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## *Staging Your Home to Sell...*

When considering selling your home, there are key issues to be considered. Homes that show at their best command a higher price and sell in a shorter period of time.

The following comments touch only on areas often neglected or overlooked.

1. **BATHROOMS:** Few places in the home can get so dirty so fast, and yet few things will 'unsell' a house as fast as dirty baths. Vanity, sink, faucet hardware, and mirror are the focal points, but other potential problems might be soap residue in a shower, a moldy shower curtain, accumulated dirt in the track of the sliding shower door, soiled or missing grout, stained toilet bowls, and dirty or tattered bath mats.
2. **KITCHEN:** Like baths, kitchens get dirty all by themselves. Most buyers will inspect this area carefully, so extra time invested here is well spent. Clean the stove inside and out. Replace stained or corroded reflector plates under the heating elements on electric range tops. Don't neglect the kitchen exhaust hood; buyers frequently check this area as a clue to general housekeeping.
3. **WINDOWS:** Clean windows are an absolute necessity if a house is to look its best, yet this is very often overlooked.
4. **WATER HEATER AND SOFTENER:** Perhaps because it is so unusual, a sparkling clean water heater or water softener really impresses buyers - and it takes so little time and effort.

### *SMELL OUT UNPLEASANT ODORS*

1. **WET TOWELS AND WASHCLOTHS:** Residents of a home frequently aren't aware of what a potential source of bad odor these are. Replace all used towels with fresh ones before a showing.
2. **SOILED CLOTHES:** When the house is being shown, keep dirty laundry out of the living area; move it to the utility room, garage, or storage area. This applies especially to a diaper pail,
3. **GARBAGE:** Take all trash and garbage out of the house, particularly any food-related discards for the kitchen, and make sure no potatoes or onions are going bad under the sink or, in the pantry. After running garbage through a disposal unit, grind up part of a lemon to add a fresh smell.
4. **CATS AND DOGS:** As a first step, move the cat's litter box out of the house. And be sure to clean up after the dog before any showings.

### *IMPORTANT REMINDERS*

1. **VALUABLES:** You may have valuable possessions that you like to display in your home, but when the house is being shown to strangers is not the time. Never leave small valuable items lying around on counters or visible in closets or cabinets. Get them out of sight, if not out of the house. If you keep firearms in your home, keep them in a locked closet or drawer. Don't invite a problem.

2. **EXCLUSIONS FROM THE SALE:** Make a note now of the items you do not intend to include with the sale of the house. Freestanding items generally are not included, but when in doubt, spell it out. Some items that often cause misunderstandings are light fixtures, draperies, large mirrors, water softeners, garage door openers.

3. **KEYS:** As you are readying the house for the market, make a note to gather all the keys for the house, including keys for doors, deadbolts, garage doors, and any padlocks around the property.

### ***TIPS FOR SHOWING***

1. **LIGHTS:** Open all draperies and window blinds. In most rooms, you should turn on lights for a bright and cheerful look. Lamps and indirect lighting are preferable, but use overhead lights if that's all there is in a particular room.

2. **LIGHT SWITCHES:** If some wall switches operate wall outlets, plug in a lamp or radio to demonstrate that the switch works. When a buyer flips a switch and nothing happens, he instinctively suspects a problem.

3. **AROMAS:** Set out some fresh flowers, both for their appearance and fragrance. Right before an agent showing, place a small dish of vanilla extract in your oven at 250 degrees.

4. **CLOSETS:** Keep doors closed except for walk-in closets. Have those doors slightly ajar and turn on the lights to draw attention to this special feature.

5. **POSTERS AND SIGNS:** We live in a tolerant age, but don't take a chance on offending potential buyers. Remove all signs or posters that might be considered offensive.

6. **ASHTRAYS:** Dirty ashtrays are both unsightly and a source of objectionable odor to nonsmokers. Keep them clean or put them away.

7. **UTILITY BILLS:** Have copies of the past twelve months' bills available, or at least a written summary of the amounts paid monthly for the period.

8. **PETS:** Get them out of the house or in a cage, if not off the property. Some people don't like dogs, and nobody likes muddy paw prints on a clean suit or dress. Cats can be just as objectionable to the person who doesn't like them, and invariably a cat will single out the cat-hater to use as a rubbing post.

9. **MUSIC:** Soft background music will help create a relaxed mood that prompts buyers to linger and enjoy, but it is better to have no music than loud music. Never have the television on when the house is being shown.

10. **YOUR PRESENCE:** Most buyers will not relax and closely inspect a home if the owners are present, so try to arrange to turn the home over to the Salesperson. If you must remain at home, refrain from talking unless questions are directed to you. All too often, a seller will jump in to point out some special feature, fearful that the salesperson might overlook it. But, please bear in mind that some of the most successful sales people will say little or nothing during showings, and for two reasons: First; they have made their selling points before entering the house; and second; they want the buyers to discover some things for themselves in order to build excitement. The

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Salesperson also knows the buyer's temperament. So trust the Salesperson's professional judgment.

**ONE FINAL NOTE:** The legal principle of *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware) is dead or dying. We are living in an age of consumer awareness, and it's hard to find a court that won't favor the buyer in a dispute. In fact, consumer groups and many government agencies are taking the posture that the seller has a positive obligation to disclose everything.

If you have a problem in your home, don't mask it. A common example is the homeowner who spray-paints a ceiling to cover water stains caused by a leaking roof. If you have a major problem that you don't intend to correct, disclose it! Sure, some people will be turned off by the prospect of a major repair, but most buyers who otherwise like the home will be philosophical about a problem openly displayed. And usually, they will discount the price they offer by far less than the cost of the repair.