

“DAVID’S EXPLANATIONS AND SYSTEMS FOR HOW TO BECOME A TOP-PRODUCING AGENT ARE UNQUESTIONABLY EFFECTIVE... I CAN’T THINK OF A BETTER PERSON TO WRITE A BOOK THIS NEEDED IN THE INDUSTRY.”

–DAVID OSBORN, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Wealth Can’t Wait*

SKILL

**A Top-Producing
Agent’s Guide
to Earning
Unlimited Income**



DAVID GREENE

**BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
BUY, REHAB, RENT, REFINANCE, REPEAT**



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BY DAVID GREENE



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David Greene

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CHAPTER ONE

TOP-PRODUCER TRAITS

“If you want to be a leader who attracts quality people, the key is to become a person of quality yourself.”

—JIM ROHN

What Is a Top Producer?

Top producers are the agents who stand apart from their peers in their market. They close more deals, make more money, and help more people than the other agents in their office. They have a reputation for selling a large number of homes. Top producers not only generate leads, but they also have more leads come to them. When a top producer speaks about real estate, they speak with the authority and confidence that comes with knowing their craft. They dominate their market.

Their reputation doesn't stop with the local community. Other agents know about them too. When you start working at a brokerage, it doesn't take long before you know who is selling homes, what their specialty is, and how they are leveraging their talents, skills, and resources to

outperform the competition. People talk about top producers. They want to be like them, they want their approval, and they want their results.

There's a common maxim in real estate sales: "Eighty percent of the business goes through the top 20 percent of the agents." If you're going to work in this business, you want to be in the top 20 percent. If you're not, you'll find yourself fighting for 20 percent of the business with the other 80 percent of Realtors.

This book is for those who don't want to just call themselves a Realtor—they want to become a top producer and experience everything this profession has to offer. Odds are, you didn't invest all your time and energy into becoming a licensed agent just to be mediocre. Getting to the top 20 percent is the key to the Realtor good life.

Reverse Engineering Success

A common mistake newbies make is to ask, "What do I do first?" and then work forward from there. These newbies learn from their mistakes, just like everybody else. But their path is dictated by trial and error. They take the wrong step, they learn their lesson, and they take the right step next. Rinse and repeat. Progress can be made like this, but it's not ideal. Rather than figure out the path to success by potluck, it makes much more sense to start with the end in mind and work backward. By doing this, you reduce the number of missteps to your desired result. The more direct your path, the faster you'll reach your destination (that is, top-producer status).

Being a top producer in real estate sales is more about who you are than what you do. When you follow top producers, you start to notice many of them have similar character traits. For instance, they have more disciplined work schedules. They use leverage to get ahead. And they insist on high standards in anything they do. If you want to be a top producer, start by valuing what they value. Doing so early in your career will help you develop the habits you'll need to support a big business later on.

Another wrong question new agents often ask is, "How do I get leads?" Although this appears to be a practical place to start, it assumes you'll know what to do with a lead when you get one. The truth is, if the agent knew how to close a lead with a high level of skill, the confidence they would exude would bring leads to them. Instead, I recommend you ask a different question: "Who would I need to be in order to draw a large number of leads?"

Think about how the top producers in an office act, talk, and carry themselves. How do they dress? In which direction do they steer conversations? How do they make you feel after speaking with them? These are the traits you want to emulate. When you come across this same way, clients will find their way to you. If you still want to find leads, you can do so knowing you can close the deal and your efforts weren't in vain.

Understanding who you need to become to get the results you want starts early in the process. This book offers helpful information, but nothing I write could possibly bring the same understanding as watching a top producer in action. The body language, facial expressions, and confidence with which they carry themselves is really what you're after. No text by itself can explain how that works.

