

Pathways to Professionalism

The following information is reprinted from the current NAR *Code of Ethics and Arbitration Manual*.

Note: While the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the National Association establishes objective, enforceable ethical standards governing the professional conduct of REALTORS®, it does not address issues of courtesy or etiquette. Based on input from many sources, the Professional Conduct Working Group of the Professional Standards Committee developed the following list of professional courtesies for use by REALTORS® on a voluntary basis. This list is not all-inclusive and may be supplemented as a result of local customs and practices.

These professional courtesies are intended to be used by REALTORS® on a voluntary basis, and cannot form the basis for a professional standards complaint.

I. Respect for the Public

1. Follow the "Golden Rule": Do unto other as you would have them do unto you.
2. Respond promptly to inquiries and requests for information.
3. Schedule appointments and showings as far in advance as possible.
4. Call if you are delayed or must cancel an appointment or showing.
5. If a prospective buyer decides not to view an occupied home, promptly explain the situation to the listing broker or the occupant.
6. Communicate with all parties in a timely fashion.
7. When entering a property ensure that unexpected situations, such as pets, are handled appropriately.
8. Leave your business card if not prohibited by local rules.
9. Never criticize property in the presence of the occupant.
10. Inform occupants that you are leaving after showings.
11. When showing an occupied home, always ring the doorbell or knock—and announce yourself loudly before entering. Knock and announce yourself loudly before entering any closed room.
12. Present a professional appearance at all times; dress appropriately and drive a clean car.
13. If occupants are home during showings, ask their permission before using the telephone or bathroom.
14. Encourage the clients of other brokers to direct questions to their agent or representative.
15. Communicate clearly; don't use jargon or slang that may not be readily understood.
16. Be aware of and respect cultural differences.
17. Show courtesy and respect to everyone.
18. Be aware of—and meet—all deadlines.
19. Promise only what you can deliver—and keep your promises.
20. Identify your REALTOR® and your professional status in contacts with the public.
21. Do not tell people what you think—tell them what you know.

II. Respect for Property

1. Be responsible for everyone you allow to enter listed property.
2. Never allow buyers to enter listed property unaccompanied.
3. When showing property, keep all members of the group together.
4. Never allow unaccompanied access to property without permission.
5. Enter property only with permission even if you have a lockbox key or combination.
6. When the occupant is absent, leave the property as you found it (lights, heating, cooling, drapes, etc.) If you think something is amiss (e.g. vandalism), contact the listing broker immediately.
7. Be considerate of the seller's property. Do not allow anyone to eat, drink, smoke, dispose of trash, use bathing or sleeping facilities, or bring pets. Leave the house as you found it unless instructed otherwise.
8. Use sidewalks; if weather is bad, take off shoes and boots inside property.
9. Respect sellers' instructions about photographing or videographing their properties' interiors or exteriors.

III. Respect for Peers

1. Identify your REALTOR® and professional status in all contacts with other REALTORS®.
2. Respond to other agents' calls, faxes, and e-mails promptly and courteously.
3. Be aware that large electronic files with attachments or lengthy faxes may be a burden on recipients.
4. Notify the listing broker if there appears to be inaccurate information on the listing.
5. Share important information about a property, including the presence of pets, security systems, and whether sellers will be present during the showing.
6. Show courtesy, trust, and respect to other real estate professionals.
7. Avoid the inappropriate use of endearments or other denigrating language.
8. Do not prospect at other REALTORS®' open houses or similar events.
9. Return keys promptly.
10. Carefully replace keys in the lockbox after showings.
11. To be successful in the business, mutual respect is essential.
12. Real estate is a reputation business. What you do today may affect your reputation—and business—for years to come.

(revised 11/13)

Polishing your Professionalism

BY JIM HATFIELD

Image

33 details that matter

There's a groundswell of momentum behind you. The NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®' Public Awareness Campaign, is pumping up your professional image by letting consumers know your value in the transaction—and the message is getting through. According to independent Riter Research Inc., from 1999 to 2002, the percentage of consumers who believe there's a benefit to working with a REALTOR®, as opposed to just a real estate licensee, has risen from 42 percent to 61 percent. That's great, but it's up to each individual to demonstrate to consumers that the campaign is more than lip service. The proof is in the details—the way you conduct your business and the thoughtful touches you incorporate into your routine service. Which details matter most? Heeding these 33 tips (few will cost you anything) will help you cultivate the image of a professional your clients and customers will want to remember.

- 1. Brand your image—realistically.** Carefully consider the image you want to portray in your marketing in terms of your personality and your clients' interests, says Greg Herder, CEO of Hobbs/Herder Advertising, a real estate marketing consultancy in Newport Beach, Calif. "If you're a golf homes specialist with a passion for golf who gives out golf balls, that's good. But if you're a family specialist who gives out golf balls, that doesn't reinforce your image," he says. Once you identify an image that fits you and your marketplace, be consistent in the message. "If you incorporate your image into every piece of your marketing materials, your brand will build itself," says Herder.
- 2. Dress the part.** "Your clothes should be professional but not glamorous," says Diana Woerner, a sales associate with RE/MAX Suburban Inc. in Glen Ellyn, Ill. "It's much better if you can say to a client, 'I love your outfit!' than the other way around." Similarly, your style should reflect your market. Armani suits in a flannel-clad market can make you look out of touch or, worse, pretentious.
- 3. Monitor yourself.** "Ask sellers if you can record your listing presentation," recommends Bill Berg, a former Chicago-area radio announcer and now a media trainer. "Play it back to see if you're speaking clearly and with enthusiasm."
- 4. Stay neutral.** Do you feel strongly about some political or religious issue? Great. But your clients and customers don't care or, worse, may be offended if you harp on it. Rid your office, car, and home office of controversial buttons, posters, bumper stickers, and photos that could distract. The last thing you need is a supercharged debate about something other than real estate.
- 5. Live by the Golden Rule.** "I always try to treat everyone in the transaction the way I would like to be treated," says Kathy Delaware, sales associate with Coldwell Banker in Reston, Va. "Some people can be very difficult, but when the dust settles and you get past the closing, your character will speak loudly to everyone involved."

6. Avoid aggressive aromas. “A little perfume or aftershave goes a long way,” counsel many practitioners. Besides offending, colognes may trigger allergies. And don’t smoke in your car or office. Nonsmokers will remember your smell, not your smile.

7. Keep confidences. Don’t gossip about your listings, clients, and customers, counsels Pat Layton, broker-owner of Coldwell Banker Preferred Realty Inc. in Frankfort, Ky. If you reveal confidential information to friends and family who leak it, the damage to your reputation can be disastrous. Plus, you may be in violation of Article 1 of the NAR Code of Ethics, which prohibits you from sharing confidential info with others about your professional dealings with a buyer or seller.

8. Tout your credentials. “Don’t hide your qualifications,” says Jane Lampert, ABR®, CRS®, a broker-associate with RE/MAX Suburban in Glen Ellyn, Ill. “Post your license and your designations where your clients will see them.”

9. You’re being watched. “Clients watch how you treat other people and perceive that’s how you’ll treat them,” says Jon Hunter, an associate with John L. Scott Real Estate in Seattle. “They’ll notice if you snap at a waiter or snarl at another driver. So be nice to everyone.” That includes assistants and coworkers. “We let our people know we care about them by recognizing achievements and birthdays,” says Arlen Speckman, CRB, GRI, owner of Speckman Realty GMAC Real Estate in Kankakee, Ill. “When clients walk in or call, that concern really shows.”

10. Show them your cyber side. Coldwell Banker sales associate Judy Szablak, ABR®, e-pro, of Fairfield, Conn., promotes her image as a techno-whiz by giving out CD-ROM business cards and sending prospects a multimedia presentation containing information about her market and credentials. The CD is labeled with her contact information and includes commonly accessible PDF and EXE files. “Many of my prospects are into new technologies,” she says. “These high-tech marketing materials show them we have a lot in common.”

11. Personalize gifts. Closing gifts can show you’re the kind of person who thinks of customers’ individual needs. For example, consider a moving day kit filled with snacks, paper towels, plastic cups, bottled water, aspirin, carton openers, and a coupon for and the phone number of the local pizza delivery spot; a mother’s helper kit, including bibs and diapers; or a stress-reduction kit filled with bubble bath, tea and cookies, a bottle of wine, potpourri, candles, and a babysitter’s number. For more gift ideas, visit the [Follow up](#) section at REALTOR® Magazine Online.

12. Be hair aware. Next to your smile, clients will notice your hair. Women: Pick a contemporary style, not one you sported 20 years ago. Men with thinning hair should adopt the old barber’s tip: Lose the comb-over and go for a shorter style. You’ll look 10 years younger.

13. Listen actively. “Listening is as important as talking,” says Teri Goudie, a former ABC News broadcaster who counsels Fortune 500 executives on communication skills. People notice if your eyes wander and you don’t seem attentive.

And when you’re listening, “watch to see if clients lose eye contact with you at certain moments. You may discover something the client is concerned about but reluctant to verbalize,” says Goudie,

whose Goudie Media Services is based in Hinsdale, Ill.

4. Keep it clean. People form impressions quickly—in seconds, say image consultants. Don't let yours be based on unkempt surroundings. "A clean environment, whether it be your office, car, or home, shows that you're organized and that you care about yourself as well as others," says Anne Marie Cooke, associate broker with Adele Aronson & Associates in Portland, Maine.

15. Speaking of your car. "Keep files and signs and such in the trunk and remember to wash your [mobile office] regularly. A car wash club is a good idea because you'll save money and have it washed more often," says Edward Krigsman, sales associate with John L. Scott Real Estate in Seattle.

16. Respect other cultures. America has become increasingly diverse, reminds Teresa Crowley, an associate with Cornerstone Realty Group in Penn Valley, Calif. "Knowledge and understanding of other lifestyles and cultures shows your respect and consideration." NAR's Certified International Property Specialist designation and the One America: At Home With Diversity course can help you learn to serve people of different cultures and show customers that you're a professional who is sensitive to cultural differences.

Of course, no focus on diversity would be complete without a reminder about fair housing. "In your promotions and media exposure, remember to be neutral," Crowley says. Guard against inadvertently exclusionary language in your advertising. Under the Fair Housing Act, ads should ensure that every buyer has an equal opportunity to see and make an offer on a home.

17. Give service guarantees. "Clients deserve to know what they'll be getting for their money, so we show them up front a list of everything we will do—and we guarantee that we'll do it," says Christie Anderson, CRB, GRI, president of United Country-Northern New Mexico Real Estate Inc. in Chama, N.M. "All of our associates go through the Quality Service Certification program, which itself is an indicator of our professionalism."

Your service reflects your reputation, confirms Larry Romito, president and CEO of Quality Service Certification Inc. in San Juan Capistrano, Calif. "Given a choice between verbal promises and a written service guarantee, who wouldn't choose a guarantee?"

18. Make up for service disappointments. Often the most loyal customers are those who haven't received perfect service but who were impressed by the way their salesperson turned around an error or oversight, says Quality Service's Romito. To recalibrate your image after a customer-service snafu, he advises that you 1) Respond immediately. 2) Listen. Then ask fact-based questions like "what," not "why," to identify problems. When you ask why, you make judgments, which heighten emotions. 3) Maintain your professional poise. Don't get caught up in emotion. 4) Have an exit plan if the person becomes abusive. 5) Restate the problem as described to you and obtain the customer's agreement on the definition of the problem. 6) Apologize—whether customers are correct or incorrect. Their receptivity to you will improve if you recognize that they're suffering. 7) Commit to get back to them with a resolution and specify exactly how and when: by phone at 2:30 on Tuesday. 8) Follow up ahead of schedule. 9) Learn from every situation. 10) Bring in a third party if it's difficult for you to interact with a customer.

19. Pump up. “Schedule time for physical fitness,” says Linda Corcoran, CRS®, GRI, a broker-manager with American Homes Real Estate in LaGrange and Western Springs, Ill. “Your clothes will fit better, and you’ll project more energy to your client.”

20. Remember what mom said. It’s not polite to interrupt. So how do you quiet a chatterbox without doing some damage to your image? Do as professional broadcast interviewers do: Lean forward and open your mouth slightly. The other party will get the message and give you a chance to talk.

