How to Win at the Game of Real Estate

A 10-step game plan for building a real estate business you love.

Alan Hernandez, Author

CHAPTER 1

Why Should You Read This Book?

> *Real estate isn’t won by the loudest agent. It’s won by the one clients trust, remember, and refer.*

Ever wonder why one agent toils away without much success while another enjoys a thriving business?

Is it just luck? We talk about luck as though it were a living force — a force that chooses some people and ignores others. When you think about it, it's kind of silly to believe some force we can't even define decides who gets to be successful.

Is success based on talent then? That's another word we use a lot without really understanding it. Is talent some mysterious quality people are "just born with?" And how does it affect success? We all know artists and performers who seem to have talent — whatever there is — but aren't successful.

More and more, researchers and thinkers are discovering that success has more to do with preparation and opportunity than it does with mystical forces such as luck or talent. And here's the thing: preparation and opportunity are things you can control. You can learn them, practice them, and use them over and over to build a successful business.

That's what this book will teach you to do!

In the real estate game, you can prepare for success by increasing your knowledge of the market, practicing your people skills, differentiating yourself from competitors, and training yourself to be a more effective negotiator.

You can create opportunities by looking for prospects in places other agents ignore, finding ways to meet more prospective buyers and sellers, and sharpening your marketing focus. When your preparation intersects with opportunity, your success isn't just more probable. It's inevitable.

As you probably know, there are a lot of competition in the real estate business. The National Association of Realtors® has a membership count of more than 1 million. That's a lot of real estate agents crowding the marketplace. They make it hard for people who want to buy or sell homes to cut through the noise and find you.

This book will enable you to get business not just in spite of your competition, but because of it. You'll learn how to develop superior skills and a Unique Selling Proposition that will get you more customers and make you more money. What you learn from reading this book will set you apart from other Realtors®.

Here are just a few things you'll learn:

- The tips inside this book will enable you to show customers why they should work with you instead of your competition.
- You'll learn how to find your strengths and tell customers about them effectively — regardless of your communication style.
- You'll discover how to build your clientele and take advantage of little-known principles such as the Law of 250.
- This book will provide tips on how to build your confidence, make friends, and become the kind of professional people want to work with.
- You'll explore not only how to tell customers you're better to work with, but to prove it with testimonials, reviews, and case studies — even if you're brand new to the real estate game!

So, sit back, enjoy, and get ready to absorb no-nonsense tips on how to take your real estate business to the highest level. Every Realtor® is looking for an edge over their 1 million competitors. This book will provide you with that competitive advantage.

CHAPTER 2

An Overview of the 10 Steps

The 10-step game plan

1. Show your results
2. Build real rapport
3. Know why you’re better
4. Project quiet confidence
5. Sharpen your presentation
6. Make a plan & present it
7. Lead with your passion
8. Own a niche
9. Communicate to your strength
10. Build your clientele

Show prospects how you helped other customers reach their goals. Customers don't have the knowledge of real estate to determine which agents are good and which are not. Use case studies and testimonials to prove your effectiveness.

Learn how to make friends. People prefer to do business with people they like. Win people's business by first winning their friendship. To develop this ability, practice listening attentively to people. Look for something about them that you admire and can compliment in a genuine way. Avoid focusing on possible areas of conflict or disagreement.

Discover exactly why you're better, then tell customers. Learn to identify the skills that set you apart from your competition. Your customers want to hear about why you're different. Make this an early highlight of conversation.

Learn how to be the confident pro your clients want to hire. Is lack of confidence holding you back? Sell yourself to you first. Start by reviewing the ways you've helped customers in the past. Then formulate a plan you can believe in.

Sharpen your presentation. You have the skills to be a champion communicator. Practice makes perfect.

Create your plan and present it to customers. What's your marketing plan for sellers? And can you help buyers put together a buying plan? You'd be surprised how many agents overlook this important step!

Find your passion and use it to get business. Customers are drawn to passionate people. Let the secret of Affinity Marketing put your passion to work. This can also give you greater satisfaction by putting more of "you" in your career.

Develop a niche expertise and promote yourself as the best at that niche. Clients want to work with an expert. Find out how to tap your unique expertise. Your niche should help you form a core platform for prospecting, but it shouldn't prevent you from seeking business in other areas.

Identify and use your communication strength. Different people communicate in different ways. Some are great public speakers. Some express themselves more effectively through their writing. Others are more comfortable communicating and building rapport one-on-one. Avoid your personal pitfalls and find the way that works best for you.

Build your clientele. Wouldn't you love to wake up every morning and know that new customers were on their way? Learn the secret of a top sales expert, who shared his secret, the Law of 250.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- This book details the 10 simple steps — and professional secrets — to unlocking skills you didn't know you had.
- Learning and applying the 10 steps detailed in this book will help you build a real estate business that is fulfilling, self-sustaining, and above all, successful.

CHAPTER 3

Show Prospects How You Helped Other Customers Reach Their Goals

> *Don’t tell people you’re great — show them how you made someone else’s goal happen.*

Alan speaking at a White Picket Realty event.

You might have heard the adage, "Don't just tell people — show them!" It's a key to success in many industries and professions, from sales and marketing to filmmaking. Why? Because all of your competitors claim to help their clients. But very few know how to demonstrate it in a concrete, convincing way.

The best way to demonstrate your value to prospective customers — the best way to prove why they should work with you — is to give them testimonials and case studies of how you helped other customers reach their goals.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Why do you need to give them testimonials and case studies? Let me explain. The average real estate customer does not know anything about real estate. They don't know who's a good Realtor® and who's not a good Realtor®. They find real estate concepts and terminology confusing.

Frankly, they don't understand real estate any more than you or I understand engine rebuilding, civil litigation, or heart surgery. If we were to go out and hire a mechanic to rebuild our engine, or a lawyer to defend us in a lawsuit, or a doctor to perform our heart surgery, we wouldn't know much about the process. We wouldn't know who's good and who's not.

It's the same thing for prospective real estate customers. They don't know who's good and who's not. So, by giving them case studies and testimonials, you can show them why you're good and give them the confidence to work with you.

In addition to that, almost everyone has been burned by a business or by a professional in the past. If you only make big claims about your abilities, prospects aren't likely to believe you. If they've had a bad experience with a real estate agent — or with any professional — they're likely to be skeptical.

They're going to be cautious about working with somebody, unless they know that person's going to do a good job for them. With so many Realtors® to choose from, how do they know who to choose to work with? Here's how you can put together case studies, testimonials, and other reviews that document your skills and get customers to work with you.

HERE'S HOW TO DO IT

You can give prospects a case study. You can give them examples of how you sold a house, for example, that another agent wasn't able to sell. You can show them examples of how you were able to negotiate a better price for your customer. You can show them examples of how you were able to help another home buyer find their dream home, despite the obstacles. You can show them how you solved problems in a transaction. That's a case study.

Basically, you show the before and after. Before, there was a seller, and an agent couldn't sell their house. The seller didn't know what to do. So, they hired you to sell their house, and you got it done, despite their earlier problems.

Here's an example of an effective case study.

Case Study #1: Home was for sale for 12 months with two other Realtors®. The sellers hired me, and I sold it in 8 days for 98.3% of the asking price.

This was an interesting sale. The sellers had been trying to sell the home for a year and really struggled at it. (The reason the home wasn't selling was not because of the price. (The home was absolutely worth what the sellers were asking for.) BUT, there was a minor complication. The neighborhood where the home was located was considering some major upgrades.

They were considering assessing everyone in the neighborhood for $7,000 to $8,000 each to cover the cost. The buyers would look at the house and then get cold feet because of the pending assessment.

Most of the buyers would say something like, "I'll buy your house, but I want an $8,000 discount on the price because of the special assessment."

The sellers would reply, "I'm glad to sell you my house, but I am not going to discount $8,000 because we think the special assessment is not going to go through."

The sellers told me about the problem when I put the home up for sale. I thought about it for a few minutes and proposed a solution.

Here's what I told them:

"Let's sell the house and agree to hold $8,000 in escrow. If the special assessment goes through within a year, then the buyers get that $8,000. If it does not go through within a year, then the $8,000 goes to you."

We all agreed that that sounded like a good idea. The home sold very fast for 98.3% of the asking price. The $8,000 was put into escrow and an attorney typed up the escrow agreement.

It turned out that the sellers were correct. The opposition in the neighborhood was strong and the special assessment never went through.

A year later, the sellers received the $8,000 that had been put into escrow. This story gives you a great example of some of the problems a good agent solves on a day-to-day basis.

I don't think my idea was particularly revolutionary, but it did solve the problem. Honestly, I am sometimes surprised at how little effort other people put into selling a home.

Do You Want to Sell Your Home for More Money? Give Me a Call Right Away at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

As you can see, case studies tell stories — stories about sales that you've accomplished. Stories about problems you have solved. You want to put together a really good case study that proves how you were able to get a better result than the other agent who had been working on the problem.

Did you overcome an inherent weakness in the property? Identify a hidden advantage that the owners — and especially other agents — completely overlooked? Help the buyers locate creative financing? Save what seemed like a doomed sale with a last-minute show of negotiating heroics? What set you apart from the people who couldn't get it done?

USING VIDEO TESTIMONIALS

Here's another great way to put together testimonials for your business: use video testimonials whenever you go and meet with a customer to sign a contract.

Let's say you have a listing, and it's been on the market a while with another Realtor®, who wasn't able to sell it. You go meet with the sellers. You finally get an offer. You finally get a contract. You meet with them to sign the contract. While you're doing that, pull out your cellphone and get a testimonial video.

I've found that the closing is a great place to get a video testimonial. But when you're meeting with the seller to sign the contract, they'll probably be on an emotional high.

You know how real estate can be. There can be a lot of problems with closing. Maybe the loan gets delayed. There are inspection problems. There are problems with the survey. Problems with this, problems with that.

Signing the contract is a high point, when both sides of the sale breathe a sigh of relief. It feels as though the hard work and anticipation have paid off, even though additional problems may surface at the closing.

Remember, though, problems are good. If there weren't any problems, people wouldn't need to hire a Realtor®. Don't be ashamed of problems but be careful to choose the right time to record your testimonial video. Wait until problems have been resolved. Then be ready to shoot an additional testimonial video after the closing, when final documents are signed and everyone's happy again.

OK, now that you know when to get your testimonial video, here's how to get it. Most people are not professional speakers. Even if you script their comments in advance, most people are not good speakers. I don't mean to sound harsh or to be rude to anybody, but that's just the reality. You know, most of us are not good speakers.

So, in order to get an effective testimonial, you're going to have to ask your customer questions. Ask "How long did you have your house for sale with the other Realtor®" when it didn't sell?" They might answer, "I had my house for sale for three months," might answer, "I had my house for sale for three months."

OK, cool. Then, you ask them, "Were you frustrated during the process of three months when it wouldn't sell?" They might answer with something such as, "Yes, I was very frustrated for three months when the other agent could not sell my house." So far, so good.

Now, you can script those two things together and get the customer's answer, so they speak smoothly and convincingly. They can say good things about you, talk about the job you've done, but you'll have to ask them questions and basically pull the testimonial out of them. Don't expect them to walk in the door and have an amazing testimonial ready for you.

Here are some questions you might consider asking:

- How did you feel?
- What were some of the low points?
- What were some of the high points?
- What do you think I did better?
- What do you think I did differently?
- Would you recommend me to any of your friends and family?
- Would you recommend other people work with me?
- Would you recommend people not work with the other agent? (Don't use the other agent's name!)

In this way, you'll pull all the desirable information out of your client. Once you're done, you'll want to go through and edit all that information into a solid, continuous testimonial, in which it sounds like only the client is talking. If you don't know how to do this, you can hire someone to edit the video for you on a website such as fiver.com or freelancer.com.

Here's another tip. When people are being interviewed for a testimonial, they usually don't know where to look. Hold your phone or camera close to your head, and just have the client look at you. This will seem more natural to them and will look much more natural in the finished video.

Nothing looks worse than a client who continually shifts focus, darting their eyes back and forth between you and the camera. This makes people look shifty and dishonest.

Pay attention to sound quality. If possible, record your client in a room that doesn't echo, and hold your phone close enough to them so that they can be heard plainly.

Smoothly edited video testimonials are very powerful tools for showing prospects how you've helped other customers solve their problems and reach their goals.

