

## Want to become the best listing agent in your area? Practice

To be the best at your craft, take the required abilities, practice more than the competition and then seek out a coach to help fine-tune each area of practice



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What separates the best listing agents from the rest? Why does it seem that some Realtors score listing after listing while others get the dreaded rejection call?

Some would insist it is an innate ability, reasoning, “The good listing agents were born with a special something I do not have, therefore there is no way I can achieve what they do.” Pure and simple, that is bunk.

Others might assume that winning agents either offer more services or cut their commissions. While there is a modicum of truth here, these are frequently not the determining factors either.

### First, let’s begin with what skills are not required during an appointment

#### Bragging about past successes

Ironically, you are in the room with the seller because they believe you can sell their home. In most cases, they will be meeting with other agents they also believe can sell their property.

This means you do not have to tout your successes — if they ask about your track record, you can provide a quick summary, but that will never be the intrinsic focus of the appointment. The

truth is, sellers are not so much concerned with what you have done in the past; they are far more interested in what you can do for them in the future.

### **Extensive talking**

In reality, the less speaking you do, the better — you want to encourage the sellers to provide most of the dialogue. If you speak too much, the seller will tune out and then start mentally counting down the moments until you are out the front door.

### **High-pressure tactics**

You will not need to strongarm a seller to work with you. In fact, if you try, you will quickly build up resentment that will either eliminate you from their options or, should they choose you, cause problems of resentment down the road.

## **Listing agents who consistently win have developed the following 10 abilities**

### **1. The ability to listen**

While most lists of “skills required by a listing agent” start with communication, I believe it is far more important to know how to listen. Many agents assume that “communication” means opening their listing presentation and downloading information.

In fact, the majority of talking in any listing appointment needs to be done by the seller(s). Smart listing agents will pull out a pad of paper, ask questions, listen carefully and write down responses that will later provide the foundation for meaningful discourse.

### **2. The ability to empathize**

The definition of empathy is “the ability to understand another person’s thoughts and feelings in a situation from their point of view, rather than your own.” In other words, by carefully listening to the seller(s), the listing agent can develop an understanding of the motivations behind the obvious need to sell.

It is impossible to empathize without taking the time to carefully listen. Often, what is not being said is more important than the actual words uttered by the client.

### **3. The ability to detect needs**

By empathizing, a listing agent can determine the underlying motivations and adapt accordingly. Most listing agents will wait for the seller to stop talking so they can start their listing

presentation. Once they begin, they are more concerned with “downloading” information than they are with determining the seller’s needs.

In contrast, if you totally understand the seller’s needs and motivations and can address them directly, you might not even need to go into your presentation at all. Simply affirming that you have heard them and can provide a simple, meaningful response that meets those needs may be all that is required to secure the listing.

#### **4. The ability to detect personality types**

Are you sitting across the table from a D, I,S or C? Or, in the world of Gary Smalley, a lion, otter, golden retriever or a beaver? Every personality type has different needs and responds in a different way.

If you go into an appointment with a lion acting like a beaver, your chances of success will be very small. In contrast, if you act like a lion to a golden retriever, there will not be a follow-up appointment. It is important to understand the differences between the various types of personalities you will encounter and how to match and mirror their characteristics.

#### **5. Ability to effectively communicate**

The underlying premise of communication is that it is a two-way dialogue designed to meet the needs of both parties. Effective communication flows from knowing who is on the other side of the table and then adapting your communication to fit their preferences. This will never happen if you do not first take the time and effort to get them talking while you actively listen.

#### **6. The ability to respond with scripts**

Just about everything we say and do in life is scripted. The problem is, we are usually unaware of how prevalent scripts actually are.

As an example, when a child acts out, we automatically respond — usually with the same dialogue we have used a hundred times before. The question is not, “Do we use scripts?” It is, “Are the scripts we use actually effective?”

Call any customer service or sales organization and you will immediately be confronted with scripts. These large organizations know the value of scripts and train their team members to use them in every situation. Standardized scripts maintain effective customer service and prevent employees from going off the rails or responding incorrectly.

Muscle memory is what happens when we do the same maneuver over and over again. There is no need to think about a response — it automatically happens.

If you have ever visited London, you will have seen signs painted on the road at crosswalks stating, “Look right.” City officials know that most of us, when approaching a street to cross, instinctively look left for approaching vehicles. Since drivers in the UK drive on the other side of

the road, a script is provided to warn us not to respond automatically. Signs began to appear after numerous foreign visitors were hit by cars coming from the “wrong” direction.

