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Op Ed: The High-Touch Business of Full-Service Real Estate

By Lennox Scott

In my travels to real estate events around the country, I hear from agents and brokers that in the face of limited-service providers and negative media, they are being asked more than ever by their clients to justify their value as full-service real estate professionals. Before I tackle this subject, I think a little historical perspective is in order.

Limited-service providers are not new to our business. In 1995, the real estate industry was quick to embrace the benefits of the Internet and the enhancements it could make to our client's home-buying/-selling experience. Soon thereafter, discount dot-coms began cropping up all over the country, threatening that they would be the demise of the full-service real estate model.

However, with time, most of these limited-service providers failed because they underestimated the value of a full-service real estate professional and the investment that is required to meet the unique needs of each individual client. They thought they could revolutionize the real estate industry without ever having to leave their computers. But they were wrong.

Real estate is a "high-touch" business in which our clients make one of the most significant financial and emotional purchases of their lives. It is disrespectful to all involved to suggest that the entirety of this experience can be limited to e-mail and phone conversations. Full-service real estate professionals are out in the neighborhoods, exploring communities, visiting listings, performing marketing analyses and collecting all the information that our clients need to make an informed, confident decision about their real estate needs.

We have the long-term relationships with the lenders, inspectors, appraisers and contractors, and we are fully trained in contract law and negotiations. This level of service simply cannot be provided by someone who sits behind a computer all day. Furthermore, home buyers/sellers should expect more from their real estate agent than minimal effort.

I recently spoke with some John L. Scott brokers/agents and asked them what sets full-service real estate providers apart from discount/limited-service providers. As trite as it might sound to some, the overwhelming answer was "we care." Not just about the transaction or the compensation they receive for that transaction, but rather they care about the long-term happiness and livelihood of their clients.

As real estate professionals, our value is defined by the investment we make in each and every client. That's because we are about the full experience of buying, selling and owning a piece of the American Dream. Our hope is that the relationship does not end when the transaction has closed, because for us, being a full-service real estate professional means having valuable relationships with our clients for life.

At some point, every full-service real estate broker/agent is asked to reduce their commission, but as I remind my agents, rarely are doctors, lawyers or accountants asked to discount their services, so why should we?

My advice to my full-service counterparts around the country is to live and breathe the positive affirmation that we are all respected real estate professionals that are valued for our experience, our competency and our integrity. If you reflect this in all things that you do, your value can never be diminished-or discounted. RE

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