The traits used by top producers are not easy to come by. If they were, there would be no top producers—everyone would be getting the same amount of business! Top producers are where they are because they are *better* than their competitors. Building up these characteristics in yourself won't come easily, and it often won't feel natural. If you find that to be the case, *that's okay*. The more difficult the transition is for you, the more valuable it will be when you get it down. It is no different than anything else you have learned in life. As a child, it was challenging to learn how to walk and speak. As an adult, it is hard learning a new exercise like yoga or developing a new skill like cooking. Everything is difficult in the beginning and becomes easier with repetition.

Top-Producer Qualities

In my time working in the real estate sales space, I've found top producers to have certain traits in common. Here's how you can channel and improve on those qualities.

Be More Direct

Those you communicate with perceive directness as a hallmark of confidence and skill. When someone is unsure of the direction they should take or how to communicate an issue, it's usually because of inexperience. Clients understand that the less experience their agent has, the less likely they will do their job well. Avoid looking insecure and inexperienced. Instead, act confident in front of clients. Direct communication is an easy way to accomplish this.

Beating around the bush, failing to answer a question clearly, or fumbling over words all portray a lack of experience that induces hesitation in your clients. Speaking directly to a situation and letting your clients know what comes next before they even ask works wonders in earning their confidence. To establish yourself as a confident leader who's in control, end every conversation by sharing next steps you'll be taking.

Directness in communication also saves you time, which is why top producers develop this trait. It's a requirement when you're operating at a high level with a lot of clients. You need to get things done faster! When you speak clearly and get your point across quickly, your clients tend to mirror this trait and will give you the information you need faster as well. Directness is more efficient and more effective, and portrays more confidence, and those three are important in this job. Start practicing being more direct in both your decision-making and communication style.

Ways to Be More Direct

- Set the boundaries of the conversation from the get-go.
 - *Example:* “Hey, I have five minutes, and I need to ask you something. Here are our options...What information do you need in order to know which direction you'd like to take?”
- When providing options, paint a picture of how those scenarios will likely turn out. This makes it easier—and therefore faster—for your clients to make their decisions.
 - *Example:* “If we ask for a credit of \$5,000, the sellers will likely put their house back on the market and find another buyer. That means we'll be out looking at properties again this weekend, and there isn't anything else on the market with a pool. Or we could ask for a credit of \$1,500. I think I can get them to give it to us. That should be enough to fix the major problems but not the cosmetic ones.”
- Help clients see the value in eliminating options. Many clients make the mistake of trying not to miss out on a great opportunity. This fear of missing out creates a scenario in which the client is overloaded with options and can't decide at all.
 - *Example:* “There are twenty-five houses in town that fit your budget. Ten are in the wrong school district, five need significant work you don't have the money for, and four of them have lots

that are too small for you. That leaves us with six houses I'd like to show you. Let's focus on making sure we don't miss out on the best one of these six!"

Improve Your Skills

It should come as no surprise that top-producing agents are highly skillful in their craft. Top agents are known for something special that makes them better than their competitors, and they often brand themselves this way. Sometimes they sell homes faster, or they earn more money for their clients, or their customer service is superior. Top producers simply do certain things better than agents who perform at a mediocre level.

Luckily for you, there are many skills an agent needs, so there are many ways you can be better than your competition!

Skillful communication is a key skill to develop. Your ability to convey information in a way that keeps your client excited and feeling positive will affect how many houses you sell. Strong communicators highlight the best aspects of the deal for the client, provide possible solutions to problems, are easy to understand, and sound confident in the information they are providing.

Market knowledge is also a skill that requires a high level of mastery. Top agents know how fast houses sell, how much they sell for, and which parts of town are most desirable. This carries over into design as well. You want to help your sellers prepare their homes to be appealing to as many buyers as possible. You also want to know how to help buyers estimate what it will cost to fix up a property to the way they say they would like it. Knowledge of home values, rehab prices, and design styles will set you apart from less experienced agents.

Another beneficial skill is negotiation. Negotiation is an important part of an agent's job, especially with those who are primarily concerned with the financial components of a transaction. Sharing how you handle offers on a client's listing or what you do to eliminate leverage in transactions (when you represent the seller) will showcase your skills as a listing agent. This will work when representing buyers too. Share how you get sellers to cover closing costs or how you get your offers accepted over others in a hot market. Buyer clients will take note of this and be impressed by your negotiation skills when you bring this up in conversation.