GETTING EMAIL TESTIMONIALS

The next thing you can think about doing is email testimonials. Handle these similarly to the way you handle video testimonials. Send your customer a list of questions:

- Hey, John. I just sold your house. I really appreciate your business. By the way, would you mind answering a couple of questions for me?
- Do you think I did a good job?
- Would you recommend me to your friends and family?
- Were you frustrated with the other agent?
- Etc.

Two or three of the right questions might be all you need. After they've answered all your questions, you'll have information you can turn into a testimonial. Maybe you could write it into a sentence or a couple of mini-paragraphs. Then, send it back to the customer, and ask, "Hey, do you agree with this? If so, then just email this back to me."

As with your video, you'll be writing the testimonial for your customer. What you're really doing is you're pulling the testimonial out of them and scripting it, so that it reads really well.

ASK FOR REVIEWS

Once you've gone back and forth with your customer and completed their email testimonial, why not turn it into a review? Ask them if they'll go online to Zillow or Realtor.com and post their comment in the review section.

Here are some other ways to get reviews. Again, a good time to get a review is when you sign the contract with the customer. For example, maybe you're working with a buyer. They've found their dream home, and they're negotiating the price.

Finally, the seller accepts their offer, and you're meeting with them to sign off on the contract. That's an emotional high. It's a great time to get a testimonial from that buyer, and it's also a great time to get the buyer's review.

As with testimonials, you can ask for an additional review at the closing. Don't worry about asking for the review in the presence of the other agent. In a lot of cases, the other agent will jump in and get their own review from their customer. You can even offer to help them do that.

Remember, be gracious. Don't try to outshine anyone, and especially, do not say anything bad about the other agent in front of their customer. Just go ahead and get the reviews.

Bring your cell phone or laptop computer. Hook it up to Wi-Fi if it's available at the office where the closing takes place. Then, you can type the review into your computer with your customer or show them how to enter a review on Zillow or Realtor.com — even walk them through it on their cellphone.

FINAL TIPS FOR TESTIMONIALS

What if you're not a top producer? What if you're just starting out? What if you don't have a bunch of reviews? What if you have no reviews or testimonials? Don't sweat it! You're not alone.

You can still use reviews, testimonials, and case studies. How? Use the case studies from your brokerage.

If you're just starting out and your broker's going to be helping you, then your broker will have case studies you can use. Use the case studies from other agents at your brokerage and the reviews of your brokerage to grow your business.

Remember, if a picture is worth a thousand words, then a testimonial can save you a thousand words trying to convince a customer to work with you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Most people don't understand real estate and can't pick good agents from bad ones.
- Use case studies, testimonials, and reviews to show how you've helped other customers reach their goals.
- Contract signings and closings are great times to record testimonials on your cell phone and obtain reviews.
- Use questions to pull information from clients.

- Professional editing also helps.
- If you're a new agent or have no case studies or reviews, use your broker's.

CHAPTER 4

Anyone Can Learn How to Make Friends

> *People do business with people they like. Rapport isn’t a trick; it’s genuine interest, repeated.*

Making friends is a skill that anyone can learn. Now, why does this matter? Why do you want to learn how to make friends? Let me explain.

If all other factors are equal, people prefer to do business with people they like. In other words, friends, or at least individuals who are friendly. If you know how to make friends, then you can be that person and you can win their business.

Now don't worry, you can learn how to make friends. It's true. 100 percent. Don't doubt your abilities. This is a skill that any person can learn.

ONE REALTOR'S STORY

Here's a true story. I know a man who struggled to make friends. He wasn't very good at it, and he honestly doubted that he had the ability to make friends. Because he was a Realtor®, his struggle held him back from his true potential in the real estate business.

Once this man committed himself to learning the necessary skills, he discovered there were some excellent books and other resources at his command. One of the best was Dale Carnegie's classic, How to Win Friends and Influence People. Gradually, the guy learned the steps in winning friends and began applying the principles successfully.

It's interesting that the man in my example started by wanting to make friends so that he could become more successful in real estate. Today, this man loves real estate because it's a great way for him to meet people and make friends.

Dale Carnegie realized that people are largely emotional, not logical. Often, they're motivated by prejudices, pride, and vanity.

Carnegie advised his readers to arouse in the other person an eager want. The best way to influence others is to talk about what they want and show them how to get it. If there is one secret of success, it's the ability to see things the way the other person sees them.

Here's what you can do: just learn how to be nice. I know that sounds a little corny, but niceness matters. Just being nice can make a big difference to your business. Then you can learn how to bond with people.

To learn how to connect with people, find something that they're interested in and that you're interested in. As you learn these skills on how to make friends, you can practice by going to community events, interacting with people, etc. There are lots of ways that you can practice how to make friends.

Here are a couple of tips on things that you can do to make friends right away. The first thing you want to do is to become genuinely interested in other people. Learn how to listen to them. Learn how to let them talk for 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, and just listen.

TIPS FOR MAKING FRIENDS

Break the Ice Gently:

- Become genuinely interested in other people.
- Smile and maintain good eye contact.
- Learn a person's name, remember it, and use it in the conversation.
- Listen attentively and encourage people to talk about themselves.
- Find a reason to give the other person a sincere compliment.
- Center your conversation around the other person's interests. Look for interests that you have in common.
- Make the other person feel like the most important person in the room.

Show Respect and Promote Engagement:

- Never argue. Be respectful of others' opinions. Don't say, "You're wrong."
- Nod your agreement with the other person. Try to phrase points so that they find it easy to say "yes."
- Let them do most of the talking and think they came up with the good ideas.
- Practice empathy, but don't say, "I understand how you feel" unless you've been in the same situation.
- Assume the other person has good intentions.
- When possible, tell stories to illustrate your points.

Avoid Friction:

- If the other person makes a mistake, call it to their attention indirectly. Ask for clarification — don't confront.
- Be quick to acknowledge your own mistakes.
- Avoid sounding dictatorial. Put what you want the other person to do in the form of a question: "Would you be comfortable doing this?" or "Does that sound acceptable?"
- Help the other person save face. Never make them feel cornered or defensive.

Be interested in what they have to tell you. I can almost hear you asking, "But what if I'm really not interested?" Remember, it's a skill that you can develop.

Start by acting interested. Then learn to turn the other person's conversation subtly toward subjects that are more interesting to you. Part of being interested is just keeping yourself alert and engaged. Avoid being judgmental. You don't agree with everything your friends say, right? Just treat the people you meet the way you treat your friends.

Once you learn this, I have seen huge changes in customers. I've met with some people who came in and were kind of ornery, difficult to deal with, and even downright hostile. I bit it off; I sat down. I learned how to talk to them and listen to them for hours, and then they hired me to help them sell their house.

You can do the same thing yourself. Just learn how to listen. You can try turning it into a contest for yourself. See how long you can let someone else talk before you open your mouth and speak. Maybe you meet a new person at a community event or somewhere or maybe a new customer. Just let them talk.

If you're there meeting them one-on-one, maybe at an open house, just let them talk and talk and talk. Just smile and listen to them and see how long you can go before you interrupt or reply. Most people avoid silence. The less you say, the harder they will work to fill up the empty spaces in the conversation. Think of how much you'll learn about the other person! You'll learn what they like — things you can touch on to bond with them. You'll learn their dislikes — things to avoid in future conversations.

You'll find out what they think about things — their hopes and goals, their fears and insecurities. All of these things help define your role as a friend. How can you help these people? How can you support their goals? How can you put them at ease?

You can train yourself to become a good listener. A good listener will run circles at making friends around somebody who talks a lot about themselves.

Then become genuinely interested in other people. Listen to them. Talk to them. If they say something you agree with or that reflects your own ideas, it's easy to be genuinely interested in what they have to talk about.

Even if they say something you disagree with or that sounds strange to you, learn to appreciate how and why they developed those ideas. It's been said that we learn the most from the people who are the least like us. Learning about the differences in people can be interesting.

Make the people you meet feel important and do it sincerely. Don't make them feel important with false flattery. Make them feel important because you take the time to really hear what they have to say. Make them feel important, and you're going to gain friends. Make friends, and you're going to be successful.

DON'T FORGET NONVERBAL CUES

Remember that nonverbal cues — the little behavioral signals we give to others — are often an important part of building friendship. Maintain eye contact with the person you meet — not a searing glare that makes them feel uncomfortable, but enough to let them feel that they have your undivided attention. Don't look around distractedly.

Watch your posture. If you're sitting far away from them, tensed up with your arms and legs crossed, you're probably sending the wrong message. Try opening up a bit, physically. Lean in toward them slightly, to make it clear that what they say is important for you to hear.

Many people find success by mirroring — watching the other person and trying to adopt the same posture, expressions, and gestures. This is a good idea, but don't make it so obvious that the other person thinks you're making fun of them.

When you speak — again, let them do most of the talking — keep your voice at an easy pace that's not too fast. Let people know you have time for what they want to say.

Smile. It's hard to dislike someone who clearly likes us. So, show outward signs that you like the other person.

A FEW LAST TIPS

Don't criticize what people have to say, their thoughts, or actions. Don't condemn them, and don't complain. Criticism is futile. It puts people on the defensive, which often leads to trying to justify themselves. Criticism wounds people's precious pride, damages their sense of importance, and arouses resentment.

You'll show more character and self-control by being honest and giving sincere appreciation.

As Thomas Carlyle said: A great man shows his greatness by the way he treats little men.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- All other factors being equal, people prefer to buy from friends or individuals they like.
- Making friends is a skill anyone can learn. The more you practice being friendly, the better you'll be at making friends.
- Start by being nice and a good listener. Let people talk, and don't judge them.
- Study great resources, such as Dale Carnegie's book, How to Win Friends and Influence People.
- To help you bond with someone, find something that also interests you.

- Make sure your nonverbal behavior is engaging. Keep your posture open, smile, maintain appropriate eye contact, and use a pleasant, medium-paced voice.

CHAPTER 5

Discover Exactly Why You're Better, Then Tell Customers

> *If you can’t say why you’re the better choice, neither can your client. Get clear, then say it plainly.*

Figure out exactly why you're better or why you're different from other real estate agents. Find your strengths. Why does this matter? Let me explain how this works.

Great marketers know the value of market positioning. It's a strategy to make your brand or product stand apart from those of your competitors in the minds of your customers.

Remember those 1 million Realtors® we talked about in this book's Introduction? It's important to set yourself apart from them, or at least the ones in your market area. What do you do that they don't? Why are you the best at doing it?

Most people don't know how to show prospective customers why they're better — even when they're way, way better than their competition. It's a reality of life. Some established businesses have more customers, have more traction in the marketplace just because they've been around longer. That doesn't necessarily mean that they're better.

Have you ever heard of Hewlett-Packard? They should be the best computer company in the business. They've been around the longest. Almost everybody in America knows who Hewlett-Packard is. However, Hewlett-Packard didn't invent the iPhone. Somebody else did — somebody not as well-known as Hewlett-Packard at the time.

We all know examples of people who did an amazing job but didn't have a lot of customers because not enough people knew about them. I've seen examples in car repair, carpenters, tile setters, and contractors. Often, people who do an amazing job don't know how to tell people why they're better. I've even seen don't know how to tell people why they're better. I've even seen marketing people who are so busy doing great work for their clients that they forget to market themselves!

One problem is that even high-performing individuals usually don't know how to tell a story about their abilities. Stories are powerful. The best stories don't just give the facts — they make facts memorable by engaging listeners' emotions. Tell a story to back up your claim about why you're better and why the customer should work with you.

FOLLOW A 3-STEP PROCESS

Here's how you can tell customers why you're better than your competition. The difference between you and your competitors doesn't have to be huge. Perhaps you're just better at a specific niche or better in a different way. Setting yourself apart from — and above — your competition is a three-step process:

Figure out what makes you better.

Then, figure out how you will tell customers why you're better.

Test out your message and tweak it based on the response.

HOW TO FIGURE OUT WHY YOU'RE BETTER

Figuring out why you're better doesn't have to be super complicated. Before you get into fancy graphs and all sorts of crazy stuff, just look at the basics. In marketing terms, this is developing your Unique Selling Proposition (USP). If you have testimonials and case studies, you already have proof that you are better.

Here's what you can do: find something that separates you from other agents. It has to be believable. Here are a few ideas of differentiators you can look for in your own expertise.

Negotiating: Perhaps your business experience makes you an excellent negotiator. You used to work at a Fortune 500 company. Be aware that many agents claim to be good negotiators, so be prepared to explain your expertise to your prospects and customers in ways that are convincing and easy to understand. Offer them proof.

Tell your customers stories about the multi-million-dollar deals you negotiated. Give them examples of deals you initiated because you dug into research your competitors overlooked. Tell them about the time you lightened a tense negotiation by telling a well-timed joke.

