



Simple Techniques That Bring Higher Prices and Quicker Sales

TECHNIQUE **1**

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Make a better first impression.

Everyone knows that you don't get a second chance to make a good first impression. That's particularly true when it comes to your home.

When you want to sell your property, first impressions are critical. Among real estate people, it is called *curb appeal*. This means that the home looks good when a potential buyer first drives up and parks at the curb. The good impression should continue as they walk through the home.

Real estate agents know that a buy or don't buy decision is often made with that first impression, even though buyers may not realize it until later. If the initial impression of your home is favorable, potential buyers walk through your home thinking positive thoughts. They will be looking for reasons to reinforce their positive feelings—reasons to purchase your home. It will take something really negative to knock them off this first track.

If, however, the first impression is negative, the buyer goes through your house with a mind-set that says, "Show me why I

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should change that first impression and buy this place.” Now the buyer has to be turned around—a much, much harder job.

If you’re planning to sell your home, it is imperative that you immediately begin improving the curb appeal of your house. You don’t have any time to spare.

If, however, selling your home is just a thought you have for the future, you should remember that creating strong curb appeal doesn’t happen overnight. If you start now and work on creating curb appeal over a period of years, the cost will be greatly reduced to say nothing of the stress.

Where to Begin?

Here’s a technique that costs you almost nothing, but which will not only give you a quicker sale, it can add extra money to the selling price.

Put yourself in the home buyer’s shoes. What do you want to see when you first look at a house?

Beyond a neat, clean appearance, most buyers want to see how their own furniture and things will fit in. It is not uncommon, for example, for buyers to measure the living room to see if their couch will fit in nicely. They may measure the bedroom to see if their furniture will adapt to the room.

If your house is filled with your own clutter, buyers won’t be able to visualize putting their things in your home. Your things will be in the way.

Remember, buyers have no imagination. You can *tell* a buyer that her dining room table will fit in your dining room, but if your oversized dining room table is crowding the room with barely space for chairs around it, she’s not very likely to believe you.

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You want some furniture in each room, otherwise the rooms tend to look small. Furniture makes rooms look not only livable, but gives them proportion.

However, too much furniture and too much clutter makes the room look small. In addition, it makes it look proprietary—it's your room, not theirs. It will be hard for them to visualize it as theirs. You want buyers to see each room as their room. When they do, they'll be more inclined to make an offer on your house. The more they see themselves fitting in, the more they'll want your house and the better that offer will be.

You Don't Have This Problem

You say this doesn't apply to you? Okay, here's a test. Take a minute to look around your home—your living and dining rooms, your kitchen and bath, your bedrooms. Notice anything unusual?

If you answered, "No," then you're like everyone else. We become accustomed to where we live and think of it as perfectly comfortable. If we're comfortable, why shouldn't anyone else be comfortable? If you've lived in a home for a number of years, it is unlikely that you'll see your own clutter.

Now call in a neighbor, friend, relative, or best of all, real estate agent. Ask them to be painfully honest. Ask them not to be polite, not to worry about hurting your feelings. Ask them to look at each room and describe what they see.

At first you might get comments such as,

"That couch is a little big for the room."

"You sure have a lot of knick knacks."

"Why do you have books and things hanging off the shelves of that bookcase?"

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“It might be easier to walk through this room if there were fewer tables.”

This is what people say when they are trying to be polite—the comments are far worse when they really don’t care about your feelings! (Remember, buyers don’t care about your feelings.)

My advice is for you to go through every room of your house and take out a third to half of all the furniture.

I can sense the feelings of disbelief coming right through these pages! “A third to a half of the furniture—is he nuts?! There won’t be any furniture left.”

Trust me, there will be plenty of furniture left. Most people have too much clutter in their homes. Removing a third to a half of it may not be enough! When you’ve removed a sufficient amount of furniture, boxes, bookshelves, and so on, you’ll know it. Your rooms will look barren, empty, as though they are crying out for more things in them.