Negotiation is not limited primarily to the other agents. More often than not, you will find yourself negotiating with your own clients. Your

ability to convince your sellers to give a little in closing costs can make the difference between a house selling in the first two weeks on the market versus six months down the road. Your ability to negotiate your buyers into shortening their inspection period by a week can be the difference in them getting their ideal house or something less than their ideal. Strong negotiators highlight the benefits of the solution they are presenting while helping the other person feel they are getting what they want. If you want to sell a lot of homes, learn how to negotiate with your clients!

Ways to Improve Your Skills

- Improve your communication skills by learning how to get directly to your point.
- Learn how to negotiate so everyone feels like they're getting something of value.
- Start every day with research. See which homes hit the market that morning, look at the listing prices, and note when a listing is posted noticeably lower or higher than a comparable property. Casually mention this information when speaking with clients during lead generation time.
 - *Example:* "Yes, I get a fair commission of 6 percent, but you get the best Realtor available in this entire market."

Build Your Charisma

Top-producing agents inspire others. This results in loyal clients returning to you time and time again for their real estate needs as well as referring others your way for the same reason. When you have an army of fans supporting your business, it's hard to fail. You may have this trait naturally. If not, you'll need to cultivate it.

Keep in mind not everyone's charisma is the same. Some people have a gregarious charm that inspires others through fun and goodwill. Others draw people to them through their genuineness or authenticity. Consider someone like Tom Hanks. His popularity in Hollywood is based on his reputation as a "genuine guy" others can relate to. His ability to relate to the working person makes him a movie draw and thus a powerful Hollywood player.

The same can be said of Elon Musk. Most people would describe his personality as downright awkward, and many who work with him claim he is incredibly difficult to get along with. Despite this, Musk has a mas-

sive following of devoted fans who believe in him and his ability to be on the cutting edge of progress. Why? Because he is considered smarter than everyone else around him. His intelligence creates a charisma his personality never could.

Charisma comes in all shapes and sizes. Each of us has our own strengths that allow us to inspire this type of devotion. Top-producing agents harness their power to help grow their businesses. What are your charismatic traits? If you don't know, ask the people who know you best. They'll tell you when you are most confident and in which situations you tend to shine. Then, look for ways to spend as much time in those situations as possible.

Ways to Build Your Charisma

- Believe in what you say. It's hard to fake conviction. If you aren't sure, study the material until you are.
- Be aware of how you come across. People notice if you mumble, stare at the floor, or try to blend into the shadows. Work on outwardly expressing the confidence you have inside you.
- Don't try to be someone you're not. If you're introverted, focus the attention of your conversations on the data you've collected that other agents miss. If you know contracts well, mention ways you've kept your clients out of legal problems that other agents can't do. Let people see you through the lens of confidence you project when you are in your element.

Increase Your Leadership

Leaders inspire confidence in others who rely on them for guidance. As a real estate professional, that's the exact situation you'll find yourself in. The better your leadership skills, the more comfortable your clients will be trusting you and following your advice. The less resistance these clients give you, the more deals you can close in a shorter amount of time. Improving your skills as a leader is a nonnegotiable tenet of becoming a top-producing agent.

My best advice for becoming a better leader is to practice the concept Jocko Willink and Leif Babin detail in their book *Extreme Ownership*. They state that every error or mistake ever made is the leader's fault, regardless of who makes the blunder. If a leader takes ownership of everything that happens underneath them, they eventually iron out

bumps in the road and become better at preventing mistakes from happening in the first place. When leaders shirk responsibility or place the blame on others, they reduce their ability to influence and impact their business and subordinates. Good leaders own everything.