Give people inside information about the negotiation process — how to know when to be flexible or stand firm on pricing. Explain how to figure out when a buyer or seller is bluffing. Connect your skills to results that are meaningful to the customer — usually making or saving them money. Tell them how you're an excellent negotiator who will negotiate a better deal for them whether they're buying or selling a house.

Customer Service: If you've worked in customer service, tell people about that. "Hey, I know how to take care of customers and keep them happy. Come to me for a world-class customer experience!" Tell them you'll save them time, money, and frustration by anticipating their needs. You'll take the worry out of a real estate transaction by explaining things in simple terms, not jargon. Prove that you say with testimonials, reviews, and ratings from satisfied customers.

Perhaps you worked in a non-real estate job, such as waiting tables. Tell people you're used to a fast-paced environment, solving problems, and resolving complaints from difficult people. You're an expert at keeping people happy.

Were you an account rep? Talk about your problem-solving skills, attention to detail, employee-of-the-month awards, and how you earned customer loyalty.

Are your clients selling homes in an upscale community? Explain that you know what makes upscale professionals and business owners "tick" — the same people likely to buy their home.

Did you work in retail? Talk about your customer-first attitude, and how you're willing to put in long hours to make a sale. You're used to dealing with unique requests and providing high-level customer service.

Staging Houses: Maybe your talent is visualizing a home from the buyer's point of view. You understand how the right paint job, furnishings, and carpeting can maximize a home's advantages and minimize problems. Talk about how effective staging sells homes for more money. Provide a few hints of how you might stage their home — just enough to let them see the possibilities.

Even if you're not a full-blown "stager," you can communicate your passion for staging. Have you worked as an artist, graphic designer, or interior designer? Have you sold — or made — furniture? Worked in a paint store mixing colors? Any of these experiences can be turned into an advantage in staging. Perhaps you can save the sellers money by staging their home instead of having an expensive professional do it.

Maybe you stay up-to-date on the latest trends. Perhaps you imply know the best local stagers and contractors. If you're working with buyers, let them know how your staging expertise will help them turn their house into a home.

Photographing Houses: Talk about how you'll take better-quality, more appealing pictures of their house. Everybody says, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Why not talk about that? "Hey, instead of writing an ad about your house and its four bedrooms and three baths, I can take an amazing picture that will capture attention and make buyers instantly fall in love with your house!" You could also take pictures of your prospect's home and post them on Instagram to attract buyers.

Talk about how your expert lighting composition will showcase their home's best features, making their house sparkle and shine. With a little research, you can find examples of similar homes that sold well with good-quality photos or languished on the market with amateur-looking pictures.

Marketing: If you used to work in media or at an ad agency, then talk about your marketing expertise and how you'll use it to do a better job of selling their house. If you've worked in real estate a while, you probably have examples of how you've done this better than your competitors. Perhaps you write brilliant ad copy, or you network extensively with local professionals.

What If You Were a Chef? If you've worked as a cook or a chef, talk about your kitchen expertise. You could talk about your ability to handle important details under pressure. Who better than a former chef to explain to buyers the advantages of an efficient kitchen, energy-saving appliances, or an outdoor grilling area? Perhaps sharing a few recipes would inspire future owners. Maybe instead of chocolate chip cookies, your canapés would make an open house the talk of the town.

You Worked in Construction: Maybe you used to work in construction. You know more about the quality craftsmanship and materials of the home than other agents. In fact, maybe you could specialize in new construction, because you're used to working with builders and contractors.

Don't claim to be an inspector unless you want to assume liability for problems. But you can certainly point out the strengths and weaknesses of a home, and alert sellers — or buyers — to potential problems before expensive repairs are needed.

You Understand Financing: Maybe you used to work in lending. In that case, you could talk about your lending expertise, how you can make sure your clients are getting the best deal on their financing, how you can make sure that sellers will have a less stressful sale. As you probably know, financing is the number one cause of stress in real estate.

Other Ideas: I know of a home painter who went into real estate. Strange as it seems, he worked both of these very different jobs at the same time. He would offer to paint the sellers' house if they would list their home with him! He got several listings this way.

Examples are endless. Remember, your niche might be your passion, rather than your expertise. Are you passionate about fishing? The beach? Waterfront properties? Historic districts? Whatever matters to you, it gives you an opportunity to communicate with prospects and clients on uniquely engaging terms. (I'll explore this in more depth later in the book.)

You can literally "speak their language" and use that ability to bond, to earn their trust, and achieve success on their behalf. You can be the person they want to sell their house.

TELLING YOUR CUSTOMERS

Once you've figured out why you're better than your competition, it's up to you to capitalize on that difference by communicating it to customers. Here are a couple of tips on how you can tell customers why you're better.

Whenever you're talking to a customer, get straight to the point on how you can benefit them. Don't say, "Ben, I notice you're looking for a home at the beach, and I love the beach. I just love living here in Atlantic Beach," blah, blah, blah, and, "I love living here in this beach town," blah, blah, blah.

Instead, you can say, "I specialize in beach properties," or, "I'm an expert at beach properties." Get straight to the point on how you can benefit them. "I'm an expert at better marketing that will sell your house for more money." "I'm an expert at negotiating a better price for your house."

Remember, the faster you tell them how you can help them, the better. Drag out your message too long, and people just conk out. They stop paying attention and say, "You know what? I'm not interested," and they don't talk to you anymore.

You only have 10 seconds to make a great first impression. So, make sure your first impression is quick, and get to the point of why they should work with you as quickly as possible.

Another example: If you have a great customer service background, you could say, "I specialize in great customer service. I used to be a customer service expert at ABC Corporation, and I got a top-notch rating because of my customer service abilities."

Now that you've made your great first impression in 10 seconds or less, you can put together a great, unique selling proposition for your business. You can talk to customers about why you're better and grow your business.

AVOID THESE MISTAKES

Here are a couple of mistakes to avoid when you're communicating with a prospect. Be careful that what you say doesn't make you sound the same as every other agent. Remember, you want to establish your USP. So, don't rely on the same claims and the same promises. In a sea of agents who all say the same thing, that's not the way to stand out from your competition. Keep your market positioning in mind.

Here's a real-life example of why this matters. Have you ever heard a car dealer radio spot or TV commercial? Every single car dealer ad says the same thing: "We have the lowest prices. We will not be beat. Our prices are so low."

Let's imagine we actually have a car dealership that has the lowest prices. Who cares? The problem is, everybody claims to have the lowest prices, but the consumer can't sort out whose prices are lowest. With every single car dealer claiming to have the lowest prices, it doesn't matter if you genuinely do have the lowest prices, because you appear no different from everyone else.

TIRED CLICHES

Here are some of the claims I've noticed real estate agents make. If you claim to have these same things, it may be hard to stand out from your competition.

"I'm available 24/7, 365 days a year!" A lot of agents say things such as this. I'm available anytime. Call me at 2 in the morning, and I will answer the phone."

"I have the best service!" In fact, this claim is kind of sad. I honestly feel bad, but I know of a real estate company that started up — it was actually a real estate team — and they talked about how they had the best service. That was everything they talked about.

Their branding was so pitiful that they ended up having to change the name of their company. Maybe they did have the best service — I don't know. The fact is, it didn't matter to consumers. It didn't get the company any business.

"I return phone calls!" (Yawn!) A lot of agents seem to like to talk about the fact that they return phone calls. Does anyone just sit and stare at the phone when it rings? Does any real estate agent with even minimal confidence and enthusiasm not return customers' calls?

"I know the area!" I would suggest avoiding saying this, because almost everybody claims to know the area. If you claim to know the area, make sure you follow up immediately with proof. Study your area to learn all you can about it — the demographics, income levels, offering prices and actual sales prices, sales trends, shopping, schools, and, well, everything else.

Make sure your selling proposition is unique. If it's not different from everyone else's, then it won't help you stand out. And if you don't stand out from your competition, you're just part of the background noise. That's not the way to grow your business.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Identify the passion, experience, or skill that sets you apart from competitors.
- If communicated well, your market positioning signals your value to customers.
- You have 10 seconds or less to make a great first impression on prospects.
- When communicating, avoid clichés that make you sound like all the other agents.

CHAPTER 6

How to Be the Confident Pro Clients Want to Hire

> *Confidence isn't volume. It's preparation you can feel — and clients can feel it too.*

Sell yourself on you. Now, what do I mean by that? I mean that a big part of performing anything well is gaining the confidence that you can do it. You have to first sell yourself — you — on why you're a great Realtor®, and why you deserve people's business.

We all know that confidence makes a huge difference for any business person or professional. Imagine how you'd react if your doctor acted nervous and uncertain when describing the heart surgery you were about to undergo! If you're confident, you have a way better chance at getting the business.

Besides being confident, there are a couple of other things you can do. Why does this matter? Why do you need to sell yourself on you first before you try to sell other people on you?

HELPING CUSTOMERS DECIDE

The average real estate customer doesn't know who's a good agent and who's not. They don't understand real estate, so they have no basis for choosing an agent.

In addition, everyone has qualms. They've been burned by a business. They've been lied to by people who are trying to sell them something. As a result, they're skeptical and they're cautious. You have to convince them you're the right choice, and part of that is showing them that you're confident.

Think about your own experiences. Think about the last time you hired somebody to work on your car. You took it to a mechanic. Unless you've worked with that car mechanic or repair shop for years, and you've proved themselves over and over, it's hard for you to have confidence that they're good at what they do.

Now, if they show you testimonials, positive reviews, or you've been referred to them by several of your friends, you'll have confidence in that car repair shop. But what if there are no testimonials, reviews, or referrals? If you're just talking to them, they can be the best in the world, but you just can't be sure.

CUSTOMERS ARE OVERWHELMED

Even if customers aren't skeptical about your abilities, there are so many real estate agents out there, it's confusing to know which one to pick. When you have the opportunity to talk with a prospective customer, whether it's by phone or face-to-face, it's important to be confident.

Your confidence tells them several important things about yourself. First, it tells them that you're comfortable. You're in control of the situation. You can handle things. You've been in this situation before. You're a seasoned professional — even if, in reality, you're new to the game of real estate!

Your confidence tells them that you believe in yourself. You're not nervous and twitchy, like somebody who doubts their own motives or weaknesses or has something to hide. People who are trustworthy and have good character are confident in themselves. All of these things tell the client they should choose to work with you.

The agent who is sold on why he or she is better probably is better, and as a result, the customers will probably work with that agent.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE

Here's how you can sell yourself on yourself. Go look at some of your testimonials. Remember? I talked about testimonials in Chapter 2 of this book? Read through your testimonials. Remember the stories and think about them.

Think about the happiness you brought to families, the problems you solved for them, and the excellent customer service you provided. Then dig into the specifics. Look at past examples of how you got your customers a better deal.

Many of your competitors claim to be top agents who sell homes for more money. Check out their list of sale prices. Check out your list of sale prices. See how your list of sale price compares with other agents and with other companies.

When you do this, when you start to go through some of your past sales, your past customers, you're going to feel a sense of confidence come over you that is stronger than anything else out there. When you stop to focus on good things you've accomplished, and the good things grateful people have said about your work, you can't help but be proud and confident.

Every testimonial or positive customer review is an affirmation — a statement that someone believes in you. A statement that you've proved your value. A reinforcement of the fact that you deserve to be confident about your work in real estate.

These aren't just "feel-good" statements, either. They're concrete examples of your hard work, your skillful effort, and your dedicated customer service.

Think about the homes you sold or the buyers you helped find for those sellers. Compare your average list to sale price with other agents. Look at some of the deals you were able to negotiate on behalf of your buyers.

Perhaps you were more effective because you were a better listener, who made your customers' needs your priority. Maybe you were better at returning phone calls and responding to emails. Or perhaps you put in extra time showing houses or researching the market.

The basics are important. If you know you covered the fundamentals well for your clients, then you can be confident that you do a really good job.

KNOW YOUR MARKET

Once you've recognized your accomplishments and abilities, make sure you're familiar with your market. Become an expert on it. Whenever you have a customer, do the absolute best that you possibly can.

Learn the ins and outs of the neighborhoods and what kind of people live there — or want to live there. Neighborhoods matter. According to a study by the National Association of Realtors®, 78 percent of home buyers said neighborhood quality means more to them than the size of the home. In the same study, 57 percent of buyers preferred a shorter commute to having a larger yard.