That’s just the way you want it. You want your buyers to sense the need for more so that they can imagine filling those rooms with their furniture. If you can accomplish that, you’re well on your way to getting a better offer.

What to Remove

Here is a checklist of the kinds of things you should remove:

Living or Family Room

- *Couches and chairs:* Unless your living/family room is unusually large, one couch and one stuffed chair are usually sufficient.
- *Throw rugs:* If you’ve got wall-to-wall flooring or nice wood floors, show them off. If you need to cover them, get one large area rug.

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- *End tables:* You only need two end tables—one at each end of your couch or chair.
- *Bookshelves:* One bookshelf is usually sufficient. More than that may help hold all your reading, but will not impress most buyers.
- *Ottomans:* They're great for putting your feet on, but otherwise they just take up room.
- *Boxes, bins, cabinets:* These tend to crop up with people who work at home. Get rid of *all* of them. You'll have a new workspace in your next home.
- *Lamps:* One per table and one standing lamp are plenty, unless your room is dark. If it is, then by all means put in more high-powered lamps. This is one case where more light overrules clutter. (See Technique 28.)

Kitchen

- *Countertop:* Clear it off. Keep a few appliances such as a toaster or microwave and get rid of everything else. Particularly get rid of stacks of newspapers, bills, notes, and so on.
- *Doors of refrigerator and cabinets:* Get rid of all those postcards, pictures, and notes that you've got stuck there. Put them inside a drawer, instead of outside it.

Bedrooms

- *Bed and nightstand:* If they are too big for the bedroom, consider moving them out and putting in smaller furniture. (That's what builders of new homes do in many of their model homes.)
- *Table and chair:* Have a table and chair only if the room is large. If not, get rid of it. The same is true for the television and stand.

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- *Bureau or dresser:* Be sure there is room for this; if not, get rid of it.

Bathrooms

- *Countertops:* Clean them off. There should be nothing there except, perhaps, a soap dish. No razors, hair blower, deodorant. Store them in shelves and drawers.
- *Floor:* One mat only.
- *Towels:* Bath towels on one rack, smaller wash cloths or face towels on another.

Where Do I Put It All?

If you're like me, we're talking about a lot of clutter. Moving it out is easy. Storing it is hard. One thing you don't want to do is fill up the garage. Buyers like to see plenty of open space in the garage. It tells them your house has adequate storage area as well as room to park car(s).

Other alternatives include storing your extra furniture at neighbors', friends', or relatives'. Rent a storage facility. Give those extra items away. Throw them away. This is a great opportunity to get rid of stuff you really don't need. Think of it as spring cleaning for the whole house.

What If You Have Expensive Furnishings?

The same rules apply, unless you're selling the furnishings with the house. If they're going with you, they can only detract from the house. You might find a buyer who's willing to make you an offer on that Chippendale, but not on the home. Do not distract your buyer; it is the house that is for sale.

BRING HIGHER PRICES AND QUICKER SALES*TECHNIQUE* **2****\$****Cars have their place, but
not in front.**

This is tricky, because there is so much opposition to it. Do not park your car (or have your neighbors park their cars) in the driveway or even in front of the house. Rather park cars in the garage.

“What?” I can hear many readers asking. “That’s outrageous. I can park my car anywhere I want. That’s my right. It’s even written into the Constitution, or should be!”

Let’s take it to an extreme and look at it from the buyer’s viewpoint. Suppose you’re a buyer looking at a house, and an agent takes you into a nice neighborhood. As you drive down the street, there are cars, all makes, models, and ages, parked all over the place. Some are in front of the homes on the street, others are in driveways, and still others are parked on the lawns.

There are guys under some of the cars changing the oil or fixing the transmission. One gal has an engine lift and is hauling the engine out of an old Ford truck, apparently planning to rebuild it. In another case, a group of people are using electric sanders on the body of an old Chevy sanding the paint off, apparently in preparation for doing body work and then repainting.

In short, the neighborhood looks like a repair yard or, at best, a haven for mechanics.