Effective Realtors understand the need for scripts. They not only look for effective scripts, they practice them until they are second nature. When specific questions arise, they can respond automatically without thinking.

### **7. Ability to demonstrate market knowledge**

Average agents know if the market is hot or cold, but do not have extensive knowledge of market intricacies at their fingertips. In contrast, effective agents are more like local economists who know the local stats, national trends and can explain, in detail, what is happening in the current market and where they believe the market will be in the future.

### **8. Ability to demonstrate integrity**

A number of years ago, I began working with a couple looking to move up. The husband was a dominant C-suite executive in a local tech company who, as I quickly discovered, was not interested in his wife’s opinion. Tension began to build as we quickly discovered they both had totally different ideas of the type of house they were looking to buy.

I finally sat them down and, as gently as I could, explained that I could sell them a house now, but, if things continued, would likely be selling it for them in a year or so to settle a divorce. I then advised them to stop the search and plug into counseling.

Startled that I would put their needs ahead of both a listing and a purchase, they took my advice, and, once they had worked on their relationship, called me back to help them achieve their goals. I subsequently did a total of five transactions with them, totaling millions of dollars.

As Realtors, we have a fiduciary responsibility to put the needs of our clients before our own. This means that we tell the truth, even if it is not in our best interest to do so. Prospective sellers can quickly tell if you are sincere or not and whether integrity is just a tagline or an integral part of your character.

### **9. Ability to demonstrate skills**

Most people, watching a chess master play multiple opponents at the same time while blindfolded, would ascribe to them God-like abilities. In reality, however, what they are actually seeing is behavior honed after thousands of hours of dedicated practice, countless pages studied in chess books and a brain that has actually been changed due to immersion in the craft.

It is no secret that a weightlifter builds muscle after repeated lifts, enabling them to increase the weight they can hoist. Runners’ hearts actually grow larger, enabling them to process more blood and increase the amount of oxygen flowing through their bodies. Likewise, after extensive practice, the brains of chess players change over time to allow for higher levels of performance.

The same principle applies in business: Whereas a rookie agent might struggle to come up with a response to any given situation in a listing appointment, the agent with years of engagement in real estate and thousands of hours of practice exudes the correct responses automatically.

Skills simply flow. Market data and statistics are provided with seemingly no effort. Their brains have, in fact, been rewired through their conscious efforts to excel.

## **10. Ability to negotiate**

At the end of the day, real estate is all about negotiation. Since the purchase or sale of a home is typically the largest financial investment many make in their lifetimes, it is important to successfully negotiate the best deal for all parties concerned.

Negotiation is not an inherent skill, regardless of what some may believe. It comes from study and practice and, while easy to learn, is often ignored by agents who assume they already have the innate skills to effectively negotiate. Since every listing appointment requires negotiation to some degree, those who have taken the time to actually develop their skills will come out ahead.

So having defined the 10 abilities required to succeed in listing appointments, how then does someone actually develop these abilities until they are second nature? How does a Michelin-starred chef know intrinsically what will work and what will not?

It comes down to practice.

## **2 critical components must be understood to set you apart from the rest of the pack**

### **More practice than the rest**

It is easy to look at truly great performers and conclude that they were born with some special skill that set them apart from the rest of the world. In reality, studies have shown this is simply not true. So what made the following so successful?

- Jerry Rice (football)
- Bobby Fisher (chess)
- Itzhak Perlman (violin)
- Michael Phelps (swimmer)
- Tiger Woods (golf)

One simple thing: They all practiced more than their competition. Not only did they put in more hours than the rest, but those hours were also intensely focused.

Phelps knew it would take two days to get back into his rhythm after taking a day off, so he opted to practice every day for years. His opponents, in contrast, took at least one day off a

week. This meant that Michael gained at least two days more of practice a week than his competitors. When you add up those extra days over years, his lead became insurmountable.

Jerry Rice is not only the greatest receiver to have played the game, but he is also considered by many to be the best football player ever, regardless of position. Ironically, based on his lack of speed and overall performance in college, he was overlooked by many teams during the draft. What made him so successful? Geoff Colvin, in *Talent is Overrated*, explains:

*“He designed his practice to work on his specific needs. Rice didn’t need to do everything well, just certain things. He had to run precise patterns; he had to evade the defenders, sometimes two or three, who were assigned to cover him; he had to outjump them to catch the ball and outmuscle them when they tried to strip it away; then he had to outrun tacklers.*

*So he focused his practice work on exactly these requirements. Not being the fastest receiver in the league turned out not to matter. He became famous for the precision of his patterns. His weight training gave him tremendous strength. His trail running gave him control so he could change directions suddenly without signaling his move. The uphill wind sprints gave him explosive acceleration.*

*Most of all, his endurance training — not something that a speed-focused athlete would normally concentrate on — gave him a giant advantage in the fourth quarter, when his opponents were tired and weak, and he seemed as fresh as he was in the first minute. Time and again, that’s when he put the game away.”*

Called “The Greatest Violinist of our Generation,” Itzhak Perlman has performed worldwide, conducted multiple orchestras, been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and won 16 Grammy Awards, including a Lifetime Achievement Award.

At the age of three, after listening to a violin concert, Perlman asked his parents to help him learn to play. They responded by giving him a child’s violin. At age four, he contracted polio. Rather than let the disease dominate his life, he adapted and played while seated.

One year later, aged five, he began studying with Rivka Goldgart, a Russian-trained teacher who was attached to the Shulamit Conservatory. While others his age were out playing, his disability kept him inside, practicing. He stated, “I am playing the violin; that’s all I know, nothing else, no education, no nothing. You just practice every day.”

The same applies to Bobby Fischer who, upon discovering chess at the age of six, completely immersed himself in the game and, when he could not find an opponent to play, practiced repeatedly on his own, racking up between 12 and 14 hours of practice a day.

Discovering that all the important books on chess were written in Russian, he taught himself how to read the language and immersed himself in every book on chess he could find. His obsession for the game led him to the U.S. Championship at age 14 and, in a monumental win, he became the first American to beat a Soviet Grand Master by beating Boris Spassky in 1972.

Tiger Woods, starting at the age of two, ended up practicing 13 hours a day along with extensive cardio and weight regimens — completely unheard of in the world of golf. Winning more than 200 tournaments worldwide and becoming one of the most famous athletes in the world, the results speak for themselves.

The constant in all of these individuals is not any latent talent, but, flowing from their passion and dedication to their craft, they all literally out-practiced their competition.

The implications for Realtors should be obvious: if you want to be better than the rest, practice is the pathway to success. In reality, it should not be too difficult to practice enough to get ahead. While this might sound crass, we all know it is true: Most Realtors (at least the ones I know) do not spend any amount of time consistently working on their craft.

In fact, as I have discovered over my years in this business, most agents will spend hours doing anything except what they should be doing to succeed.

### **Better practice than the rest**

As seen above, it is not only the fact that these champions practiced more than everyone else; how they practiced was also important. Jim Collins in *Habits* clarifies: “Excellence requires more than just a lot of practice. It requires the right kind of practice. The natural tendency for humans, professional athletes included, is to fall into a routine once we achieve an adequate level of performance.”

Michael Phelps did not just keep swimming laps trying to best his previous times. Knowing that strength was critical, with the help of his coach, he focused on targeted weight training. Understanding that his competitive edge would often be in hundredths of a second, he intensely homed in on tiny details such as the position of his hands and then practiced the new techniques until they were second nature.

Referring to Rice, Colvin explains, “Rice and his coaches understood exactly what he needed in order to be dominant. They focused on these things and not on other goals that might have seemed generally desirable, like speed.” Since they knew Jerry would not beat many defenders with speed, they had to target their practice on things that would allow him to outmaneuver and outperform his opponents.”

Colvin goes on to explain that effective practice is actually deliberately focused and is not mindless repetition. James Clear clarifies by defining deliberate practice as “a special type of practice that is purposeful and systematic. While regular practice might include mindless repetitions, deliberate practice requires focused attention and is conducted with the specific goal of improving performance.”

In other words, using an example from Colvin’s book *Talent is Overrated*, instead of showing up and mindlessly hitting a bucket of golf balls, a more effective approach would be to hit a ball

and then have a coach work with you to finetune your swing until you are consistently hitting balls straight and true.

Unfortunately, this type of practice can be intensely boring, which is the No. 1 reason most are not willing to pay the price required to achieve success.

For Realtors who want to be the best at their craft, it means taking the 10 required abilities, practicing more than their competition and then seeking out a coach to help fine-tune each area of practice until mastery is achieved. The good news is that most of your competitors will not be willing to pay the price required to become the best, which leaves the door wide open for those who truly want to succeed.