What do people in your marketplace do for a living? Are they older, established professionals? Are they retirees looking to hit the golf course? Or are they empty-nesters? Are they people beginning their careers? Are they folks just starting families? What's their average income?

Know the local home prices. Are they trending up or down? What are the construction styles? Who are the good builders? The bad builders? How are homes in the area usually financed? What are the local amenities, the schools, shopping areas, parks, and recreation activities? Research the trends. Know everything you can about your marketplace.

Here's the thing: with every fact you learn about your marketplace, you'll be building your confidence. You'll be secure in the knowledge that you can answer any question from a seller or prospective buyer.

Everything you can learn about your marketplace is a potential advantage over competitors, a possible edge that differentiates you from other Realtors® in the minds of your customers.

GO ABOVE AND BEYOND

Part of confidence and capability is commitment, your willingness and determination to do the absolute best you possibly can for your client. To go above and beyond the good customer service that is reasonably expected of you.

Make it a goal to do this for the next 5 or 10 customers, and you will have way more confidence in serving all your customers in the future. Customer service is like a muscle — the more you exercise your good customer service, the more it grows.

Commitment can build your confidence, even if you're new to the real estate game and haven't had much success yet. Just knowing that you won't settle for providing second-rate customer service will give you a confident attitude. You'll meet every new customer, knowing that you're going to provide what that individual needs to be successful.

If you were a prospective real estate client, who would you choose to trust with your business? The agent who's obviously nervous and uncertain when explaining why he or she would like your business? An agent who's practically begging for your business?

Or would you choose the confident agent? The one who's already researched your marketplace? The one who can show you testimonials and online reviews? The one who clearly believes he or she can do the job and provide you with better customer service? Which one is the confident professional you want to service?

VALUE YOURSELF

Then, once you've gone through this, put a higher value on yourself. Start thinking of yourself as a top producer, as someone who deserves the customer's business. Visualize success, not just in general, but also before every client meeting.

Don't fall into the trap of being intimidated by successful people. Realize that every single prospect, no matter how successful they are, has experienced many of the same struggles and insecurities.

I'm not saying to go out there and envision them having struggles or insecurities. Just realize that most people face adversity and struggle with confidence at some point in their lives, no matter how successful they are.

That's not just true of clients. It's also true of your competitors, even those "top producers."

Also remember that highly successful individuals — even powerful CEOs — usually understand the value of working with specialists like you. Their ability to efficiently manage the strengths of others is one reason they became successful.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Few people understand real estate. Most have had bad business experiences. They have trouble choosing a good agent from the many available.
- Showing confidence will help you get their business, but first, you must "sell" yourself.
- Reading your client testimonials and good reviews can inspire your confidence.
- Commit to providing excellent customer service and understanding your marketplace.

- Knowing that you're well prepared — and learning to value yourself — leads to success.

CHAPTER 7

Sharpen Your Presentation

A presentation that wins the room

- Open with the client’s goal, not your résumé
- Show proof: results for people like them
- Make the numbers simple and honest
- Have a clear next step ready
- Practice until it feels like a conversation

Alan sharing his playbook on stage.

So, why should you practice your presentation? The more you practice your presentation, the better you're going to be at giving it to potential customers. If you have a good presentation on why buyers should work with you to buy a house, and you practice it, you'll get better and naturally convert more of those buyers into your clients.

Same thing with sellers. If I told you that potentially you could earn thousands of dollars and get more prospects to list their houses with you, just by practicing your listing presentation, why wouldn't you do it? Well, that's exactly what I'm telling you. You're getting paid to practice!

Here's the thing. Most people talk themselves into thinking they're not good at giving listing presentations. They tell themselves, "I'm a terrible presenter. I don't even try to do a presentation. I just try to bond with people and build rapport."

Well, yes, bonding and building rapport are good ideas, and you can practice both of those things and become better at them. But even if you decide to do that, it's no reason not to practice your presentation. So, for today, let's focus on practicing that listing presentation and why it's so important.

Most people who struggle with their presentations begin with the assumption that they don't have the natural, God-gifted talent to do it. That's not true. Let me give you a real-life example of why "natural talent" doesn't always matter in why you would be good at something.

THE JANUARY FACTOR

Have you ever heard that most pro hockey players were born in a certain part of the year? What, you've never heard that story? Here's the deal: most pro hockey players are born in

January than in months of the year, and many more are born in January than in any other month.

Why in the world are the largest number of pro hockey players born in January? Shouldn't all the kids born in December, born in January, October, June, or May have the same skills on average, the same natural talent on average as the other hockey players? Why in the world are those other kids not being chosen to play professionally?

Scientific study has found that National Hockey League teams prefer to draft players born in the first quarter of the year — January through March. In fact, between 1980 and 2007, 36 percent of players drafted by NHL teams were born in the first quarter — January to March — compared to only 14.5 per cent who were born in the fourth quarter — October to December.

Here's why: In Canada — the cradle of professional hockey — kids are selected for all-star teams at an early age. But the cutoff date for eligibility is December 31st. So, if you're born December 31st, you're going to play hockey with kids who are 10, 11, almost 12 months older than you.

Kids born closer to January 1st will have many natural advantages over kids born late in the year. They're bigger, faster, more experienced, and more mature. January kids are more likely to be singled out for all-star teams, where they'll get more practice and play more games and get more experience playing on the road. Coaches will invest more time and effort into training them. They'll also play against more talented, better seasoned competitors.

As the January kids get older and advance through higher levels of competition, the advantages are compounded. By the time the players born in January reach draft age, they're thought to be more talented, when in reality, they've just had greater opportunities to develop their skills and confidence. As a result, they're more likely to become professional hockey players.

If talent were really the main factor, you would see professional hockey players whose birthdays were scattered more or less evenly all throughout the year. They'd be born in December and November and all of the other months, not primarily in the first quarter.

WHAT'S YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION?

Now think about your own success. Have you been losing lots of listing presentations? Maybe you're not a terrible presenter, after all. Maybe you could be an awesome, amazing presenter if you just practiced a little bit more. Refine your presentation. Refine your bio presentation. Refine your elevator pitch — the primary reason that somebody should work with you to buy or sell a house.

The more you practice, the better you'll become, and you'll also be able to fix and improve your presentation. Maybe you'll notice that if you say things a certain way, people immediately nod and think, "You know what, you sound like a great Realtor®." I want to work with you to buy a house.

Maybe you'll identify where your presentation routinely goes wrong — gets too complicated, too filled with real estate jargon, or makes people look puzzled or unhappy. I'll bet you've heard the old saying, "Practice makes perfect." It's true.

Here's another reason why you should practice. Look at Tiger Woods. He practices like a maniac, 6, 8, 10 hours a day. Personal problems and bad health have eaten away at his concentration and skill level. But when Tiger Woods was at the top of his game, he was the best golfer in the world by a wide margin, and he got that way by practicing more intensely than anyone else.

Michael Jordan became a legend in professional basketball the same way — through intense practice. Lots of people who have reached the top of their industry, whether sports or business or entertainment, have gotten there not because they were naturally skilled. They took the skills they had and got ahead by practicing. And if you do have natural skills and abilities, imagine how much better you can become if you take the time to practice those skills better and hone those abilities.

Keep in mind that when you're speaking to a prospective client by phone or face-to-face, you don't have to be better than every real estate agent in the United States. Most home sellers don't interview 10 Realtors® to sell their house. They might interview just three Realtors®. If you practice, all you have to do is impress your prospects more than they're impressed by the other two or three agents they're interviewing.

Remember that the main point of an interview is to tell customers why they should work with you to buy or sell a house. Just figure out why they should work with you instead of the other agents. That's what we call your unique selling proposition. It's what makes you different, and most important, it's what makes you better than your competition.

So, practice how to say it. Try changing words around just a little bit. The more practice, the better you're going to get at explaining You'll get to the point why they should work with you to sell or buy a house. You'll make your points more quickly, without seeming pushy. Every engagement will feel more like a conversation than a speech.

Listen for people's feedback and incorporate it into your practice. What do you say that gets a good reaction and makes people say, "You know what? That makes sense. I can tell you're a great agent." Edit your presentation for clarity and also for economy — you want to make your point early and quickly, without seeming rushed.

Give your presentation to the mirror. Give your elevator speech or your 30-second spiel on why someone should work with you to sell or buy a house. Try your "elevator speech" when you're riding alone in an elevator!

Talk to your spouse, partner, or maybe a supportive friend. Just talk to an actual person and get feedback from them. Don't get discouraged if they don't give you good feedback. Every opportunity you take to practice makes you a little bit better, a little bit more confident, than you were before.

Here's another method you can try. Record your presentation on audio or — better yet — on video. Let it sit there for a couple of days and then watch it with fresh eyes. It might take a few minutes to get used to the sound of your own voice. You're used to hearing your voice through your bones and ear canals — everyone thinks they sound different on a recording.

People also tend to focus on what they think is wrong with their looks. Remember that a big part of looking confident is looking comfortable. Uncertainty and self-doubt make us tense and jittery, which can give our faces a pained expression. A confident person looks relaxed — looks as though he or she belongs wherever they are.

Concentrate on what you say and whether you look and sound sincere and natural. You might find that, "I should have said something differently there. Oh, I should always avoid saying that. That's a big no-no to say, and it's not going to make people feel confident to work with me."

Gradually, you'll get a much better presentation for listing appointments, a much better presentation for buyer appointments, and you're going to have more customers. Additionally, it will be easier and more pleasant for you. No one wants to feel that you're just using a hard closing or coercing them into wanting to work with you. You don't want to feel that, either.

Ideally, customers will think, "You know what, I can tell that you'd do a great job in helping me find a perfect house. It's what you're saying. It's obvious that you're different from other real estate agents. You have a unique method that works better than anyone else. So, I'm going to work with you to help me buy a house." Or similarly, "I can see you have a unique strategy that will be more effective for selling my house." So just practice it, refine it, and you're going to grow your business.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Practicing your presentation will help you fix any problems in advance.
- Focus on clarity and getting to the important points of why customers should work with you.
- Practice in front of a mirror, spouse, partner, or a supportive friend.

- Record yourself on video and watch it.

CHAPTER 8

Create Your Plan and Present it to Customers

1	2	3
Assess Understand the client’s goal, timeline, and worries	**Build the plan** A simple, written path to that goal	**Present it** Walk them through it with calm confidence

So, why should you put together a plan for what you're going to do? Let's talk about listings in this scenario, although it works just as well when working with buyers. You can put together a plan for what you're going to do to help someone sell their house, or what you're going to do to help someone buy a house.

You might find this surprising, but most Realtors® do not put together good plans. Their plans are lacking, or they don't put a plan at all. They just meet with the seller and they talk a lot. They do a great job of bonding and building rapport, and with a little bit of luck, they walk out, and they've got the listing.

Are you willing to trust your success to luck? If not, here's how you can separate yourself from other Realtors® who either have no plan — or at least, don't have a great plan — like the plan you're going to have after you finish this chapter. Ready? Here's what you can do.

PROVE IT IN BLACK AND WHITE

Demonstrate what you can do on paper (or on your tablet screen, if that's how you present). Put together a checklist of what you do, and maybe you can also do a comparison. Ever seen one of those online comparisons, where a computer or software company compares what they do to what the average person or competitor does? You can do a checklist or a comparison sheet like that. Below is a shortened, simplified example of this format.

CREATE A MARKETING PLAN FOR LISTINGS

Regardless of the form you choose, here's how to put together a great marketing plan for listings. List all the things you're going to do:

- I'm going to put a sign in the yard.

- I'm going to advertise the property on Realtor.com.
- I'm going to advertise the property on Homes.com.
- I'm going to advertise the property on other websites.
- Trulia.com, Zillow.com, and other websites.
- I'm going to take great-quality pictures, so people will see them online and want to buy your house.
- I'm going to figure out a unique selling proposition for your house.

Be sure to mention some different marketing methods — things the average real estate agent probably doesn't do. A well-crafted marketing plan can accomplish several things for you.

First, whenever you meet a prospective client, it will be easy for them to see that you're not a fly-by-night real estate agent who just shows up and does whatever comes to mind. You'll show yourself to be a Realtor® with a solid plan that's going to give clients a better chance at selling their houses — or selling their houses for more money. Second, you can customize your marketing to the seller's needs.

CRAFT YOUR PLAN TO YOUR CUSTOMER

Let's say that you're meeting with a special seller. Perhaps she wants to sell a high-end home. You can tailor your marketing plan to show your effectiveness at selling to high-end buyers. Provide some data on potential buyers who would likely be interested — and qualified — to purchase the buyer's home. What would high-end purchasers find attractive about the neighborhood? What are the features of her home that would appeal to those high-end buyers? How would you communicate those features to them?

