

ASK CLARK HOWARD: Open mind, agent's eye key to selling home
Clark Howard - For the Journal-Constitution
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Have you seen the billboard on I-75 that posts how many houses are for sale in metro Atlanta? The number has been steadily climbing toward the 90,000 mark!

If you're thinking of adding your home to the mix, you'll be glad to know you have several ways to do it.

At one time, selling a house meant you either hired a real estate agent or you didn't. Today, there are lots of variations and choices you can make. You can hire a full-time agent; sign on for select services from an agent; work with various discount marketers; or sell it entirely on your own (For Sale by Owner, or FSBO).

There are a few people who have the right mentality to sell their own home. But most of us take it too personally. There's an emotional attachment to a home that isn't there with a stock or bond. But if you are going to do it yourself, you need to do the same kind of homework an agent would do.

First, come up with a 12-week sales plan. Figure out how you're going to advertise, schedule visits and handle open houses. Remember, for 12 weeks, you have to deal with the questions and impromptu calls. I'd also recommend that you protect agents who bring you a buyer by agreeing to pay them a 2 percent to 3 percent commission.

You may want to work with a broker who will put your home in the Multiple Listing Service. Go to Yourigloo.com to find out how much it might cost. Some companies offer a limited menu of options, from a flat fee for some services to a reduced commission. In Atlanta, Duffy Realty (Duffyrealtyofatlanta.com) and Ziprealty.com are two you might want to check out.

Whether you sell with a traditional agent, on your own or with some mix in between, one thing doesn't change: You've got to dress up your house. A lot of us have things we don't notice because we see them every day --- the trim that needs fresh paint, the items that need to be repaired, the closets full of clutter. If you have too much stuff, rent a storage facility and put your possessions in it. If you like unusual colors, paint them to neutral shades that will give buyers a clean canvas.

One thing I'd like sellers to do is invite the most negative person you know to come in and tell you what they think of your house. That will give you a list of items to correct or address. Have a home inspection done and make copies of it for buyers to see. If you've made repairs, show buyers the receipts. Remember, people want to buy a dream, not a potential problem. Last, I highly recommend that you keep an open mind. Bring in a few agents, see what they think your house is worth and listen to how they would market it. Most people at that point say, "This is a lot more work than I thought!" and will hire someone to do it. Either way, you'll have picked up valuable information.

H.M. Cauley contributed to this article.

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It's the time of the year when the home-selling season kicks off, and with it comes one of my most frequently asked questions: Should I try to sell my house by myself?

To offer a "For Sale by Owner" or not is a question only you, as the seller, can answer. There are several key points you should consider before making up your mind.

First of all, if your idea of doing an FSBO is to buy a for-sale sign, put it in the yard, and wait for buyers to show up, you're probably not going to be very successful. Most people do ultimately end up going with a listing agent. In fact, the vast majority of homes in metro Atlanta are sold with the assistance of a professional real estate agent.

If you're willing to do the work, an FSBO might be right for you. The first thing I'd suggest is to map out a twelve-week marketing plan. Lay out how you're going to advertise, set the price, make up a brochure, handle showings, and host open houses. Perhaps the toughest part here may be settling on the asking price. If you go to www.realtor.com, you can see a range of homes in your area and how they are priced. But know that the asking price is not always the selling price.

The next step is to have your most critical friend come over and give you specific suggestions that might hurt your feelings but may help your house sell. Because we live in our houses every day, we don't necessarily see the scuff marks, the carpet stains and the junky closets that someone going through your home will notice immediately. Remember, home shoppers are buying dreams, not problems. So clean out the closets, add a fresh coat of paint, reduce the clutter and keep the house straightened up.

Another part of your sales plan should be to consider how you'll handle agents who bring qualified buyers. Usually, that means offering a 3% commission to the agent. I say, pay it: It's better than paying 0% but having no purchaser at all.

Whether you're doing an FSBO or working with a listing agent, you also need to consider the safety factor when selling a house. There are criminals out there who go to Sunday open houses just to steal. So put all the valuables, family heirlooms, and cash in a safe or storage unit.

If you've gotten to the halfway point of your twelve-week FSBO and you find you hate doing it, pull the plug. Consider listing with an agent or take a look at the services offered by various hybrid real estate firms. Zip Realty (www.ziprealty.com) is one whose agents offer lower commission rates.

At Duffy Realty (www.duffyrealtyofatlanta.com), sellers pay a flat fee and then select additional services from a menu of options; another is YourIgloo (www.yourigloo.com). The advantage with these firms is that you can get your home on the multiple listing services, an important way to let people know you're selling.

Whether you opt to go FSBO, to work with a hybrid real estate firm, or to list your home with a traditional full-commission agent, one thing is still true: Selling a home can be a nerve-racking process. You might want to weigh how much you could save against how much aggravation you're willing to take on.

H.M. Cauley contributed to this article.

Clark Howard answers questions of general interest in this column. Because of volume, he can't respond to all questions.

Have a question? Visit [ajc.com /buyersedge](http://ajc.com/buyersedge).

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