

7 Things Your real estate expert Wants You to Know

1 Ask for the best broker. "Often the worst thing you can do is walk into a real estate office and go with whatever agent comes out to greet you," says Barbara Corcoran, star of ABC's *Shark Tank* and founder of The Corcoran Group. "Chances are, it's going to be a newbie." Instead, call the sales manager ahead of time and ask him to recommend his best person. Here's why it works: "Every sales manager is compensated based on how much his agents sell."

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Price it right. "Listing too high is the biggest mistake sellers make," says Marie Otis, a real estate agent with CBSHOME Real Estate in Omaha, NE. "It drives me crazy when people say, 'Can't we list at a higher price for the first few weeks to see if we get any action?' Buyers won't waste time looking at an overpriced home. So when your agent suggests a price range based on comparable sales, go with the lower end of the range," says Otis. Don't chase the market or else you'll end up selling for a lot less than you could have.

3 Once you finish decluttering, do it again. "Sellers usually think they've put away a lot, but most of the time they haven't," says Barb Schwarz, CEO of StagedHomes.com and author of *Staging to Sell*. "When I get to the house, I always find more things that need to be packed up, like family photos, books stacked on tables, too many throw pillows on the sofa, too much artwork on the walls. Keep it to no more than three of each. You want potential buyers to mentally move in, and they can't do that if they're focused on your stuff."



4 Follow the four-month rule. When a home sits unsold for months, buyers think, *I bet we can get it for a song*, says Otis. Translation: lowball offers. "If your house has been on the market for more than four months, take it off and relist two months later," says Corcoran. "That way, when it goes back on sale it looks brand-new to buyers, especially those who have just started house hunting. The truth is, few people take the time to search the history of a house."

5 Hire a cleaning crew. A spruce-up isn't enough. You need to have your home deep-cleaned by professionals, says Otis. "It's worth the investment, because buyers will decide if a house is their dream home in about 15 seconds," she says. "And nothing turns them off like dirt."

6 Do a smell check. "Bad odors make people turn right around and walk out," cautions Schwarz. "You live with those smells, so you probably don't even notice them." Ask a friend for an honest assessment, especially if you smoke, have pets or often cook pungent foods. If it's not good news, that's another reason to get your home professionally cleaned. "A fresh, clean smell is what you want," says Otis. "Some people bake cookies or boil cinnamon to make their home smell nice. But keep in mind, a prospective buyer may not like those scents."

7 Make a price drop count. "When a house isn't selling, many people lower the price inch by inch," says Corcoran. A better strategy: Reduce once by a big chunk—\$25,000 to \$50,000 or more. "Buyers shop by price brackets and this puts your home into a different one, attracting new buyers." Go just below a cap, say \$249,000 instead of \$250,000. "Psychologically, it makes a difference to buyers."