sell it. Don't worry: Whichever role you are in, by the time you finish this book you will know how to Stage a property inside and out!

5. **Pricing the property correctly.** Two things sell a home: Staging and price. Staging, I believe, is the greater of the two factors. However, a property that looks attractive also has to be priced right. If it is priced way, way too high for the price range of the neighborhood, how good it looks may not matter. Pricing in this market is no different than pricing in any market. People think that you price the property differently depending on whether the market is slow or fast. No, you price it in the same way; that is, you price it in the context of the surrounding market. Value is value, but it is not the appraised value or the seller's perceived value. It is the *market value*, the price that will sell the house in the current market. Every property will sell when it reaches the right price for the market it is in, and Staging helps immensely by presenting the property at its best. Although pricing is crucial, price the property according to the market value *and* in consideration of its being Staged. (I have seen homes sell for tens of thousands more than the neighbors'.) However, be aware that traditionally there still is a ceiling for each neighborhood. We have to have price and Staging working in balance for the current market. So, I have come up with some definite techniques and tools that will help you get that property priced right.
6. **Marketing the property to get it sold!** We can go through all the other goals, but if we don't do the marketing we should do, we may not get it sold. You can have the greatest house in the world, but if no one knows about it, then what good is it? One of my goals in this book is to give you a total marketing package, combining the strength of my many marketing techniques. And marketing in a slow market requires

some extra marketing ideas—not the same old put-the-sign-in-the-yard-and-sell-the-house routine. I don't believe in that approach anyway. It takes way more than that in a slow market, and sellers deserve more marketing than that even in a hot market.

An Agent once complained to me in a slow market that Agents were not even coming to her broker's open house; I recommended doing things that *would* get them there! I said to hire a belly dancer if she needed to—just get the Agents to her broker's open house. She said, “Oh, you must be kidding!” I said, “No, I am *not* kidding. I have done that myself, and that alone brought Agents to the house just to see the dancer. It worked, too, because one of the Agents who came later came back with buyers in hand and sold the house!” In slower markets creativity has to be the playing card used the most to get Agents and buyers there. As long as it is legal, moral, and ethical, be creative and think of ideas that will bring Agents and buyers to the house. Of course, have the house Staged. I assure you that the belly dancer house was Staged to the hilt, and the gimmick worked because the house *was* Staged. Belly dancer or not, if it had not been Staged, the Agents might have come to see the dancer, but the house would not have sold because it was a slow market and the Staging combined with the marketing got the house sold!

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT MYSELF

Now, before we go on, I would like to tell you a little about my background. After all, we are going to have a special relationship as you read my book, and I think it is important that you know a little bit about where I came from and my background. After I graduated from high school in Kansas, which is where I grew up, my family moved to Seattle, Washington. I earned a degree in education, with a major in music and a minor in design from the University of Washington, and went on to teach elementary school in the Bellevue, Washington, public school system.

What does all that have to do with real estate and listing residential property? More than you might think. Even though we don't usually associate teaching with real estate, a lot of the techniques and ideas that I am going to share with you in this book are adapted from skills I developed during my teaching days. When I left teaching, I ran my own interior design business. That was my minor in college. For about five years

I worked with single-family home owners, helping them design and decorate their homes. I also worked with builders and owners of commercial and multifamily housing. When we get to the section in this book on ways to improve the condition of a property, please don't say, "Well, Barb can do that because she has a design background." Actually, the things I am going to share with you have nothing to do with design. Design or decorating is *not* Staging. I will show you how to create more space and less clutter so that the buyers can mentally move into a potential home when they first see it.

After several years in design, the wonderful world of real estate came along for me. One day I happened to be calling on a real estate broker, and he said to me, "Why aren't you in real estate?" All I could say to him was, "Gosh, I love homes. I used to hold open houses for builders in Kansas when I was in high school. I've thought about getting into real estate but I've never done anything about it." He looked me square in the eye and said, "It sounds to me like you are procrastinating." When he said that, his words hit me like the proverbial ton of bricks! I headed out the door and didn't look back. I applied for my license, passed the test, started in this fantastic business, and have loved it ever since. It was one of those moments that can change your life forever, and that moment changed mine.

During my first 18 months in real estate—and this may shock you—I didn't get one of my listings sold. Not one! All the listings I had were overpriced and did not look very good. After a while I started to realize that the real money makers in the business were listing Agents and that if I were to become successful in the listing game I had to come up with a better way to get my listings priced right and prepared for sale to come on the market. I also really enjoyed working with sellers. I decided one of the reasons I enjoyed working with them was that they put their names on the dotted line. They made commitments to me, and they made them in writing. I knew if I worked hard, they were going to stick with me, and I, for sure, was going to stick with them!

Now, you may say to yourself, "This woman couldn't sell her own listings, how does she plan to tell me how to list and sell the property?" Remember what I said earlier: You are going to benefit from my mistakes. And I made a lot of mistakes in that first year and a half. I spent a lot of time hitting my head against the wall and saying to myself, "There's got to be a better way." What I am telling you is that I developed this program in the streets, that is, working with sellers. No matter what happened—or didn't happen—I was responsible to my sellers. I thought, "Hey, Barb,

you haven't been very honest with these people. You didn't lie to them, but you also didn't tell them the truth. You listed at what they wanted for a price instead of at the price that would get the house sold in the current market." So the sellers' houses just stood there waiting, and as I know and say now, "Longevity on the market means one thing: reduction in price."

I also thought, "You didn't tell them what you thought they should do to prepare their house for sale. You didn't want to hurt their feelings. You were afraid you wouldn't get the listing." If you are an Agent or a Stager, does any of this sound familiar to you? So, I made a commitment to myself, to my sellers, and to all the people who would be my future sellers, which I have stuck by all these years: No matter what, I am going to tell all my sellers the truth.

You need to be honest. Whether you are a Stager or an Agent, you need to tell sellers the truth. As I said to my sellers as an Agent, "There are Agents out there who will tell you what they think you want to hear, and I really believe in sharing the truth that you deserve to know." You don't have to take a listing. As a Stager you don't have to take the Staging either. No matter what, don't be afraid to be honest with your sellers. Sellers will appreciate your honesty when you point out to them that you are being honest for their own sake.

So I started to be truly honest with people. Guess what happened? I came up with the idea of Home Staging based on my experiences in the theater productions I had been in. I began to appreciate that:

- Just as we set the Stage for each act in each play and musical, so, because each home is different and each room is different, we need to set the Stage for the buyers looking for their future home.
- The seller is the producer, the other Agents are the critics, the buyers are the audience, and I am the director.

It worked! Little did I know that I had invented an industry and would be now writing this book for you many, many years later. At that point I started to get my listings priced right and prepared for sale, coming up with the ideas I called Staging, and the houses sold! My sellers started to get their equities. With each listing I came up with even more effective techniques!

These same techniques are going to make you more money, and they are going to make your role as a seller easier or your career as a Real Estate Agent or Stager more enjoyable. Everything you learn in this book you can apply to your own business and life. People come up to me during

my seminars and tell me how easily they have been able to work my program into their own careers. They say to me, “It works!” And it can work for you too.

AND NOW ON WITH THE SHOW

I want you to enjoy this book and to learn things you can use. But there is something else I ask you to do.

I am going to ask you to make some commitments and then hold yourself accountable. Commitment and accountability bring results. Make the commitment, hold yourself accountable, take the steps of action to bring you what you want, and get results. There is no way that it won't happen.

Have a positive attitude in all that you do, and the ideas I share with you here will work. You will also be making a difference by doing so in your life and in the lives of others.

Give it a go. Now, on with the show!