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## 3 real estate lessons from Elizabeth Taylor

*Who are you when no one is looking?*

BY BERNICE ROSS



Elizabeth Taylor

On March 23, 2011, actress Elizabeth Taylor died. Her life provides a wealth of extraordinary life lessons for all of us -- including those of us in real estate.

The first time I saw Elizabeth Taylor live was when she was co-starring in a Noel Coward play with Richard Burton. While movies are shot, reshot and edited, there's nothing like a live performance to show how truly talented (or untalented) an actor is.

### **Lesson 1: Passion and authenticity**

Burton and Taylor are screen legends, but I have never seen anyone more passionate or impressive on stage than these two. Even though they had divorced at the time of the play, you could feel the electricity between them.

You weren't just seeing acting. You saw two incredibly passionate people who were living the roles they were playing. Whether they were kissing or fighting, it was real and completely authentic.

Lesson learned: Our clients want someone who will be passionate about helping them buy or sell a house. They also want someone who isn't going to rattle off a bunch of scripts or is going to promise them everything and not deliver. When an agent has a true passion for the business and does what she promises (i.e., is authentic), that's a winning combination to generate referrals for years to come.

### **Lesson 2: Sharing is caring**

Taylor was well known for her philanthropic activities. She was an early advocate for AIDS research and worked for years to raise money for research in this area. Her passion for acting was also evident in her passion for helping others.

Lesson learned: Steve Kantor's book, "Billion Dollar Agent: Lessons Learned," has interviews from 100 agents who have sold \$1 billion or more of real estate. One major trait that more than 60 percent of these top agents shared was their commitment to either community service or charitable fundraising. In fact, in most cases, this work was a cornerstone of their business.

### **Lesson 3: Who are you when no one is looking?**

My second encounter with Elizabeth Taylor was much more personal and inspiring.

Back in the late 1980s, I was the faculty adviser for our college ski club. Their big trip for the year was a week in Aspen, Colo., over spring break. We had three buses of students as well as about 40 students who would be flying to Aspen. I elected to fly since we had several disabled skiers who would be going with this group.

These young people were truly remarkable. One young man was blind, but it didn't keep him from skiing. Several others had to wear leg braces. They needed two sets of skis; one for their braced legs and a second set of skis that they used to steer with their hands.

When we reached Denver, our group boarded a puddle jumper to make the last leg of the flight to Aspen. A few minutes before the flight was scheduled to

leave, Elizabeth Taylor and George Hamilton boarded the plane. Because there was no first-class seating, they sat in the first-row bulkhead seats.

Once we were in the air, rather than staying in her seat and chatting with Hamilton, Taylor noticed that a number of the students were disabled. She got up out of her seat and spent time talking to each of the disabled students. She shared how she had been injured and what she had gone through with repeated surgeries. Her interest in them and what they had faced was genuine.

The most important thing she did, however, was that she gave them hope and an extraordinary experience that they will remember for the rest of their lives.

Lesson learned: Most of the people on the plane had no idea that Taylor and Hamilton were on board. There were no reporters and no one would have ever known the act of kindness she shared when no one was looking.

Granted, we bond with those with whom we share similarities. More important, however, is what we do when no one is looking. When most people encounter someone who is disabled, they often look the other way. In most cases, there is nothing malicious. It's just that they don't know what to say or do.

The opportunity here is to remember that all the technology and all the social media tools can never substitute for having a genuine, authentic, face-to-face interaction with another human being.

Ultimately, the secret to being happy and to having a great business is not so much what you do or say in public. It's what you do when no one else is looking.

Elizabeth Taylor modeled being a genuine caring human being both in her public and private life. Whatever tragedy or challenge she had to overcome, she still found time to reach out and care for others.

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