Good leaders also run toward hard things. As a top-producing agent, you are setting yourself apart from your competitors. This means having higher standards and taking on challenges other agents would shy away from, like hiring and training staff. Some skills—such as leverage in negotiation—are easier in theory than in practice. For this reason, very few are successful at the most difficult aspects of the industry. This is why there is so much room to rise to the top! It is by running toward hard things and not avoiding them that you set yourself apart from the competition. You can have what few have if you are willing to do what few others do. Practicing extreme ownership as a leader means running toward what is hard.

Make it a habit to own the mistakes that occur in your business and let your clients know your plan to fix them. It is true that when a buyer's loan falls through on your listing, it isn't your fault. It is *also* true that you could have checked more thoroughly with the buyer's lender before accepting their offer. When you own the mistake, you empower yourself to make changes in how you move forward, and you reduce the chances of the same mistake happening with the next client.

Similarly, you should see your weaknesses and vulnerabilities as opportunities for growth. Unfamiliar with the lending process? Learn more about how the lending side of our business works. This will make you a better agent and may even open up opportunities to help improve your lending partners' business. These doors only open when we embrace that we can better influence outcomes when we commit to being leaders who do hard things.

The stronger you become as a leader, the more people will be drawn to you as someone who can serve their real estate needs. Your leadership skills therefore directly translate into an increased number of clients. This will also help you build a strong team—or, at a minimum, create a strong staff—working alongside you to scale your business.

Ways to Increase Your Leadership

- Don't just react to problems when they occur; work proactively to stop problems from occurring. This is a key part of creating systems

and improving your clients' overall experience.

- Accept that it is your responsibility to train others to help you. It's not enough to do the work well yourself. If you want to help more clients, you'll also need to hire and train staff well.
- Never blame anyone else when things go wrong. You can explain how the mistake happened, but always accept responsibility for not working to prevent the mistake.
 - *Example:* "I'm sorry, but it looks like the buyer's agent failed to schedule their appraisal and now they are running behind the contracted timelines. I should have been checking in with them to make sure they handled this. I'm going to call them every day to ensure the appraiser arrives as soon as possible."

Be Trustworthy

It's sad this needs to be mentioned, but there is a glaring need for trustworthiness in real estate sales. If you want to be a top producer, you absolutely must excel at being a trustworthy agent known for always putting the interest of your clients before your own. Most importantly, always tell the truth. It's never okay to lie to a client; however, that doesn't mean that all ways of conveying information are the same. Trustworthy agents disclose everything their client should know about a property or a deal, and they practice how they will convey this information.

These agents develop a specific method of delivering vital information, especially if it's a common issue in real estate. This is referred to as a "script." Scripts are, simply put, a means of communicating information to clients in a manner that is easy to understand. Trustworthy agents often put the information in context to help the client weigh its importance and prevent them from overreacting or making a rash decision they'll regret later. Your ability to communicate information effectively will allow you to maintain a high degree of trustworthiness without compromising your sales.

When conveying negative information, always do so by phone call as opposed to email or text. Practice how you will share the information in a way that is completely accurate but that includes a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down. Focus on the solution you have in mind and bring the client's attention to that rather than letting it rest on the problem or the potential negative consequences.

Ways to Be Trustworthy

- Focus on the solution.
- Don't "wing" the conversation. When you must convey upsetting news, jot down every important point that needs to be made, then practice until you've established a way of communicating this news that reduces the emotional blow for the client.
- Resist the urge to hide bad news from your clients and hope they don't find out. This will completely erode any trust you've built. Your clients will understand that not everything that goes wrong is your fault, and they often just need to vent. Be direct about conveying bad news and allow them to take their frustration out on you without taking it personally.
 - *Example:* "It appears your home has appraised for \$20,000 less than the contracted price. I'm sure this is a shock to you, and I'm very disappointed as well. The buyers have the ability to back out of this deal if we don't reduce our price, and that would mean us putting the house back on the market where this could potentially happen again. I want to avoid that, and I'm going to be speaking with the other agent to see if there is a possibility we could meet somewhere in the middle."