What are the homes like in the area that are likely to provide competition for upscale buyers? Where do they work, shop, or send their children to school? What kind of advertising would you use to capture the interest of those buyers? What are the most effective channels for getting the message out? Where and how would you market the seller's home to reach those buyers and attract their interest?

CLIENTS LIKE TO BE INCLUDED

You don't want sellers to feel like they're just another number — everybody deserves good service. If you're committed to providing high level of service, be prepared to customize your marketing plan to the seller's needs.

Sellers like to feel included, so help them feel included. Show them what they can do to help the marketing and sales process. If they don't want to do any of the work, show them how you can handle it all, and ask for their input. For example, you could ask a seller, "Sir, what do you think needs to be done to sell this house?"

You never know — they might have helpful insights and suggestions. Hidden benefits such as how the view from a bedroom looks at sunset, how energy-efficient the furnace is, or how nice the neighborhood kids are.

If they have any useful ideas, incorporate them into your plan. This will show them that you're a good listener, and if you do use any of their ideas, they'll feel more involved and engaged. That means you're more likely to get a listing.

Remember that for many people, a real estate transaction might be part of a bigger goal or dream again. Buying a home might be part of a plan to fund their kids' college education, downsize, or simplify as there are buyers and sellers. The more you know about your prospective customers and their needs, the more closely you can tailor your plan to fit their needs.

When possible, craft your plan around what they want. You can steer them in the right direction if they need a little help, but don't be too pushy.

DON'T FORGET THE BUYER

You also can put together a plan for a buyer. Here's how I'd do it. I'd look at homes on the market that fits the buyer's criteria and tell them about it as soon as it comes on the market. I'd put together an email alert to get those listings to the buyer ASAP.

Remember Chapter 5, where we talked about going above and beyond for our customers? I'd look at homes that expired three months ago, and I'd contact those sellers to see whether they're interested in selling their house. I'd contact builders to see if they have any homes in the area that might fit what the buyer is looking for. I'm willing to do whatever it is that's going to give that buyer an advantage over all the other buyers in the market looking to buy a house.

WHAT YOUR COMPETITORS IGNORE

You'd be surprised how many agents never do this. They just say, "Hey, I do the standard stuff, I help you buy a house, I help you buy a house for the lowest price, etc."

If you have an actual, tangible plan for people to see, it's not just you "puffing" the goods and how great you are. Instead, you're sending the message, "Look, I'm going to follow this plan. Here are the real goods to back up what I have to say."

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Your plan doesn't need to have a hundred things you're going to do. That's not always what's necessary, and customers can't absorb that much information, anyway. It's better to include key items that will capture their attention. Most important, you need to include the things that you're going to do differently or better than your competitors. Remember, the point is to prove you can help the seller — or buyer — get a better result.

So, don't make the same mistake that a lot of agents make. They think that a list of a hundred things — a big, huge to-do list that takes up 10 pages — is going to impress the sellers. For one thing, you don't want to interrupt your presentation while they spend an hour reading every detail.

A huge plan might impress people the wrong way. Not only will they not read and comprehend such a list, they're likely to think it's too complex to be realistic and achieve the desired results. No one can do everything on a list like that and do it all well.

Suppose you include something obvious and generic in an attempt to pad your list — something like, "Inform the seller the home went on the market!" Come on, now! That's the kind of thing any agent would do. Most people might be uneducated about real estate, but they're not stupid. They recognize fluff when they see it. Stick to the facts that matter — especially the ones that set you apart in a good way from other real estate agents in the market.

And here's the other risk in telling them you're going to do a hundred different things. If you miss even one of those things, you didn't inform them you're going to do, and say, "Hey, you didn't inform me when my house went on Realtor.com (or whatever), that you only did a hundred different things." Avoid making a list of a hundred different things that you do differently, that you do better, that separate you from your competition, and you yourself a big favor. Focus on three to four things that separate you from your competition, and you can get more business.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Creating a marketing plan and sharing it with clients provides tangible evidence you know what you're doing.
- Keep your plan simple. List the important steps — the ones you'll do differently or better than your competitors.
- Customize your plan for specific needs of sellers and buyers. When practical, include their input.

CHAPTER 9

Find Your Passion and Use it to Get Business

> *Passion is a strategy. The part of this work you love is the part clients will remember you for.*

Why in the world would I suggest that you go out and find your passion and use it to get business? Let me explain. People prefer to do business with individuals who are passionate about what they do. Don't believe me?

Think about one of your bad customer service experiences — perhaps a recent time you ordered dinner at a restaurant or stood in line waiting for someone to ring up your groceries at the supermarket.

Did they fail to acknowledge you? Was the waiter or the person at the register bored and half asleep? Did they keep checking their watch to see when their shift would end? Did the expression on their face tell you they'd rather be somewhere — anywhere — else? Did they make mistakes or fail to respond to something you said because they were tuned out? And how did that make you feel?

Now think of a really good customer service experience you had. Chances are, your server or clerk greeted you with a smile and a friendly voice. They were alert, energetic, and moved quickly. They answered your questions promptly — even volunteered useful information — because it was clear that they knew their products and services well and they were glad to be there. They probably gave you a hearty "Thank you!" Now, how did that make you feel?

Ever go to one of those computer stores with the resident

experts?" Those people live and breathe their products. Are you going to spend your evenings playing video games and fall asleep reading a review of the latest self-proclaimed computer "geeks"? Do you spend your evenings playing video games and fall asleep reading a review of the latest software or smartphone app? Then you probably realize that the local computer store isn't just a shop — it's a community.

I'd rather work with a Realtor® who's passionate than work with a Realtor® who's half dead. I know that's a horrible example, but people want something more educated and going to care, you're going to get a better result with selling or going to care, and they're going to get a better result with selling or buying a house.

WELCOME TO AFFINITY MARKETING

Let me explain how this works and how you can use this to grow your business. Have you ever heard of Salt Life? Salt Life is a clothing brand. Basically, it's a brand that talks about salt life — enjoying life in the water, whether you're boating or fishing or whatever else salt life is all about.

As you can see, I don't know that much about salt life, but that's the power of affinity marketing. People will buy Salt Life shirts because they want to be part of Salt Life's community.

Now, if someone is interested in salt life, for example, they're more likely to hire a Realtor® who's into salt life. Maybe that Realtor® is an expert in boating and at least owns a boat, knows all the ins and outs of the different areas — where's the best place to buy a house if you have a boat? How do you sell a house that has a boat?

They're going to be passionate when they're marketing a house that has a boat or is on the water — you know, boating property. Those are just a few of the possible examples of how you, as a Realtor®, might tap into the salt life community. If you're passionate about something, you're going to be able to get more business by tapping into the spirit and interests of like-minded buyers and sellers.

Here are examples of some of the ways people could feel that you are one of them or feel connected to you, because if they feel connected to you, they're more likely to do business with you. Let's look at salt life again, but in this case, I mean fishing. You could be really into fishing, and as a result, you could help sell or buy more fishing houses — houses that have a boat, are on the water, or near the water.

You could be very passionate about the outdoors, in general. If you like getting outside and running and jogging — whatever it is that gets you outdoors — you could talk about that and use it as a springboard for building a business rapport.

You could be passionate about country living. Who wants to live in a tiny little house in the middle of town with no yard when you can live on five acres in the country and enjoy nature? Country living is a rich tapestry of activities and interests. It embraces everything from living a simpler lifestyle to canning, quilting, rustic arts and crafts, home cooking, woodworking, and keeping and raising animals. And that's just a taste of this community. If you're passionate about country living, that's something you could use to get more business from people who are buying or selling a country house.

Beach property is another great example. Some people love to live at the beach. Some people don't care — they don't want to spend extra money for a beachfront property or lifestyle. But if it's worth paying the extra money to live where you can wake up to the sound of pounding breakers, enjoy long walks on the sand, and exploring every shell and piece of driftwood. If that describes you, then you're going to do a better job at helping buyers and marketing houses that are at the beach.

Same thing for golf — if you're into golf and you know the best views, and the best challenging "19th hole," you could get a Same thing for golf — if you're into golf and you know the best courses, the most challenging "19th hole," you could get a lot of business from the golf niche because you do a better job at marketing the most sumptuous cocktails at the 19th hole. You're going to do a better job at marketing to buy a house, you're going to do a better job at helping them find that perfect golf course property.

Are you at home reading an article about how 19th century brickwork differs from modern brickwork? Just let people know, "Hey, I'm a great Realtor®, but I also do an awesome job at historic properties because I love them," and get more business as a result.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

The late George Carlin was a polarizing force in standup comedy, but no one can deny his success and groundbreaking influence on the entertainment industry. Carlin made a splash on television in the 1960s, mostly portraying zany onstage characters, such as "Al Sleet, the Hippie-Dippie Weatherman." He was getting work and making money, but he felt something was missing.

"I found out I wasn't in my own act after a while," he said. Carlin ditched the wacky characters and started doing routines that reflected how he felt about life. The result disappointed many of his old fans. But the passion he poured into his new act gave him greater satisfaction and made him phenomenally successful.

Your passion might be whale watching or bird watching. It could be wine making or wine tasting. You get the idea. There's probably a group of fellow enthusiasts in your area. If not, start one.

Find your passion and then be passionate about it. Tell people about it. I love fishing. I love golfing. I love historic properties. You can express yourself through a blog. You could express yourself through a Facebook page or Instagram or Pinterest pins. Perhaps your logo or business cards or business name could reflect your interest.

Here's an idea: Why not shoot a video related to your passionate interest? Show people how much you love that new boat, that favorite fishing hole, that home where George Washington once spent the night. Post your video on YouTube. Link it to your website and social media presence.

Join Facebook groups pertaining to your passion. Maybe you can find a local historic properties association. But whatever it is, find your passion, and then go out and pursue it. Don't tell people that's the only thing you sell, but you can tell people, "I'm a great Realtor®, but I also do a phenomenal job at helping you buy or sell a historic property." Or perhaps, "I'm a great Realtor®." I can help anybody get a great deal when they are buying or selling a home, but I'm really passionate about the beach."

Or how about, "Looking for some great fly fishing spots? I know some humdingers. And there are some wonderful homes in the area, too." Whatever your niche is, it could be a lucrative way to combine your passion and your business in a very lucrative and satisfying way.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Affinity marketing focuses on a community of individuals who share a passion or interest.
- Your own passion can open new markets for your services among like-minded people who respect your opinions.
- Almost any passion can enhance your real estate business, if you pursue it and make your interests known to others.

CHAPTER 10

Develop a Niche and Establish Yourself as the Best

1

Pick a lane

Choose a niche you actually enjoy

2

Go deep

Learn it better than anyone nearby

3

Become the name

Be the obvious call in that niche

Why would I suggest that you develop a niche expertise and then promote yourself as an expert in the niche? Won't that limit you in your marketplace? What about people who want to buy or sell a house but who are outside that niche? Won't they refuse to work with you? Fortunately, that's not the case.

Let me tell you a story about an agent who benefited from the niche strategy. I know an agent who developed a really good niche. She became the best at helping people buy or sell all the types of properties in her specific area of specialization. She's in a small market; she's not in a big, huge market. The average house price is around $200,000, and yet she's selling $30 million to $40 million a year consistently!

She sold $35 million in volume back in 2012, when the housing market was just starting to recover from recession. That niche has really given her a great business. Here's what's interesting; only half of the houses that she sells are in her small niche. She gets lots of other business from people who aren't buying or selling a house in her low-end bracket.

Here's why it happens. That niche is like rocket fuel for her real estate business. People who are buying a house or selling a house within her niche hire her because she's the expert in that niche. They put their house on the market with her, get to know her, realize she's an amazing Realtor®, and as a result, she meets a lot of people.

Those people can tell that she's great. She saves money for her buyers, makes more clients. Some core business. In that case, she Those people can tell that she's great. She saves money for her sellers, and solves problems for both kinds of clients. Some core business. In that case, she provides excellent customer service for her sellers, and solves problems for both kinds of clients. Some core business. In that case, she both kinds of clients fit into her core business.

Other clients are quick to refer her to friends and relatives, who benefits when they give her their repeat business.

Other clients are quick to refer her to friends and relatives, who also might not fit within her niche. But all these people need a great Realtor®. The key is that she made vital connections with people while operating within her core area of specialization. She operating within her core area of specialization and her niche has fueled the growth of people while operating within her niche has fueled the growth of the rest of her business.