21. Select meeting places that build relationships. You only get one first impression, notes Andy Norton, CRS®, a sales associate with RE/MAX Distinctive Real Estate Inc. in McLean, Va. So he makes his debut as nonthreatening as possible by meeting prospects at Starbucks. “My business is very relationship-oriented, so I like to meet in a professional and social environment that conveys acceptance and warmth,” he says.

22. Respect other lifestyles. You don’t lead the same life as the people you work with. For instance, you may not have children, but many clients and customers do. Your attention to the tots can go a long way to showing the parents you understand their needs. Wynne Achatz, ABR®, CRS®, broker-owner of Real Estate One Westrick Associates Inc. in Marine City, Mich., pays special attention to kids who visit her office. She gives them a bag of Beanie Babies to play with and lets them keep their favorite.

23. Share your expertise. One great way to boost your image is just to let people know how much you know. Jerry Fowler, CRB, CRS®, managing broker of Jerry Fowler and The Results Team, REALTORS®, in Columbia, S.C., hosts a weekly radio show. “My show is paid for by advertisers. It’s fast-paced, has lots of listener involvement, and generates a ton of business.”

24. Show that you’re results-oriented. When you offer help of any kind, be sure to carry through. “During my listing presentation I ask sellers how I can help them right away, even if it’s just finding a home for some used furniture,” says Joan Smith, sales associate with Long and Foster in Rehoboth Beach, Del. “People are impressed when you demonstrate your ability to get results fast—especially before you get the listing.”

25. Just a hint of mint. Nothing can ruin a good impression like coffee breath. Keep breath mints handy to combat halitosis.

26. Stick to the point. Politicians know the way to get elected is to stay on message. To win the listing, keep your conversation focused on your clients’ needs and not your weekend at the shore, say top media advisers.

27. Be a doer. People are more aware of contributors, says George Meredith of ERA Carroll Realty Co. in Sheridan, Wyo. “Become involved in social, community, or governmental causes and groups. Most important, do the best you can to help, not just attend meetings.” But get involved because you want to, not just to drum up more business. People will see through that motivation.

28. Be accessible. “Don’t make it difficult for people to contact you,” says Long and Foster’s Smith. “Many practitioners require site visitors to fill out an online questionnaire before they can reach you. I don’t do that on my Web site, and people have told me that’s why they contacted me first.”

29. Show your REALTOR® pride. Maximize your return on the \$35 you contribute each year to the Public Awareness Campaign by wearing your REALTOR® pin. It’s arguably the easiest way to represent the professionalism and results-driven experience consumers want and prefer.

30. Respect clients’ time. Whether it’s during the showing phase or the busy last minutes before closing, make it known to clients that you regard their time as precious. RE/MAX Suburban’s Woerner helps busy buyers save time “by making maps with numbered dots showing every house we plan to visit,” she says. “That way we don’t get lost, and we see every property in record speed.”

31. Don’t over cell. Practitioners agree that nothing annoys clients more than someone who takes phone calls on clients’ time. Smart professionals turn off their phone, focus completely on their clients, and return their phone messages later.

32. Offer a money-back guarantee. Sales trainer Walter Sanford, of Sanford Systems and Strategies in Kankakee, Ill., recommends these types of guarantees: If we don’t sell your house, we’ll buy it. If you don’t get a return phone call within two hours, we reduce our commission by 5 percent. You can cancel a listing for any reason as long as you pay a \$500 cancellation fee to reimburse my marketing expenditures. These shows of good faith make people just as comfortable as if you’d offered them a full money-back guarantee, he says, without jeopardizing your livelihood. Of course, guarantees and service promises are no good unless you heed the advice in tip No. 33.

33. Underpromise and overdeliver. “Trying to always deliver more than you promise is a great way to operate,” says Cornerstone Realty Group’s Crowley. “I measure success not only in volume and referrals but also in quality service surveys.”

So there they are: the details to create your professional patina. They all boil down to the fact that, when it comes to image, actions speak louder than words. Says Phil Brickley, e-PRO®, a sales associate with Coldwell Banker Preferred in Devon, Pa.: “Providing good service is the best image builder of all.”