Your Standards Determine Your Success

Many people operate under the assumption that we can have more success simply by working harder. In many ways this is true; it just isn't the whole story. Hard work is not a guarantee of success. During my time in real estate sales, I've noticed there is something more than hard work that makes a top producer.

Top-producing agents are people of character. There is something about who they are as people that separates them from the other agents in their market.

Think about the people you trust the most in life. Are they always the hardest workers? Or are they the people who keep your secret and are always straight with you? When someone shows the strength of character to put your needs above their own on a consistent basis, you trust them and want to be around them. Trustworthiness breeds trust, and trust is the essential ingredient in all good relationships. Real estate is a relationship business. As such, your relationships with others will play

a large role in determining your success.

Your sphere of influence won't send you referrals if they don't trust you'll take good care of them.

Your clients won't follow your advice if they don't trust your motives.

Leads won't trust your guidance if they don't trust your honesty.

Other agents won't accept your offer if they don't trust you can bring your buyers to close.

Two of the first things to learn as a top producer are how to make tough decisions and how to have difficult conversations that maintain and even foster others' trust in you. Your character will determine whether you can do this.

Character will also play a large role in your work ethic. Top producers keep their word. When they say they will make a certain number of contacts in a day, they do it. When they agree to read through a contract in its entirety, they do it. Top producers have high standards for themselves, and it shows. The standards you choose for yourself may be the most influential factor that determines your success in business and in life.

As a young agent, I heard Gary Keller (founder of Keller Williams Realty) say, "Your clients are not loyal to you. They are loyal to your standards." This statement set off an avalanche of thoughts in my mind.

The more I grew in the business, the more I found Keller's statement to be true. In fact, as I gained a deeper understanding of this concept, I realized the only thing that set me apart from other agents—and the sole reason clients chose to work with me over others—was the standard I set for how I conducted myself and my reputation with real estate.

Clients are not drawn to me solely because of my knowledge or track record. These things play a role, of course, but more important is that clients are drawn to what I represent. I have built my own portfolio of investment properties through my standards for earning, saving, and investing money. My properties perform well because of my standards for investment criteria.

My knowledge has been acquired through the standard I set for myself for learning, and my ability to articulate concepts and ideas come from the high standards I set for communication. Everything that causes my phone to ring and people to reach out to me can be traced back to the standards I initially created for myself, and these were higher than my competition's standards.

It became clear to me that the path to more success was higher stan-

dards. By always raising my standards in business, and in my own character, I have increased my sales and the performance of my company. When my sales grew to the point where I could not keep doing the work alone, I hired people. But I was continually frustrated with their performance, and my company's growth stagnated. Why? Because I hired people who had standards lower than my own.

When I started hiring people with higher standards and enforcing the standards of my company, growth exploded. In 2020, I sold almost four times as much real estate as in 2019 from this one small tweak. I cannot express strongly enough how important this concept is. If you want to be a top producer, the path is remarkably simple—raise the standards at which you do everything.

Top-Producer Standards

Your clients expect you to be the expert when it comes to real estate, so you should expect that of yourself too. Increasing your knowledge is a quick way to set yourself apart from the competition and showcase a higher standard. The following are simple ways to do just that.

Creating and Interpreting CMAs

A CMA (comparative market analysis) is a tool used by agents to determine what a property is worth based on comparable sales of similar properties in similar locations. Every agent should know how to create a CMA. Your clients will judge you based on your accuracy. Choosing the wrong properties as comparable sales—or missing properties that should be included—is a great way to lose credibility with a seller and find yourself out of a job. To start increasing your knowledge in real estate sales, learn how to look at a property through the eyes of an appraiser, and learn how to select the right properties for your CMA.

Creating a CMA is relatively simple but interpreting it for the client is definitely not. Accurate CMA interpretation is a way to stand apart from other agents. Chapter Nine of *SOLD: Every Real Estate Agent's Guide to Building a Profitable Business* (the precursor to this book) provides an in-depth description of how to create a CMA. Your goal is to present this information in such a way as to help your clients see it from your expert perspective and feel good that they are pricing their home according to the market data.