That's how it works. Specializing in a particular niche doesn't mean you can't sell other properties. But building the core of your business by specializing in that niche gives you lots of power.

Everybody wants to work with an expert. Everybody wants to work with the best of the best at whatever they are doing. However, most Realtors® never bother to specialize. They assume the best strategy is to sell whatever they can whenever they can. It's simply not in the DNA of Realtors® to specialize in a niche. Consequently, they never become experts in any single area of specialization.

WHEN ONLY AN EXPERT WILL DO

Let's look at other industries. What about attorneys? If you were arrested and you were facing the possibility of going to go to jail for 20 years, would you want to hire an attorney who's amazing at criminal cases and keeping clients out of jail, or would you prefer to hire a personal injury attorney who specializes in collecting money on lawsuits? Personally, I'd prefer to work with the criminal attorney.

Same thing for the medical field. Who do you want to hire to help you if you need brain surgery? Who do you want to get a root canal on your teeth? We both know you're going to say you'd hire a brain surgeon for your surgery question. Would you hire an amazing dentist — the best dentist in the entire world, with accolades out the wazoo — to perform surgery on your brain? The answer is no, of course not.

The same thing applies in reverse. You wouldn't hire that brain surgeon — even the best brain surgeon on earth — to do a root canal on your teeth. That's the reason you want to specialize. People want to work with an expert.

You can position yourself as an expert, grow your business in your niche, and then grow your business outside of your niche. Your expertise in a core area — your niche — will be your entryway to meeting an enormous number of people with properties to buy or sell within that niche.

You'll quickly become an expert in your core area of focus, and it will be so much easier to get people to work with you. Let's say someone wants to buy a mountain property, and you're the local expert at mountain properties. Are they going to want to work with you or the agent who does a little bit of everything — waterfront homes, historic homes, golf course properties — you name it? Of course, the person interested in buying a mountain property will prefer to work with the mountain property expert.

AVOIDING "TYPECASTING"

Here's one of the biggest concerns that most agents have: "I don't want to get stereotyped as only selling homes in that niche." I can understand your concern. Let's look at the movie industry. A good actor doesn't want to be typecast, either. Actors hate to hear a casting directors say, "Hey, you're only the funny actor. You're only the action movie actor. You're only the romantic movie actor." Once an actor gets typecast, it's very hard to get other roles.

Just as a good actor doesn't want to be typecast, neither do you. So, don't brand yourself as the niche. Don't say, "I'm the golf property agent." Instead, brand yourself "as a great Realtor® who happens to know a lot about historic golf real estate. "I do a great job on all the different properties out there, but I'm also really good at helping you buy or sell a golf property."

In fact, you could put it in the beginning of every article or really good at helping you buy or sell a golf property."

In fact, you could put it in the beginning of every article or blog that you write. Remember the "Most Interesting Man in the World" ads for Dos Equis? His tagline was, "I don't always drink beer, but when I do, I drink Dos Equis." Let's say you want to start a blog about golf course properties. Every blog post might start out, "I don't only sell golf properties, but when I do, here's what I think about it." Let people know that you're good at all aspects of real estate, but you're especially good at selling properties in your niche.

3 STEPS TO BECOMING AN EXPERT

Here's the three-step process to becoming an expert in a specialty:

First, you need to identify your niche. I'll tell you how to do that in just a minute.

Next, you've got to study the niche. You want to become the best of the best and genuinely know what you're talking about when it comes to buying or selling a house within your niche. You can't fake it. You need to become amazing at helping people buy or sell a house inside your niche.

Then, you have to start marketing your expertise in that niche. "I'm the best. I don't always sell golf properties, but when I do, I do it better than anyone. Here's why."

FINDING YOUR NICHE

How do you find your niche? Let's ask some questions. What are your strengths? What are things that you're good at or passionate about? Is there a real estate niche in which you've already sold a lot of houses? Maybe you've sold a lot of new construction, or you've sold a lot of vacant land, or you've sold a lot of multi-family investment property. Maybe you've sold a lot of houses in one general area of town or a specific neighborhood.

There are all sorts of niches on which you can focus. You can focus on waterfront, riverfront properties, intercoastal properties, lakefront properties, or homes within walking distance of a lake or beach. You can specialize in golf properties, historic houses, vacant land, country properties, homes on more than one acre, multi-family investment properties, mountain properties, downtown lofts, or homes with good views.

You could specialize in the properties within a specific ZIP code — especially exclusive or desirable ZIP codes. Some buyers would love an expert who could help them find a home — or an investment property — in the 90210 ZIP code of Beverly Hills, the 33109 of Miami Beach, Aspen's 81611, or the 94027 of Silicon Valley. Have you sold a ton of homes in an upscale or historic ZIP code in your area? That's a possible niche.

Here's another idea. Maybe you're a sensitive person who excels at showing empathy and talking to people about tough issues. It takes a special kind of person to do this. If that's you, consider targeting people who are getting a divorce or who are inheriting a house from a loved one. Often, those are emotional home sales, and your skills and caring attitude could really help buyers — or sellers — who are going through a rough time with their transactions.

Here's something important to remember. Don't stop at just one niche. You can have two, three, four, five niches, and once you get a niche up and running, start another one. I'd focus on one niche at a time. Become the best of the best at golf course properties, for example, and then once you've achieved that, move on to new construction, or whatever it is. There are endless niches that you can make your own to grow your business.

STUDYING YOUR NICHE

How do you study your niche? That's going to vary depending on the different types of property. Let's say that you've decided you want to specialize in golf course properties. Maybe just start with Google. Google the phrase "Biggest mistakes to avoid when selling a golf course property." Google "Golf course properties," or, "Golf courses in my area," and just go through some of the different websites and get some ideas.

Maybe find an expert in another marketplace. Someone in your marketplace might not be willing to tell you their secrets, but you could talk to another top agent who specializes in golf course properties in another metro area and ask their opinion. "Hey, how do I become the best at helping people buy or sell a golf course property?"

If you've never played golf but want to specialize in golf course properties, go out and play a few rounds. Look at the various homes for sale in golf course developments — not just from the street side, but from the golfer's point of view on the greens. Explore the neighborhood. How did the developers market the homes? Which amenities are important to local golfers and homeowners?

Who has been buying the golf properties? Golfers? Investors? Retirees who just like a grand view with acres of grass they don't have to mow? Your research will vary, depending on the type of niche that you're targeting. For historic homes, you might be starting at the nearest library or by visiting the local historical society.

Study the prices at which the homes were offered — as well as their actual selling prices. This information is available online. Who buys these homes? What is their typical income? Where do they like to shop? Do they need easy access to jobs, or are they focused more on leisure and entertainment opportunities? Every scrap of information you can gather will make you more of an expert on your chosen market.

MARKETING YOUR NICHE EXPERTISE

Once you reach the point at which you feel you're an expert, go out and start marketing yourself. Start up an Instagram page. Just start posting pictures; this is so easy. Go around with your phone, take 100, 200 pictures, and start posting them on your Instagram page: "John's golf course niche," or, "Golf course expert," or whatever. Just start getting your interest and expertise out there for people to see.

Many of the suggestions from Chapter 8 will work here. Do YouTube videos where you talk about your niche. Going back to our golf niche example, give people a tour of the golf course golf course neighborhood and why you would love to own a home here." Join groups. Start a blog. There are so many different ways that you can market yourself as the expert in your niche.

Just get out, look, research, and learn. That's how you can become an expert at a niche and use that niche to fuel your business.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Developing expertise in a specific niche is an effective way to create a core business in real estate.
- Over time, identify yourself with additional specialties. Take measures not to "typecast" yourself.
- Developing niche business is a three-step process. Identify your niche, study it carefully, then market your expertise.

CHAPTER 11

Identify and Use Your Communication Strength

> *Play to your natural communication strength instead of copying someone else’s script.*

Alan out and about in Houston.

Let me explain why this matters. If you are a naturally amazing, talented speaker, do you think that you'd be putting yourself at a disadvantage if the only way you could communicate with potential customers was through writing? If you're a brilliant public speaker, should you spend all your time blogging online?

Or maybe you're an amazing writer, but the only way you have to communicate with prospects and clients is in person or on the phone. Wouldn't you be placing yourself at a big disadvantage?

Are you holding yourself back needlessly? If you can find out what your most powerful communication strength is, then you can start focusing your marketing efforts in that area and get more business as a result. At the same time, you can find ways to minimize the communication styles that are least natural for you.

Why spend too much time communicating in a way that is a weakness for you? The more time you spend putting your communication strengths to work, the sooner you will reach your full potential.

IDENTIFYING YOUR STRENGTHS

The first thing you want to do is to identify the way that you prefer to communicate. Think about the times you've communicated with people most effectively. Think about the times communication felt most natural or satisfying to you. Now, think about which of your communication efforts have received the most compliments from others.

Maybe you prefer public speaking, and you're an amazing public speaker. Perhaps you've given presentations and thanked you or speaker. Perhaps you've given presentations and members of your audience have come up to you afterward and thanked you or praised your speech. If that's the case, figure out how you can get up in your marketplace and grow your public speaking engagements in your marketplace and grow your real estate business that way.

What about writing? If you're an amazing writer, find ways that you can write and grow your business. Or perhaps you're not comfortable with public speaking or writing. Maybe your forte is talking to people one-on-one and building rapport. If that's you, there are other options that will let you play to this strength.

START USING YOUR STRENGTH

Once you've identified your communication strength, then start using it more. If you're a writer, post. Create a Facebook page, if you haven't done so already. Post on Facebook every day. Or start a blog. Blog about your favorite neighborhoods, their histories, their community events. Highlight some of their outstanding citizens. Celebrate their diversity, their architecture, their mature landscaping — whatever makes those neighborhoods great places to live.

To start blogging, you'll want to purchase a domain name, so figure out a name that reflects your focus. Maybe include the name of your area, real estate blog, or specialty in your domain name. You'll also want to figure out a hosting service for your website. After you secure a domain name and find a hosting service, figure out the right way to use it to grow your business.

You could set up a basic WordPress blog, and then just start writing and posting on your blog. As with your Facebook page, you could talk about your favorite neighborhoods, why you like them, and your new homes that come on the market. Start writing, and pretty soon you're going to get some search engine rankings and get business that way.

Don't forget to post photographs. Maybe you can start up an Instagram page or use Pinterest to post your pictures. As you get more adept at communicating online, you can try targeting the different search engine words and use those to get business. There are lots of different ways to do this.

If speaking to groups and writing aren't viable options for you, maybe your strength is that you're terrific at communicating one-on-one, and you're amazing at building a rapport with one individual at a time. In that case, you might want to try a method that puts you in a position to succeed.

If you have someone to develop leads for you — or even if you don't — you just might be happier trying some door knocking. Pick a neighborhood where you want to get listings and go door-to-door. Talk to the people in your community and get to know them.

You could also attend local events, such as holiday celebrations, block parties, neighborhood barbecues, etc. Try volunteering for a community project or program. Even if there are a lot of people attending these events, you'll find plenty of opportunities to chat with people individually and make contacts. Get out there and start meeting people, start building relationships, because those relationships are going to turn into more real estate business.

In addition, you'll also make a lot of great friends. That's one of the reasons many agents love the real estate business. Making friends is a great way to generate business leads, but making friends is also a reward in itself.

Ah, but what if you're not a great writer and you're better at addressing a room full of people than you are at communicating with them one-on-one? What if you're the kind of person who is an accomplished public speaker and enjoys it?

In that case, find opportunities to give public speeches in your area. Here's what's cool. If you're great at talking, you can build your business more rapidly than communicating with people one area at a time.

All of a sudden, a room full of people know of a great Realtor® — you — and if they're going to sell or buy a house, there's a good chance you're the first agent they'll think of. Here's what you can do you can put together a stock speech that you can customize to various organizations. You can customize your speech slightly for each audience to make it more effective.

Make your presentation useful but generic. It will need to appeal to most of the general public, regardless of whether they plan to buy or sell real estate in the near future, and regardless of how knowledgeable they are about real estate issues.

You might decide just to talk about what's happening in the marketplace. This will vary from time to time as local market conditions change, but your speech can rely on the same format time after time. Talk about the stats, talk about the trends, talk about what's hot, what's not. You could talk about how certain types of houses are selling right now, while other types of houses are not.

You could talk about the advantages of buying an investment property compared to putting money in bonds or the stock market. Be willing to be controversial. If you're confident and passionate about real estate, get out there and tell people why it's a great investment.

