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Healthy change

There comes a time in the lives of many seniors when staying in their current home is no longer a safe or wise choice. But the decision to move is often delayed—or

avoided altogether—because of the myriad emotions surrounding the transition.

To work with seniors, you must be able to recognize situations in which emotions have led to decision-making paralysis and be prepared to guide your clients and customers through a clear, rational assessment of their current living arrangement.

For many seniors, just the thought of selling stirs up fear and anxiety about leaving their home, neighborhood, and friendships for unfamiliar territory—so much so that they often convince themselves a move isn't necessary.

Here's a common scenario: A senior couple begin the process of downsizing and preparing to put their home on the market, even putting down a deposit at a senior community. Then doubt and confusion set in, and the next thing you know, they cancel the move and ask for the deposit back. All this happens usually within a few days. Or, you might meet a woman who's lived in her home for more than 30 years and whose husband has passed away, leaving her with the responsibility of main-

taining a home that's aging and in need of improvements. She's on a tight budget and doesn't have the resources to upgrade the home, but she still clings to the comfort and familiarity of her neighborhood.

There's a great need in the senior market for education about options. So seminars and newsletters are a great way to offer information and find prospects. You also can provide links to financial, legal, healthcare, and other services aimed at seniors through your Web site.

You also might identify potential senior sellers through their adult children. The children might be concerned about their parents' current living situation and possibly will get involved in discussing a move.

Once you find potential sellers, you might have to walk them through the decision-making process. Pose these questions to seniors to help them better assess their situation:

- Does your home provide the best environment for the physical needs you have?
- Have you isolated yourself from friends and family because your inability to maintain your home has left it in disrepair?
- Have you had trouble finding workers to take care of maintenance?
- Are finances keeping you from enjoying the home you've loved for so many years?
- Do you feel you have adequate security and access to care where you are?

If seniors can answer yes to more than one of these questions, they're candidates for change.

If you're serious about working with this segment of the market, you'd be wise to pursue some specialized training. I obtained the Senior Real Estate Specialist (SRES®) designation (www.seniorsreal-estate.com/sarec), conferred by the Senior Advantage Real Estate Council. Additional education, experience, and training will help you become a valuable adviser to seniors on real estate-related matters.

The training can help you put a move into per-

The longer I live
the more beautiful
life becomes.

Frank Lloyd Wright,
architect
(1869-1959)



SALES SHORTS

spective for seniors. For example, many seniors experience a debilitating sense of dread when they imagine trying to fit all of their belongings into smaller quarters. Many people, however, use only certain areas of their home the majority of the time. Measure the square footage of the areas the seniors currently occupy the most—say, the living room or den, kitchen, bath, and bedroom—and compare that with the square footage of the apartment or other living arrangement they're considering. In some cases, the sellers might actually gain space.

Here are some additional steps you can recommend to help seniors overcome their fears.

1. Visit senior communities and apartments in the area. Seniors might not be aware of the many choices available. Marketing directors often will be happy to give tours of their facilities and explain the different types of senior housing. Among them: Senior apartment complexes cater to older adults, but residents must be able to care for themselves. Retirement communities are self-contained residential complexes with support services and recreational and social amenities. Continuing care retirement communities offer three levels of living environments—-independent, assisted living, and skilled nursing. Become familiar with all the facilities in your area so that you can speak knowledgeably to seniors.

2. Talk to trusted advisers. Clergy, an attorney, relatives, a physician, or a best friend are all excellent sources of unbiased advice. Counsel seniors to discuss their feelings with their advisers and describe how their current situation is affecting their view of life. Encourage them to divulge any difficulties they're experiencing, such as physical hardships, and anxieties, such as loneliness. Then suggest that they let their advisers help guide them with love and concern to the right decision.

3. Make lists of benefits and objections. Tell seniors to list on one side of a sheet of paper all of the reasons a move would be good and to list on the other side all the negatives. Suggest they put the paper away for a couple of days, then reread the answers. After reflection, the right path to take could become obvious.

Working with seniors is challenging but rewarding. When the transaction is finished, you will have not only sold a home but also helped change the lives of folks who truly need a guiding hand. **RM**



Nemovitz, ABR[®], CRS[®], SRES[®], of Realty Executives Lakeshore, Wis., has worked with hundreds of seniors and their families during his

28-year real estate career. He's written a book entitled *Moving in the Right Direction*. You can reach him at 262/242-6177.



Fingertip branding

Looking for the perfect promotional item—something people will keep that doesn't cost an arm and a leg?

Frank P. Edwards, a selling broker with Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty in Stony Brook, N.Y., says he's sharpened his marketing edge with nail files: nine-inch, padded emery boards printed with his contact information and the slogan "File or dial for Frank."

He says the files cost about \$2 each with a minimum order of 500. To help defray the cost, he let one of the lenders he works with advertise on the other side of the file. When the lender stopped participating, Edwards, who specializes in waterfront properties, began featuring a beach scene or a picture of one of his listings on the other side. "A file is something people won't get rid of," he says, adding he frequently gets calls for replacement files.

Dual-purpose cards

Practitioners at Prestige Real Estate

Group LLC in Englewood, Colo., get extra mileage out of their business cards by using the back sides to promote their listings. The company, which creates a separate Web site for each property listing, set up a template so that salespeople can print a picture of a house and its specific URL on a regular adhesive label, which can be affixed to the back of their business cards. Leeann Iacino, GRI[®], president of Prestige, says the approach gives practitioners flexibility. "It's target-specific. If they're going to a meeting at a country club, they can use an upper-



end property. If they're going to their kid's sporting event, they can highlight a different property." She says sellers often ask for cards featuring their own home to give to friends and family, which increases exposure for the salesperson and Prestige. Iacino says the labels, which can be purchased at most office supply

stores, cost only a few cents each.

Cyberside chats

Phyllis Staines, ABR[®], CRS[®], broker-associate with RE/MAX Coastal Real Estate in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., looks for every opportunity



to add a high-tech element to her business. For the past year she's conducted monthly online Q&As for consumers interested in buying or selling real estate. She subscribes to a real-time chat service from LivePerson Inc. (www.liveperson.com) that lets her respond to queries immediately. She's found that not only can she save on the overhead costs of holding in-person seminars, but "folks love that they can choose to remain anonymous and can participate from their home." She promotes the Q&As on her Web site and through the local paper, netting 20 to 25 visitors per session. Staines attributes at least five closed deals and dozens of leads to the sessions.

Do you have an innovative, business-boosting selling or marketing tip that you'd like to share? Please e-mail us at greatideas@realtors.org.