Knowing how to showcase which homes have sat on the market without selling—and explaining why—will guide your clients to understand this information. You do this by showing the homes that have been on the market a long time and explaining how much stress this creates for the sellers. Bringing your clients' attention to the “pending” properties will help them set realistic goals. Pricing your clients' homes in alignment with properties that were successfully put in contract and getting them to improve their homes' condition to meet pending sale prices are the best ways to ensure your clients' homes sell well.

It is not enough to create a CMA, email it to a client, and expect them to interpret it by themselves. I see Realtors do this, and it conveys an extremely low standard of service. It's not uncommon for your clients to think they know more about real estate than they really do. To help them understand what must be done to sell their home, start with interpreting the CMA information you created in a way they can comprehend and feel good that their home is priced appropriately.

Local Market Knowledge

It is safe to assume your clients will expect you to have a high level of local market knowledge. This includes knowing which types of properties sell the fastest and what price points different homes will sell for. It also includes knowing specifics, such as school districts, utility jurisdictions, and which parts of town have the highest property taxes. From a practical standpoint, this type of information will play a small role in your job as an agent. From a marketing standpoint, however, it will be huge. Being able to quickly share this information will separate you from your competitors.

My favorite way to gather this information is by talking with more experienced Realtors in the office. I've often found the best resource is the agent who sells a medium number of homes (twelve to twenty-four a year) and who has been in the business for a long time. These agents usually aren't too busy to help you. Plus, they have done enough deals to have accumulated the knowledge you need. The easiest way to start this conversation is by asking, “What do you think is the best part of town?” When they answer, follow up with, “Why is that?” This opens the door for them to share their thoughts on facts or details you may not have considered on your own.

Contract Knowledge

A significant part of being a top-producing agent is knowing how a contract works and what it says. It's all too common for an agent to know where signatures are needed on the forms but not understand what the client is agreeing to. This can cause major headaches when there is a dispute between buyers and sellers that ends up in mitigation or arbitration. Top-producing agents are expected to help avoid these scenarios.

In addition to avoiding mediation or arbitration disputes, having contract expertise will showcase your professionalism, care for your clients, and dedication to your craft. The best place to do this is in your buyer and listing presentations. I recommend having slides dedicated to the parts of the contract you feel are the most important and using those slides to show how you protect your clients' interests and can outmaneuver the other side.

Wealth-Building Strategies

A run-of-the-mill real estate salesperson can get away with doing the bare minimum of showing and listing houses, writing up contracts, and delivering keys. If you want top-producer status, you'll need to up your game when it comes to knowledge about building wealth through real estate. A study by the Federal Reserve found the average homeowner's net worth is *forty times* that of someone who rents.¹ With results this significant, you can see how Realtors are changing lives by helping clients overcome their fears of buying a house. When your clients see you as a guide and adviser regarding their financing, they are much more likely to trust your advice and share the word with others who should use you.

One wealth-building strategy you can introduce to your clients after you help them buy a home is renting out properties to others. The following is a simple process that breaks down if a property will make or lose money each month for the owner. Understanding and then explaining these steps will set you apart from other agents.

Step One: Calculate Cash Flow

To calculate cash flow, subtract the rent from the property's expenses.

¹ Keeping Current Matters, "A Homeowner's Net Worth Is 40x Greater Than a Renter's," October 7, 2020, <https://www.keepingcurrentmatters.com/2020/10/07/a-homeowners-net-worth-is-40x-greater-than-a-renters/>.

Rent information can be found on websites,² BiggerPockets' rent estimator tool,³ or via a property management company's site.

