

Part I

PREP THROUGH OPEN

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Chapter 1

GAME-TIME MENTALITY

Before we get to the numbers, and before we get to me, here's the thing. The most important rule in life is to show up and show up on time. By on time I mean early. By early, I mean ahead of schedule, prepared, in warrior mindset, questions asked and answered in all ways, ready to go. The clock started yesterday.

If you're late to bed, you're late to wake up, maybe not physically, but definitely mentally. If you're late to breakfast, your morning routine, then you're already chasing. If you're late to the locker room, you're late to what you should have been able to bring to the table. Even worse, you've now missed the coach's plan. You're late for the game. You don't deserve to be on the court. You're not a player. You're not ready to close. Don't be late to yourself.

The beauty and the common attraction of the real estate business is the idea of freedom, that you are your own boss, the coach. Wait – cut that thought out right now. If you want to be your own boss, then you'll understand and respect the fact that your client is the boss, the coach, no matter how you feel about them personally, no matter the situation.

There's no excuse to be late – not car trouble, family emergencies, whatever. Yes, things happen, but you can bet your ass that in most cases your new client has a family too, and there they are, ready to strategize, ready to play, ready to attack. They're not late because they are showing up for their family, setting them up in the best seats, the best arena. They care about that family. Do you? You'd better.

If they have no family, then there's even less leeway for being late. They are there for themselves, racing the clock to build whatever is important to them. They have a game plan and they have drafted you to be on their team. If you're not punctual, if you're not there with guns blazing, uniform on, and a positive attitude ready to play, then you already don't deserve to be on the team. Let me say this again, if you truly want to be your own boss, know that your client is the boss.

Like it or not, we are all human. We all have an ego. We all want to be a baller in whatever sense the word works for us. In our case, it usually means getting the best deal. As soon as you show your current boss a flaw in your preparation, in your ability to work with them and take direction, a lack of confidence, cockiness, or ego, you have compromised your role on the team. You're late. You're wrong. You're done.

You don't take them seriously so why should they want you. You've created doubt in a business they are already uncomfortable with, even if seasoned. Like the reputations of nickel-and-diming construction workers or mechanics, of lying lawyers, slippery entertainment agents, and greasy car salesman, a long line of unreliable jerks have tainted our reputations as real estate agents.

So you begin against the odds, not trusted, a possible scumbag out only for yourself ready to rip someone off. Your new coach knows this and yet has gambled on you. Their reputation, career, money, safety of their children, getting laid that night by their lover, all of it, depends on the faith they have put in you. And let me tell you, the sharks, the big dogs, the ones with the loot you want to put in *your* pocket, will have no tolerance for you. There are plenty of players to pick from. The good ones are ready and beyond.

Believe me, your clients are just itching to fire your ass, to flex their muscles and reassure themselves that they are in charge. They want to feel better about themselves and not view themselves as weak, as suckers – or they simply know the ropes and don't tolerate bullshit. They expect top-grade. They are ballers who don't have time for nonsense. Waiver – and forget about it.

You see me on television, *Million Dollar Listing: Los Angeles*. Yes, it's a reality show. Cast members throw glasses of wine at each other and do other petty shit. But the real business is the real estate, the properties, the deals, the clients, and the closings. All very real: I did 189 closings last year.

You see ten of those on the show. How many times have you seen me roll into a meeting that starts off with a threat to my job? Ten. "I want it this way, Josh. I want it that way, Altman. Get it done or I'll find someone else!" I am proud to say, and my stats have proven, that many of those same clients – my coaches – end the episodes on television and in actual life saying, "I can't believe you pulled that off," grinning ear-to-ear, the cigar lit, ready to do business again.

So you're there, but are you there mentally prepared? From the moment I wake up, as I do my morning stretch, drink my protein shake, slip on my sharp-as-hell uniform, kiss my beautiful wife, hug my daughter, and pull out of my driveway, in the car of my dreams, away from the house I always wanted. I am closing. I am a beast! I am ready for battle, ready to win, ready to close, to open, to work, to make everyone money. I want my boss to know that when it comes down to the last-second huddle, his most trusted and reliable option is to coordinate the play so I get the ball.

Can I stroll in and still maybe win the game on charm, luck, skill, and an easy challenge? Sure. But that's not good enough. At this level – the Altman "Hollywood" level – my job is to win to do it in spectacular fashion against all odds. I want my coach, in the postgame interview in front of all the cameras, to brag that I made his job easier. Choosing me as his superstar makes him look like a beautiful genius but my stock goes up.

Then I have to do it again. It's expected. I have to meet that demand and surpass it. In another postgame interview my coach, again wowed by my lead to victory, laughs in amazement. Now, every team wants me and mine will fight, sacrifice, and pay to keep me on their team.

The beauty of real estate is that there's no limit to the amount of teams we can win championship rings for. Don't try it. Do it. If you blow it, get up and do it again. Prove yourself even against adversity. Those hard times will happen, but coach is counting on you. *You* are counting on you. Be prepared. Become your own coach by allowing all to be one.

My empire reigns from Hollywood in the traditional sense of the term as much as it does the Altman sense, so let me reference one of my favorite classic films. Have you ever seen Martin Scorsese's *Casino* starring Robert De Niro? If you haven't, eat some antacids and watch it.

In this movie based on a true-life scenario, De Niro plays a sports bookie who sets the point-spread lines for every game – the coach of his crew. As any great boss, he relies on preparation and knowledge. In return, he is able to assess the most predictable outcome of each sporting event, making even the gamblers, the suckers, feel like they are the coaches. He gives them the knowledge to make them think they will win while guaranteeing himself and his employers – in this case the mafia (and you may want to steer clear of them) – that he will win, for them and for all.

In the movie (and in real life too) the mafia bosses gave the bookie, called Sam “Ace” Rothstein in the film, the keys to a Vegas casino. True story. What did Rothstein know beyond any average guy picking up the sports page? The answer is personal information, insider knowledge. Is today’s freezing wind chill a factor for an opposing team used to warmer weather on their home field? Did the point guard’s dog just die? The quarterback spent the weekend in drunken tears after finding out his girlfriend was cheating on him. How’s he feeling today? The basketball court has a soft spot on the baseline, which can deaden the spring in an athlete’s step, and the rim is tilted a degree to the left, which can change the ball’s trajectory. Who does that effect and how? It’s the same in real estate.

A few years ago, I had a premiere property in the 90210 – Beverly Hills. The lot was baller, but the clients/coaches were an emotional mess. I’m talking two siblings who were fighting over their childhood home that they couldn’t afford to keep. The brother wanted to sell. The sister wouldn’t go for it. It was tense. What was my job? To give the brother the best tools and arguments to convince his sister to sell, the offer no one could refuse. I needed to provide every option. To do this right I had to show up and show up on time, prepared, ready to please, ready to close from the open. I needed to be “Hollywood.”

A great real estate agent must act as architect, interior designer, contractor, city planner, legal consultant, insurance agent, salesman, dream maker, fortune teller, and most of all, therapist. I had done my research. I knew the neighborhood comps. I knew the insurance zones. I knew the local ordinances. I knew the community, the school zones, the crime rate and the walking distance to shops. I knew the nearby sports bar where the brother suggested we first meet. I knew the prices of necessary renovations and I had the eye for suggestions they never considered on how to beautify the home. I had paid attention to all of this with closing in mind, as any real estate agent worth their salt should have done.

But there was one more problem. The sister loved the old oak, the very tree she'd climb in childhood, the tree where she and her brother had their names carved in the trunk. She'd never let the tree be uprooted from her childhood memories or from her now-adult, eco-friendly heart. She'd rather have the house burn down. I can't tell you how many times I've met sellers who exclaim, "But I don't want anyone to change the style of the house, no knockdowns, and they definitely can't remove that special tree." It's an unreasonable ball-bust, but we humans are ball-busters, and we often want to preserve and share what is special to us. It's our nature.

So, how'd I learn about the tree? What I'm about to say is one of the most overlooked elements in our business along with a general simple rule of life – I asked the guy! Then I listened. I repeat. I asked and listened. I could have asked the basic questions any real estate agent would ask, but I needed to be great, the greatest of all time. I needed to be more than a real estate agent. I needed to be a friend. I knew going in that this property was only for sale due to a death in the family and the remaining siblings were at odds about what to do. I needed to be a person who cared and who helped. In return, this would also help me; it would be good for the soul, the head, the heart, and ultimately the pocket. As my wonderful parents had taught me, this mentality was bigger than the close – it was life, my clients' life *and* mine.

It was my moment to shine, to fix the problem, to make the sale, to close. I showed on time, prepared, and asked this grieving soul the details, the little personal stuff. Not only did this express my comforting interest in him and his family, but it led me toward an end zone he never considered when wondering how to achieve the same goal and then sell it to his sister against her opposition. I needed to have ready options for any posed scenario. He needed options to take back to his sister, who was a kind of boss to him. It was my job to give him these valuable options with value assessed. I pleased my coach. I came to close through opening – offering new solutions he could pitch to his sister and help her realize a reasonable price, something she never thought could be done and never wanted to confront.

We are human. We're sensitive. Respect this. It takes time to sort out emotions and heal, especially after the loss of a loved one. By showing up on time, prepared to ask carefully crafted, pertinent questions, I allowed the family to fast-track the time it would have taken for them to reach their breaking point – the "ah, screw it" moment: "I just can't do it anymore." Allowing a client to reach that point is something you can't always

control, but it is my job to make the best effort to let people see the true story, to give them the keys to their casino. I'm not just selling homes; I'm helping people close their hardships. In return, I make a better deal for each of us, a better day – a win for all. That's being prepared. That is "Game-Time Mentality."

In the end, the sister couldn't disagree with the circumstances and I made her feel a lot better about the inevitable. She gave up the tree and she gave up the house. When the next contractor was removing the tree, I made sure to preserve small pieces of the trunk where the brother and sister had carved their names. I sent those pieces framed and glassed to each of them, a personal sentimental touch. We're not only friends now, but they've sent me a dozen more coaches all over the nation who still have me as their starting superstar. I showed up and showed up on time, prepared for the game, and everyone won. I pleased my coach, my boss, and me.

"Game Time" in Altman "Hollywood" means showing up on time, prepared and ready, in your heart as well as your head. If you don't understand that, then you'll never be on my team or be able to compete against it.

Now let's fast forward. Let's get to some rock-star living. Let's get to the Altman Brothers, modern-day Los Angeles, 2019.