Now remember, you’re a home buyer looking for a nice place to live. Would you want to move into that neighborhood? Or would all those cars give you second thoughts?

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Perception can be more important than reality. In our example, the perception is that people don't really care about the neighborhood or in keeping it looking neat and well groomed. Rather, out of financial necessity or simply love of working on their cars, they've turned it into a giant garage. Cars out in front do drive many potential buyers away and can lower property values.

Of course, you say, we're taken an unlikely case . . . or have we? I've driven through neighborhoods that are exactly as described here. Would you buy there? How will you sell there?

While this extreme example helps to make the point, even more moderate examples are telling. When a potential buyer drives into a neighborhood and there's even one car parked on a lawn with someone working on it, it sets a tone. The buyer thinks, "If one could do it, they all could. Do I want to buy into an area where people work on their cars on the front lawn?"

Take it a step further—someone's working on his car, not on the lawn, but in the driveway. He's changing the oil (which almost inevitably means an oil stain). The buyer again asks, "Do I want to buy there?"

Take it yet another step away. Cars are parked in the driveways and in front of the homes up and down the street, but no one's working on them. There are just a lot of cars. If nothing else, the buyer is going to get the impression of a very dense population in this neighborhood. It looks crowded, congested, not the free and open space the buyer might envision as home.

Finally, consider a neighborhood where there are no (or only one or two) cars in driveways and few cars parked on the streets. What does a potential buyer now see? He or she sees the HOMES! They are what stand out. The area looks open, with lots of space (low density). It looks well cared for by owners

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who are concerned about their neighborhood. In short, it looks like a great place to live. The property values here are likely to be the highest.

I haven't convinced you? Then take a little time to drive around neighborhoods and see for yourself. I would bet that those areas that are most exclusive, that are seeing the fastest price appreciation, that are the most desirable, are also those areas that have the fewest numbers of cars parked in driveways (and, generally, have the fewest number of cars on the street). It's a fact: The fewer autos visible in a neighborhood, generally speaking, the more desirable the area.

Note: We're not talking here about prohibiting people from parking on the street. People have gatherings and parties and those who attend come in cars. But, that's short term and is readily identifiable. Rather, we're concerned about areas where there are loads of cars parked day and night in front and on driveways.

If you need any final convincing, just ask any real estate agent. When your home is listed, you'll be told, "Don't park your car in the driveway or in front. Park it in the garage, so people can see how nice and open your home is."

What to Do?

Obviously, don't park your car in your driveway, or in front on the street for long periods of time. If you don't have a big enough garage for all of your vehicles, you may want to consider renting a covered parking space.

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Many homeowners' associations have rules about parking cars. You are requested to keep cars off the driveway and the street and in the garage. Some even go so far as to have a time limit you can keep your car in front of your home.

Although many homeowners complain about such seemingly trivial rules, they also love it when they can sell their homes for higher prices because of the appealing look of their community.

Can you get your neighbors to park their cars in their garages? If you don't have a homeowners' association, this is not the sort of thing you can readily organize a community to do. Most people will simply scoff at the idea.

But, you can help educate your neighbors. Whenever you're with them and conversation inevitably turns to property values, you can be sure people will listen if you have a suggestion as to how property values can be improved. The first time you mention neighborhood appearance and cars, chances are there will be a lot of negative reaction. But, you'll have initiated the idea. When your neighbors travel to other areas, they will now be looking at the interaction of cars and neighborhood appearance. Mention it a couple more times and you'll soon have some converts.

No, you won't be able to turn every neighbor or every neighborhood around. Some areas are simply high density with small garages and too many cars with nowhere to park except the driveway and in front. If that's the case, you'll just have to bear it and the consequences it has on property values.

On the other hand, if you've got your home for sale, keep your driveway clear (and also the front of your home, if possible).

Work on educating your neighbors. If even a few begin to keep their cars parked in their garages, it can make a big change in the overall appearance of the neighborhood.