Expenses typically consist of:

- Mortgage (plenty of free apps help calculate this)
- Property taxes (a title company can provide this)
- Homeowners insurance (online quotes are quick and easy to find)
- Property management fees (6 to 10 percent, depending on price point and location)
- Budgeted repairs (5 percent of gross rents is standard)
- Vacancy
- Capital expenditures (think big items like replacing HVAC systems or roofs)

Adding up your expenses and then subtracting that amount from your rent leaves you with your monthly cash flow. Multiply this number by twelve to get your yearly cash flow.

$$\text{Cash flow} = (\text{Rent} - \text{Expenses}) \times 12$$

(Eq. 1)

Step Two: Determine Investment Basis

Most investment properties require 20 to 25 percent down. This can be avoided by helping your client buy a primary residence and renting it out after they have lived there. Many primary residence loans stipulate the buyer must intend to occupy the property as their primary residence but cannot require someone to stay in a property if life circumstances dictate they move.

To determine the investment basis, add the down payment, closing costs, and estimated repairs.

$$\text{Investment basis} = \text{Down payment} + \text{Closing costs} + \text{Repairs}$$

(Eq. 2)

Step Three: Determine ROI

The return on investment (ROI) is used to determine what percentage of

² Check out www.rentometer.com.

³ <https://www.biggerpockets.com/insights/property-searches/new>.

your client's investment they will receive back in a year's time. To determine this number, take the yearly profit and divide it by the investment basis.

$$\text{ROI} = \text{Yearly profit} / \text{Investment basis}$$

(Eq. 3)

Step Four: Determine Likely Appreciation

Your last step is to help your client determine if the property's value and ROI will increase over time. To do this, look at market trends over the last five to ten years to get a feel for how much properties increased in value. You can do the same with rents over the last five years. By estimating previous amounts, you can project what rents might be in five years' time, then you take that number and plug it into a new cash flow calculation with the higher rent (Equation 1). Run through the above process and show your clients what their ROI may be five years down the road.

Raising Your Standards with Clients

As discussed earlier, the difference between a top-producing agent and a mediocre agent can be boiled down to their standards. Raising your standards can be challenging, so you'll need to be committed and disciplined about it.

Top producers offer impeccable customer service. Providing an experience that leaves your customers thrilled that they used you and happy to recommend you to others will supercharge your growth in the field. Keep in mind that almost every client you help in your career at one point used a different Realtor, and that Realtor failed to "wow" them enough to keep them as clients.

Look for ways, even small ones, to make your clients feel special. For example, my showing agents bring bottles of water to each showing to give to the clients as well as team-branded folders with printouts of each property and pens so clients can take notes. We also send our clients' children gift certificates to get ice cream on their birthdays and follow up every year on the anniversary of buying their home. We drop off gift baskets after each closing and look for ways to let our clients know they are the lifeblood of our business.

Top producers thus connect with their clients on an emotional level.

They display empathy, understanding, patience, and a sense of calm in the storm. Many clients have practical needs (“answer my calls,” “give me good advice,” etc.), but what they really want is someone to make them feel that they are doing the right thing and making the right decisions. This reassurance is on the emotional level. If you naturally don’t like people or don’t enjoy validating emotions, at a minimum you’ll have to learn to do so at specific points in the transaction.

Acknowledging your clients’ fears, doubts, and other emotions is a part of your job as their guide. Top producers accept and embrace this principle and then work to excel at it.

Raising your standards includes building stronger relationships with your clients. Get to know them not just as transactional components to your business but as friends. Everybody longs for the day of the family doctor, when your physician knew you, your history, and what ailed you. The decrease in bedside manner—and in the overall patient–physician relationship—is lamentable in modern medicine.

What you want to do is make yourself the “family Realtor.” You want your clients’ friends, family, and coworkers to hear rave reviews about your performance and loyalty to those you serve. Your follow-up game after the close will play a huge role in this. Everyone knows you made a sizable commission on the deal. If the closing day is the last day your clients hear from you, they will absolutely believe that paycheck was the only reason you worked with them. Your relationship will feel transactional to them. Instead, send gifts, set reminders to follow up on their one-year anniversary, and send periodic texts and calls to let your clients know you’re thinking of them. This is not only good for relationship-building but also for lead generation.