If nothing else, people are going to talk to about you. They're going to realize you believe in the value of real estate. Even if they don't agree with you, they're going to recognize that you're a great Realtor®, that you're very passionate about real estate, and that you can probably do a darned good job at helping them buy or sell a house.

WHAT TO AVOID

There are a couple of mistakes to avoid. You don't want your speech to be too "pitchy." Turning your speech into a transparent pitch for new business will only turn off your audience and guarantee that you're never invited back.

The goal of the speech should be to provide value and get people to know you as an expert in your marketplace. Devote 95 percent of your speech to providing valuable content. Then at the end, you can say, "You know what? If you want to contact me for any real estate questions, here's my phone number, here's my email address, here's my website. I'll be happy to answer any of your questions about real estate."

Just add a one-minute elevator speech at the very end of your presentation to talk about why you're different from — or better than — your competitors. Something along the lines of, "My name is John, and I'm amazing at selling homes in the tri-county area," or whatever it is. Just tell them a little bit about what you do and why you're so good at it — you specialize in the local market or in certain kinds of homes found in the neighborhood. This might be a great place to insert your niche, as we discussed in Chapter 9.

Just keep it short and then move along. Remember, you're not here to whom 'em over the head and close an immediate sale. Just show them, through your presentation, that you're knowledgeable, likable, approachable, and that they'd benefit by working with you.

Here's the deal. Once you develop a speech about real estate, you can start doing free speeches all over town. Most organizations need good speakers. There is more demand for good speakers than there are speakers available. Instead of having a conversation with one individual you meet at the grocery store, than there are speakers available. Instead of having a conversation with one individual you meet at the grocery store, you can give your stock speech to 100, 200, 500 people, or more, and get better known by all the people in your marketplace.

Think of it this way: each speech to an audience of 50 is roughly equal to one or two listing appointments.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Identify the method of communication you prefer and that works best for you.
- Once you've identified your communication strength, use it to full advantage. For example:

If you excel at public speaking, join civic organizations, volunteer to be a guest speaker, or host events at which you speak.

If you're a good writer, use Facebook, Instagram, blogging, and other ways to reach people.

If you're best at one-on-one communication, try cold calling, door knocking, or interactions at local events and volunteer opportunities.

- Create and practice your elevator speech — a sentence or two about how you're better than your competition and why people should work with you.

CHAPTER 12

Build Your Clientele

Here's another way that you can gain an advantage over your competition and grow your real estate business. Do a more effective job of building up your clientele. Of course, there are obvious reasons why you would want to get to know more people and build up your clientele.

Ask yourself a question. Wouldn't it be nice if you came into the office and you just knew that no matter what, every single day, every single month, a certain amount of new business would come through your door? Wouldn't it be great to know that every month you could count on maybe four listings and three buyers, coming in the door automatically?

You can do that when you build up a loyal clientele — people who worked with you in the past. People who give you their repeat business and who also refer new business to you. Here's an example of how this works in real life.

I'll tell you a little story about a guy who used this advantage in his business. This man's name is Joe Girard. He's not a real estate salesman, Joe Girard is a car salesman.

But Joe had a great system for building his clientele. As a result, according to the Guinness Book of World Records, he was the world's greatest salesman. Rather than just saying, "I'm the best, I'm number one," he actually had the Guinness Book of World Records do research, and they determined that Joe Girard had sold more vehicles than any other individual. According to their criteria, Joe Girard was the world's greatest salesperson.

When he was relatively new in the car sales business, he was struggling a bit. He was paying his bills, doing OK, but he wanted to grow his business and make a little bit more. "I won't get my sales from struggling to get people who walk in the door. I will bring my sales from to grow his business. He had promised the owner, "I won't get my sales from to grow his business. He had promised the owner, "I will bring my sales from people who walk in the door. I will bring my sales from any of the walk. So, as a business because he didn't benefit from any of the walk. So, as a business because he didn't benefit from any of the walk-in traffic that that dealership had.

One day, Joe went to a funeral. It was a Catholic funeral, and he saw that a lot of mass cards were being given out to the attendees. In fact, there were enough mass cards for everybody at the funeral.

Curious, he went and talked to the funeral director and asked, "Hey, how in the world do you know how many mass cards to print? Cause if you print too many, you've got to throw them away. If you don't print enough, not everybody's going to have one."

The funeral director said, "You know what? Most funerals, it always comes out to about 250 cards that I need to print. So, I get 250 printed up for every funeral, and we almost never run out, and we hardly have to throw any away because, usually, about 250 people show up at any type of funeral."

Weeks later, Joe went to another funeral and asked the funeral director the same question. The funeral director gave the same answer: "Oh, we print about 250. That's how many cards we have in order to make sure that everybody gets a card, and we don't have to throw that many away."

Then Joe went to a wedding and asked the minister about attendance. "You know what?" the minister said. "We have about 500 people show up at most weddings. We've got 250 on the brides side and 250 on the groom's side."

As a result of his experiences at the funerals and wedding, Joe recognized a pattern, which he began to call his Law of 250. In a nutshell, the law states that most people know about 250 people who care about them enough to go to a funeral or to go to a wedding when they get married. Yes, there are some instances where people know more people or fewer people, but in general, about 250 people care about somebody enough to go to their funeral or go to their wedding.

So, Joe went home and realized, "If I can do a great job for a customer, not only am I going to gain that customer's possible repeat business down the road. I'm also going to gain 250 additional, potential customers who care enough about that person that they may ask for their opinion or ask for their referral for buying a car." Joe then put together a great system that enabled him to stay in touch with all of his past clients. Each of those clients represented approximately 250 possible referrals.

So, that's what you can do. Figure out a way to stay in touch with all of your past customers — in fact, your entire sphere of influence. By continuing your communication with past customers, you change the nature of your marketing from a one-time *transactional* model to an ongoing *relationship-based* model. At the same time, you grow a clientele that achieves a critical mass — enough repeat business and referrals to ensure a sustained growth. These are the customers you can expect to just walk through your door.

How Joe Did It

Here's what Joe Girard did to cultivate all of his past customers. He knew if he just sold them a car and they never heard from him again, he probably wouldn't gain their repeat and referral business. So, every month, he'd mail out a little postcard or a handwritten note that said, "I like you." That's all it was; it just said, "I'm Joe Girard. I like you." Every single month, he'd mail it out to past customers and make sure they didn't forget about Joe Girard.

Obviously, he also provided great service. There's a lot more to Girard. The bottom line is he did a good job for his what he did, but the bottom line is he did a good job for his customers and worked hard, just like you work hard for your customers. The difference was that he stayed in touch, so they'd send him referrals and never forget him.

You can do the same thing. You could start up an email newsletter. You could mail postcards. With today's electronic innovations and capabilities, you can automate your process, so that it happens regularly, consistently, and with minimal effort. Whatever method you choose, if you stay in touch with each of your customers and take great care of them, you can build up an amazing clientele that will feed you and pay your bills for the rest of your life.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Keep building your clientele. First-time clients form the basis for repeat business and referrals.
- Joe Girard's Law of 250 states that on average, every individual exerts influence over approximately 250 others.
- Keeping in touch with every past customer keeps them aware of you. It also converts a transactional interaction to an ongoing personal relationship.
- Newsletters and emails are two examples of ways customer contacts can be automated.

CHAPTER 13

New at the Game? Step Up to Bat!

> *New to the game? Good. Coachable beats experienced. Step up to the plate and take the swing.*

If you're just getting started in the real estate business, here are some tips that will make the transition easier. The first thing I would recommend is taking maximum advantage of your brokerage's training programs. A lot of companies have great training programs that can really help you get started and get going fast.

Whatever training programs are available to you, tap into them. Take the time to sit down, watch the training videos, read the books, whatever it is. Take the time to learn and study so you can become the best.

When you're starting out as an agent, it can be challenging to get business. People who want to buy or sell homes might be hesitant to work with you. If you haven't established a reputation yet, use your brokerage's credibility to help you get customers.

Consider teaming up with an experienced agent or rely on your broker for advice. Ask them questions and have them guide you through your first couple of deals. It can be intimidating trying to help your first customer all by yourself.

Don't be afraid to ask someone at your brokerage to look over your shoulder, making sure you've got everything figured out. Even the most successful Realtors® started somewhere, and most would probably say they benefited from the experience and guidance of at least one mentor.

When you're starting out, it's helpful to have some money saved up. Sometimes it can take 60 to 90 days to receive sales commissions. That's the unfortunate reality of real estate and other commission-based occupations.

SEASONAL FACTORS AFFECT SALES

Real estate prices can fluctuate because of seasonal changes. Many home buyers wait for the school year or holiday seasons. June is especially the school year wait to move during the summer. June is and sellers would rather wait to move during the summer day of all. and sellers would rather wait to move. July 31st is the busiest moving day of all.

Waiting for summer is less disruptive for school-age children. They also have more free time to pack and help move. They get more time to acclimate to a new neighborhood and school district before school resumes in the fall.

Seasonal patterns vary by region, but in general, weather can affect the supply and demand of housing. According to Investopedia, sellers often have to offer a seasonal discount of up to 10 percent on their home listing prices.

People also prefer not to move during the holiday season, from November to January. Investopedia cites reasons such as family obligations, year-end deadlines, inclement weather, and the financial strain holidays place on family budgets.

If you're dedicated to understanding your local real estate market, you'll track the important market metrics for your area every month. You'll be able to identify shifts in listing prices and to calculate average sales prices.

That will give you advance knowledge of trends that could affect your clients and your business. Your knowledge will allow you to approach home buyers and advise them on the best times to make lower-than-listed purchases.

HOW'S YOUR FINANCIAL PLAN?

You've probably noticed how I keep referring to your real estate career as a "business." As a real estate agent, the IRS and your state will almost certainly treat you as a business owner for tax purposes.

Unfortunately, one real estate industry expert estimates that more than 80 percent of real estate agents have no financial plan. The slow months are the perfect time to review your finances and create a plan. Here are some questions you should ask yourself:

- How much did I spend last year?
- What did I spend my money on?
- Did I take advantage of every available tax write-off for my business?
- Did I waste money on tools that I did not use or that were unproductive?
- What should next year's annual budget be?
- Should I incorporate my business and pay myself a salary?
- Do I need to be paying quarterly taxes?
- How can I save more?
- Could my business invest to make more money?

Spend some time doing the necessary research and consulting experts to make sure you answer each of these important questions.

Work a second job if necessary to cover the bills and routine expenses while you're building your real estate business. You might want to share your real estate ambitions with your coworkers at the second job. Each of those coworkers is a potential customer or referral for the future. If you impress them with your hard work, knowledge, and trustworthiness, perhaps they'll go to you for their future needs when buying or selling a home.

Above all, remember, if you try hard and stay committed, you'll make it. I guarantee it! Sometimes it does get going, real make it. I guarantee it! Sometimes it does take a little bit more struggle. But once you get going, real work and a extremely rewarding career. If you're willing to work hard and an extremely rewarding career. If you're willing to work harder than you've ever worked in your life for six months to a estate is an extremely rewarding career, and you're going to love it. year, you can get your business, and you're going to love it.

BUILD YOUR BOOK OF BUSINESS

When starting out, you'll want to do anything you can to bring in new customers. A lot of agents struggle with the fact that they're competing with other agents who are more experienced. Just start where you are and give a large clientele time to develop naturally.

All you need is one or two customers who will put their trust in you and say, "You know what? I'm willing to work with you to help me buy or sell my house." You just need to convince one person to take a chance, and that will lead to credibility, experience, and confidence that you know what you're doing, and you can help them.

MAKE BEING NEW AN ADVANTAGE

One of your biggest challenges as a new real estate agent is overcoming the belief that "No one will work with me because I'm new."

When you're talking to prospective clients — or anyone else really — about your real estate business, don't position yourself "I'm brand new." Position yourself as, "I'm brand new. I don't know what I'm doing." Position yourself as, "I'm brand new. I'm excited about the real estate business not worn out. I'm not jaded. I'm highly motivated, I'm innovative,

and I'm here to help you get the absolute best result in the real estate business."

Here's a fact: innovation comes from new companies and new Realtors®. You may be way more innovative than the Realtor® who's already been in the business for 30 years and doesn't want to try anything new. That realization should provide you with confidence and plenty of motivation.

Remember what I said about Hewlett-Packard in Chapter 4? Do you think that Hewlett-Packard would have created the iPhone? Even though they had been in business decades at the time, it took an upstart company like Apple to create the iPhone.

