5 characteristics of real estate's top producers

Over the course of my decades-long real estate career, thousands of agents either worked for me or crossed my path, giving me priceless insights into how top producers operate, what they bring to the field and the characteristics that separate them from the rest.

All of these stand-out agents had a handful of key traits in common. Regardless of their markets, their strategies and their unique skills, these five factors inevitably played the biggest role in their success.

They show up — whether they want to or not.

Even the best agents wake up uncertain of what the day will bring, or flat-out terrified because they can foresee the challenges ahead. Still, they get up every morning and head toward the unknown.

While talking with Lee Iacocca, the automobile exec and icon who saved Chrysler (and possibly the American car industry), I asked him what the economy might look like in a year. I'll never forget his reply: "Whatever I think the economy is going to be, I can guarantee one thing," he said. "It will either be better or it will be worse than I think it is today."

Chrysler Chairman Lee Iacocca attends the unveiling of the new Mercedes-Benz Maybach 57S at Mercedes Benz of Beverly Hills on October 18, 2005 in Beverly Hills, California. (Photo by Matthew Simmons/Getty Images)

The future of the market is immaterial and beyond our control. Just show up.

They understand who they are.

I represented Cher and Diana Ross in the sale of their Beverly Hills homes. I spent a Saturday evening sitting on the floor with both of them eating popcorn and watching TV while both were headlining in Las Vegas.

2727 Benedict Canyon Drive / Cher’s former Beverly Hills palace (Photo: Aaron Kirman / John Aaroe Group)

Each was a loyal, long-term client — in Cher’s case, for well over 10 years. Yet I never forgot I was simply their ambassador to the real estate market.

Don’t ever think you’re as important as your client. And never assume your clients are your friends — that’s unprofessional. The property and client are important. You are not. I have watched many blur the line of self-promotion and self-importance. The end results were never good.

They maintain a professional distance, avoiding emotion and editorializing.

A real estate agent’s true job is to position a client to successfully complete a transaction. Like

your CPA, doctor or lawyer, it's essential for you to be able to deliver bad or disappointing news when necessary.

Your CPA doesn't care what you owe the IRS but prepares your return and informs you of your obligation. Your doctor doesn't care about maintaining your cholesterol levels but provides a recommendation and presumes you will listen. The agent's role isn't any different. Successful agents deliver accurate information without drama. They just present the facts.

They don't wallow in disappointment.

One evening I received a call from Air Force One. Nancy Reagan had learned that I represented Broadway playwright Neil Simon in the sale of his Bel Air home, and she wanted to see it.

I had to remember I wasn't representing the President and First Lady. I was representing the potential buyers of a home. After viewing the property, the Reagans decided it would be perfect for their post-Washington life, and the Secret Service agreed.

I called Mr. Simon to inform him of a near full-price offer. Since the property had been on the market for 10 months with no offers, I assumed he'd be pleased.

"I'm glad you called," he replied. "I've decided not to sell." Mrs. Reagan, while very gracious, was decidedly not pleased.

Mr. Simon owns the property to this day. Disappointment is a daily occurrence for any successful agent. When faced with a significant blow, allow yourself 24 hours to heal. Not a week. Not a month. 24 hours.

They believe they are the best and are associated with the best.

Successful agents walk to the front door of each listing appointment with pride — they exude more than self-confidence without crossing the fine line into arrogance. They have a healthy understanding of what separates them from their competitors, speak proudly of their brand and can articulate its numerous points of difference. (If you can't do this truthfully and confidently, you won't be successful. And if you're not in alignment with the culture of your brand, change brokers).

The broker has an obligation to provide the tools and programs that the agent needs to be successful. The agent has an obligation to learn how to use them. Both have an obligation to learn from and listen to each other. Most agents don't fully grasp more than about 30 percent of the tools offered by their brokers. Top-producing agents maintain a whole arsenal of facts, programs and tools — and are well-versed in each one. They can tailor the appropriate options to their specific clients.

You have two choices in your career. You can be committed to it, or you can just be interested. Successful agents are totally committed. They begin each morning passionate about showing up for life and end each day with the same level of enthusiasm.

Success is not about being smarter than your competition or having great connections. Success is about being willing to work hard. Very hard. And showing up every day.

John Aaroe

John Aaroe was one of the leading estate agents in Beverly Hills, representing Cher, Diana Ross, Neil Simon, Joan Rivers and countless others. He worked with Nancy Reagan, studio CEOs, business leaders and prominent politicians. Aaroe owned two of the most successful and productive real estate companies in the Beverly Hills/Los Angeles marketplace. He announced his retirement in September*.*

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