Raising Your Standards in Negotiating

It’s easy for those who work with real estate transactions every day to forget how much money is changing hands. This can lead to a calloused approach to how much things cost. It’s commonplace for buyers to spend thousands of dollars on the title, escrow, closing costs, and inspections. It’s also commonplace for sellers to pay 5 to 7 percent in commissions. We may be used to these numbers, but our clients sure aren’t.

Stand out from the competition by showing you care about how much money your clients are spending and find ways to minimize that amount.

The best way you can do so is by negotiating hard for every dollar and then letting your clients know what you did. They may not always tell you so, but they are watching what you do for them. Not communicating to the client the work you do on their behalf means they won't know, and you won't get the credit. What's worse: the work you don't do. Top producers pride themselves on knowing where they have leverage and how they can use that to benefit their clients in negotiation. This higher standard of saving client money separates top producers from the standard agent.

Raising Your Standards in Communication

Communication is always important, but it becomes even more so when people are stressed, nervous, or excited. Molehills turn into mountains during emotionally intense periods. It's in this spot where we make our living and where you'll need your best communication skills. Unfortunately, top producers also have the least amount of time. The more clients you're working for at the same time, the harder it gets to stay on top of everything. This is why "busy" agents tend to get bad reputations for their communication skills.

The best agents avoid this situation. They quickly respond to phone calls and emails. And they have systems in place for when they can't get to clients' requests. For example, the client doesn't have to talk only to you. Many top producers hire assistants to field calls and forward the requests. To a client, it's often more important that they talk to *someone* rather than speak specifically with you. Anticipating this communication hurdle and preparing a path for clients to get their needs met is critically important.

Once you get to the point where you're closing a good number of deals, it's important to hire someone to help you stay in touch with your clients. Bad reviews and negative word of mouth can hurt you a lot more than the hourly wage you'll pay someone to keep your clients in the loop. This can start with a transaction coordinator calling your clients daily to let them know what is supposed to happen that day and what is left for the rest of the transaction. From there, you can hire an assistant to take over those duties and offer more control over the quality and nature of those interactions. The important thing is that the best agents never let "being busy" become an excuse to not communicate with their clients.

At the end of the day, success is measured by the standards you hold.

Rather than waiting to raise your standards until after you have more leads, more clients, and more closings, consider raising them right now. Dress better, communicate better, be more interested in others than you are in yourself, and know your market more thoroughly than your competitors do, and you will more easily lay the groundwork for your business to thrive.

My advice? Make everything a game. Ask yourself how quickly you can return calls, how detailed you can make your answers to questions, and how good you can make others feel when you speak to them. Once you are good at these things, look for ways to do them faster. Once you're able to do them well and quickly, look for ways to leverage that skill onto another team member, and get that person doing them at the same level as you. Make every day a game in which you perform better than you did the day before. This will step up your standards, and you'll have fun while doing so.

Carl Buehner wrote, "They may forget what you said—but they will never forget how you made them feel." Keep this in mind throughout your day and ultimately throughout your career. It doesn't matter what your intentions are or what's running through your head. People will judge you—and your ability to represent them—based on how you make them feel.

KEY POINTS

- Top producers speak with authority and confidence and use directness, skill, charisma, trustworthiness, leadership, empathy, patience, and a sense of calm.
- Newbies ask, "What do I do first?" and then work forward from there, but that's the wrong order. Reduce the number of missteps by starting with the end in mind. The more direct the path, the faster the destination is reached.
- Focus on who you are, not just what you do.
- Develop the highest standards, keep your word, and display strong ethics.
- Learn how to build trusting relationships with leads; it will determine your success.
- Top producers make tough decisions and have difficult conversations yet still foster and maintain strong levels of trust.

- Help a client by *interpreting* the information you create in the CMA.
- Develop a high level of local market knowledge.
- Being able to help your clients run the numbers on investment properties will help set you apart as an elite in your industry.
- Acknowledge your clients' fears, doubts, and other emotions.
- Top producers know clients just want to be heard, but that just as easily can be handled by a staff member.