Unfortunately for Hewlett-Packard, they're no longer an innovative computer company. They're creating a lot of printers and a few computers, but they're not changing lives or fulfilling dreams with the newest, cutting-edge technology.

In the same way, as a new agent like you, just starting out, may have a lot more cutting-edge, innovative ideas that can help your customers. It's valuable to look at real estate through a fresh set of eyes, without the "but we've always done it that way!" attitude that many people who've been in the business for 20 or 30 years might have.

START WITH PEOPLE YOU KNOW

So, if you're intent on building your real estate book of business from scratch, where should you start? A great place to find your customers is to start with your friends, your neighbors, your family, former coworkers, people you grew up with, former teachers — really, anyone you know.

Reach out to anyone you know in your area and just let them know, "Hey, I went into real estate, and I'd be excited to help you with any of your real estate needs. If you're looking for someone to help you buy a house or help you sell your home, I would love to help to help you buy my butt off and provide awesome service to to help you buy my butt off and provide awesome service to you. And I'd work my real estate goals." help you reach your real estate goals."

Don't be offended if they say no. Some people may hire you, some people may not. That's not the end of the world. The point is to get out there, let people know you're in the real estate business, and start building your reputation as an agent who's enthusiastic and willing to work hard.

When anybody decides to work with you, be appreciative and thankful you get their business. If somebody turns you down because you're new, stay in touch with them. Maybe when you get your business up and running and you've proved yourself as a successful Realtor®, they'll try you out on a future transaction.

Even people who don't hire you can be valuable sources of referrals. Maybe they have a friend or neighbor who wants to sell a house or who is ready to buy one. Think back on Joe Girard's Law of 250 from Chapter 11. Treating people well and building relationships is like dropping a pebble in a pond. The ripples spread out wider and wider. Eventually, the relationships you build will bring reliable business to your door.

BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH BUYERS

Be willing to work with buyers. It might sound silly, but many real estate agents don't want to work with them. Many agents find buyers can be challenging and frustrating to work with. The perception is that buyers are more labor-intensive. The agent might have to travel around to show them multiple houses, and if they're not clear about what they want — or they're just plain indecisive — it can be difficult.

But it's so much easier to get buyers to put their confidence in you than it is to get sellers to list their house with you.

Think of it this way: you're getting paid to learn the real estate marketplace. Working with buyers, you'll learn the neighborhoods. You'll learn the market. You'll learn what's hot. You'll learn how much homes sell for and what makes some more desirable than others. And you'll be compensated for your training as soon as you sell a house to a buyer.

THRIVING IN A SLOW SEASON

Remember all the gloomy reasons I mentioned for people being reluctant to sell their houses during the school year and during the holiday season? These circumstances can actually work in a buyer's favor. And if you represent buyers during those times, you can share in the benefits.

Buyers who go house-hunting during the slow season tend to be very serious about purchasing. Why else would they go out in the cold and wet weather to look at houses?

Sellers who are compelled to sell during a slow season are probably also highly motivated. Maybe they've encountered unforeseen circumstances, such as a job relocation, trouble paying bills, or the threat of a foreclosure.

As we've seen, seasonal patterns can affect housing supply and demand. Suddenly, you might be looking at a situation where there's less competition from buyers because they don't want to move. At the same time, you have sellers who absolutely have to sell because of unforeseen circumstances.

Voila! You now have a perfect climate for helping your buyers negotiate lower prices and better terms. If sellers are forced to offer discounts of up to 10 percent, the buyers you represent could realize huge savings.

PRIMING THE PUMP

An important tip that I would recommend is to have a little bit of patience. Sometimes it takes time to get your business moving. I'll give you a little parable about an old-fashioned hand pump. I'll give you a little parable about an old-fashioned hand pump. seen an old well pump? I'm talking about a well pump water from a well seen an old well pump? I'm talking about a well pump water from a well pump where you walk up to it and you pump water from a well that's deep in the ground.

Most people pump the handle a few times but don't get any water. They don't realize this, but they have to prime the pump. The pump must have water slowly come up the pipe until it reaches the top. You may have to pump that thing multiple times before you get any water.

It's the same thing in real estate. You may have to talk to many different leads. People may say, "You know what? I'm thinking about buying a house in a month or two months or three months." If you give up too fast, you may say, "You know what? I'm not working with buyers anymore!" You might give up and get discouraged, even drop out of the real estate business.

But if you give up, three months later, that person you talked to finally might be ready to buy a house, and they'll call you up. Do you really want to tell them, "You know what? I already dropped out of real estate."

Take the time to prime your pump. Pump as much as you can — get as much business as you possibly can — but remember that it takes time to get things going in real estate. Sometimes it can take two, three, four months. People often act emotionally, rather than rationally.

Maybe they've been scared by rumors or predictions about the economy or where the housing market is headed. Maybe they're waiting for what they believe is the "right" season. But the time will come when they're ready to buy or sell a home. Make sure you're ready when that happens.

FOCUS, FOCUS, FOCUS!

Sharpen your focus. Don't try to chase too many goals at once. Maybe you've heard the Chinese saying, "He who chases two rabbits catches none." I'd recommend focusing on one thing at a time, one goal, one business strategy, rather than trying to focus on multiple strategies.

Life is a marathon, not a sprint. If you're going to be successful in real estate for 5, 10, 20, or 30 years, you're going to have plenty of time to try out all different ideas. But in the beginning, you're going to get better results by channeling all of your energy into one idea, one marketing strategy, or one real estate niche. Focusing all your energy on one opportunity will take you way further than trying to chase several "rabbits."

CULTIVATE THE TRAITS OF A WINNER

Winners in the game of real estate — or the game of life — almost always exhibit certain characteristics. Learn to adopt those characteristics, and you can be a winner too. Here are the traits you should work to cultivate:

Confidence: If you want to be a winner in real estate, figure out a way to be confident. If you're not naturally confident, then go back into the earlier chapters and put together an amazing plan. This is especially important if you're working with buyers. When you have a rock-solid plan, you can't help but be confident in your abilities to help that customer.

Hard Work: Here's another trait of a winner. You want to be a hard worker. Just put in the time, put in the energy. Real estate is a tremendously rewarding career, but it's going to take time and energy to get your career going. That might entail doing more research on your local market. It might mean putting in more hours or working weekends to serve your customers. Whatever effort you have to put in will be rewarded.

Being a People Person: Learn how to get along with people. In Chapter 3, I detailed the process of making friends with people. These are skills that can be learned, practiced, and perfected, even if you're normally shy or a loner. With effort, you can learn to listen to people, to show genuine care for their concerns, and to put yourself in a position to help them meet their needs and goals. It might be stressful at first, but learn how to be a people person, and you'll get way further ahead in your real estate business.

Becoming Tech-Savvy: In addition, you want to learn some of the technology that's required. You don't have to be a techie, but you want to be able to use the basic technology to help your customers reach their goals. If an iPad will help you pull up listings while you're showing buyers houses out in the field, then get an iPad and learn how to use it. Understanding social media will open up new ways to share your business messaging with prospects and clients. And automating your follow-up contacts with past customers will help build warm relationships, while expending less time and effort.

Eagerness to Listen and Learn: Here's a final trait worth cultivating if you want to be a winner in the real estate game. Be eager to listen and eager to learn. Listen to your customers. Listen to your coworkers and mentors. You have two ears and one mouth for a reason — to listen twice as much as you speak. People want to work with someone who will listen to them.

The more you open yourself to listening, the quicker you'll learn how to build your business, meet your customers' needs and goals, and achieve success in your business. That can be one of your competitive advantages in real estate: "I listen, and I help you reach your goals. I take your thoughts and your input into consideration."

I'll make you a promise. Be patient and stay optimistic. Immerse yourself in real estate, take advantage of every opportunity, whether your prospect is selling a home or wants to buy one. Practice developing the traits of a winner and work hard for every one of your customers. Do all this, and you will have amazing success in real estate.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- If you're a new agent, prepare for the time it may take to develop your business. Have savings in place and consider taking a part-time job.
- Take advantage of any training and guidance your brokerage offers. Rely on your broker's credibility while building your own with clients.
- If you're new to the real estate business, turn that into an advantage. New agents are often more innovative and energetic than their veteran counterparts.

- Cultivate the traits of a winner: confidence, hard work, people skills, technical understanding, eagerness to listen and learn
- While building your book of business, be willing to work with buyers. The extra work you do in learning your market and building relationships will pay off in the long run.

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About This Book

HOW TO WIN AT THE GAME OF REAL ESTATE

As a real estate agent, choosing the right brokerage can make or break your career. So how do you find the right fit? Unlike a game of poker or roulette, you can't necessarily rely on luck to find the right answer. Every brokerage is different, and the right one can offer you the tools you need to kickstart or advance your business.

If you're new to the game, we've also included a helpful guide to getting started. These strategies have been thoroughly tested and proven effective time and time again. Don't miss out on this opportunity to learn tips and tricks employed by top Realtors all over the country!

In this book, I've provided an effective guide for you to establish or grow your business. If you don't have time to implement all of the strategies discussed in this book, I'd be more than happy to provide my expertise and services to help you succeed.

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About the Author

Alan Hernandez, Broker & REALTOR®

Alan brings enthusiasm, passion, and over 17 years of real estate experience with a results driven attitude to the Houston market. He believes in doing what you love and is on a mission to share his vision of financial freedom with the world. His optimistic energy is contagious and his commitment to helping those that surround him is his key to success. Professionally, he is a licensed Broker, a Director for Texas Realtors (on a state level) and an active Real Estate investor with experience in renovations/flips, raising private money and the creation of passive income. As the broker/owner of White Picket Realty, he serves as a mentor to his agents and a consultant to his clients. In his personal life, he enjoys mountain biking, cooking, funny movies, salsa dancing, reading, healthy living and most of all, creating memories with his friends & family. With his uncompromising commitment to the success of those around him, you are assured to be working with one of Houston's best.

This sums up the kind of person Alan is, and the type of Broker he continuously strives to be, for his clients and his agents. Alan was taught at a young age that if you want something in life, you have to work for it. So that's what he's built his business on and teaches to his agents.

Throughout his career, Alan has earned numerous accolades, including:

- Bachelor's Degree in Business Management and Marketing from FSU
- Director of TAR - Texas Association of Realtors 2019-Present
- Featured agent for Realtor.com and spokesperson for 2018 campaign
- President for NAHREP Houston (National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals) 2017
- Award Winning In-House Marketing Team, Home Designer and In-House Sales Team
- Recognized Real Estate Agent and Continuing Education Instructor

Alan aims to provide the highest level of service to his agents and takes deep pride in helping them achieve their real estate goals.

REVIEWS

Testimonials

Testimonials & Reviews for Alan Hernandez

Here's a list of agents whom I have worked with, and what they said about working with me:

Cutting edge boutique brokerage. Alan is super helpful and one of the most knowledgeable real estate professionals to learn from and work with. -Stephen C., Real Estate Agent

Alan has been the best broker I've ever worked with. He has helped me at my lowest and has prepared me to be at my best. Alan Has been extremely helpful and has thought me so much on how to run my business like a business, my mindset, real estate investing, has help me accountable & standing for my success. Definitely a great person and has become a good friend. -Erik A., Real Estate Agent

Alan is an exceptional broker and phenomenal mentor. My business grew tremendously when I joined his brokerage. I have grown professionally and personally under Alan's leadership. He has proven to be dedicated to the growth of White Picket Realty agents. -Manuel M., Real Estate Agent

Alan is a fantastic person to work with as a broker and as an investment partner. I was able to buy my very first Investment property through him. You will not find any other broker other than Alan for an abundance of knowledge and Network to excel yourself in real estate. -Luan T., Real Estate Agent

The onboarding process I've experienced as a new agent has been great so far, but I'm most thankful for the growth and expansive mindset shared amongst everyone with #TeamWPR. Growth and change can be difficult but with the support and knowledge shared at #TeamWPR, it's definitely more approachable! -Elissa Cruz, Real Estate Agent

Alan and his team have definitely set the example of how successful agents and investors operate. What initially attracted me to TeamWPR was their culture. It has been almost 4 years now and I stay because of their drive, empowerment, and steady search of growing and educating their agents for success. TeamWPR is about family and building each other up. Investing and a team later, I am truly happy to be part of the White Picket Family. Thank you guys for creating an AWESOME Brokerage. -Yesenia Phoummarath, Real Estate Agent

Also, Find Out What Over 100 Happy 5 Star Clients Have Said About Working With Alan and His Team Here: