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A brokers tips for do-it-yourself real estate success

Letters from the Home Front

BY KRIS BERG

"In real estate, you can't succeed on your own."

I found this terrifying email message staring at me from my inbox. It is an exact quote. (Except for the comma, which I added because I tend to overuse commas -- and because I thought it looked nice there. I also tend to overuse parenthetical statements, by the way.)

"Yikes!" I thought. "Will fail ... must get help ... fast!" Since this epiphany had been delivered unto me at 6 a.m., I was still a couple cups of coffee short of thinking in complete sentences.

The warning shot was fired by a mega-brokerage who, seemingly sensing I was on the brink of financial ruin, wanted to help me help myself.

The help being offered included a large accumulation of like-minded agents already congregating around their company-provided mantra of "loyalty" and "trust." Apparently, they felt that those things might be gaping voids in my current business environment and feared for my solvency.

Of course, they did offer one juicy carrot among the sea of proverbial sticks: favorable commission splits. In the context of success, however, I know that commission splits are a trailing issue.

They matter when you have business, but 100 percent of zero is still zero. Rather, this brokerage appeared to be targeting the struggling.

I didn't feel like I was struggling. Business, in fact, has been pretty brisk lately. Perhaps I was delusional. Perhaps the last quarter, an all-time record for us, was a fluke and there were storm clouds brewing. Maybe it does take a village, especially one that has set up camp in the anchor suite of a Class B multitenant office building. Who am I to argue with my inbox?

So, we can't succeed on our own. Except, that is the only way we can succeed. This idea that agents must look to others for their own success is one that has disturbed me for some time. If brokers really want their agents to succeed, I think they are continuing to send the wrong message.

Camaraderie is nice. It tends to motivate and inspire. Trust is nice too, assuming you've learned to drive before you are thrown the car keys. And, when it comes to loyalty, I'm a big fan. But no one -- no one -- can be held responsible for your success as an agent. This one falls squarely in your own 1099 lap.

The reality is that there are two requisites to success in real estate -- in any field. First, you need to suit up and learn the rules. This is the easy part. You need a license and a place to hang it. You need the textbook undergraduate training so that you possess at least a basic understanding of the contracts and the process. And you need seed money, because startups rarely reach profitability overnight.

These things alone do not guarantee greatness or even subsistence, however; they just comprise the entry fee.

The second part involves becoming remarkable, and it is actually achieving that success that is the tough part. The unwritten corollary to "you can't succeed on your own" is "we can make you a success," and that is simply a myth. It is feel-good recruiting spiel, a magic bean that represents the promise of an easy way up. The only real way to the top, however, is to build it yourself.

My daughter might decide one day that she should be a prima ballerina. I can buy her a tutu. And dance lessons. She can hang around other would-be ballerinas, even accomplished ones, but none of those things can put her center stage.

Only a lot of practice and years of hard work might. The things that will determine her ultimate accomplishment are things that no one can give her -- like determination, desire, focus and a whole lot of hard work.

And inherent talent. If everyone could be a top producer, everyone would be. My husband, watching my daughter's accomplishments, might decide he too should don the tutu.

But I can assure you that the most expensive toe shoes and all of the dance classes in the world won't change the fact that he has the wrong body type, not to mention he was blessed with all the rhythm of Whiplash the Cowboy Monkey (no offense to the monkey).

Classes, webinars, coaches and conferences have value, as do brokers who provide mentoring and support. Our professional associations and our search boxes offer us with unlimited opportunities to both master the fundamentals and glean new ideas.

Study, learn, and get yourself pumped up, but know that those things are not the stories; rather, they are the foundation.

As a broker, I owe it to our brand, our agents and every agent we might court to promise only what we can truly deliver. My goal is to build a troupe of promising dancers -- not the biggest headcount of people looking for a promise. Because, as a broker, I know I can only set the stage.

I can offer an environment in which you might become successful, but I can't make you successful. That part is up to you -- all on your own.

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