

BUYING A HOME | FINANCING

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A Home Buyer's Story: Choosing a Real Estate Agent

By Kristin Offler

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Our house hunt wasn't easy sailing. When we got discouraged at offers that fell through – or saw house after house that just wasn't right – our [real estate agent](#) helped us see the light at the end of the tunnel. She kept us motivated when we were feeling deflated at the whole process. She made sure we got a fair price for the house we ended up buying, and she stayed on top of every last detail.

It's important to establish a good relationship with your real estate agent because you may work with them for many months. In our case, a trusted family friend was our real estate agent. But if you don't have any referrals to go off, what kind of [qualities in a real estate agent](#) should you look for? Here's what I found to be valuable in finding the right real estate agent for our home search.

Experience. I'm sure you can find a great agent you love who is newer to real estate, but one characteristic that was important to us was experience. Our agent had been selling houses for a few years and we knew she was a total professional. You don't necessarily need a real estate agent who has been selling homes for 20 years, but try to get a sense of a potential agent's work history before you commit to them. If you're comfortable with their experience, that's a good sign. If you know someone who has worked with that agent before, you can get an even better idea of what your experience might be with that agent.

Compassion. Chances are you won't find the right house immediately. If you have a few offers fall through or just have a difficult time finding your home, you'll probably want to have an agent who understands how emotionally taxing and exhausting the process can be at times. Having someone who is in the business and can sympathize with the ups and downs makes all the difference. And a compassionate agent will often remind you that you're not alone— thousands of people go through the same things when looking for a home.

The ability to ask the questions you might not think of. The right agent for you will know which questions need to be asked when you're at an open house, writing up an offer, or negotiating with a seller. For example, our house's listing stated that the property was on a septic system. An inspection revealed that it was actually a cesspool. Our realtor knew how to negotiate with the seller to get money put into escrow to have the cesspool converted because it was an expense we hadn't planned on shouldering. She also knew how much money had to be put into escrow (1.5% of the estimated price, rather than just the estimated amount) to avoid any potential financial surprises on our part.

Friendly, but firm. Working with someone who is friendly and kind to others is important; you want to feel like you can go into any experience with your agent and have him or her get along with another agent or the seller. However, being firm is hugely important, too. Your realtor is helping you get into the right home, so they should be able to smile, but also put their foot down when the situation calls for it. Our real estate agent was always friendly when we went to showings, but she also didn't let anyone mess around with us. For example, we ran into one agent who was really unpleasant and spent most of the time we were around him bashing our loan officer. We were uncomfortable with his unprofessionalism, and our realtor took him aside and asked him to cut it out. We were glad she did, and glad that we had someone on our side who knew how to be polite but also firm.

Basically, you want someone who makes the house hunt and home buying process easier for you. They should have your back 100%, root for you the whole time, and always put your best interests first, even if that means talking you out of an offer that might not be right for you.







Here are a few questions to ask your real estate agent candidates. Read the entire [real estate agent checklist](#) at the LendingTree website:

- How long have you been in real estate?
- Are you a full-time buyer's agent?
- Are you familiar with the area in which we want to look?
- How many home sales did you participate in last year?



Kristin Offler is a freelance writer who recently completed a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. She lives happily in her new home in the Northeast with her husband and dog.

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- Government Raising Borrowing Costs for FHA Insured Loans  11
- Tax Break Benefits When You Buy a Home  10
- The Discipline of Fiscal and Physical Fitness  9

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In our case, hiring a family friend was a *huge* mistake. Because when we ended up unhappy with her work, things got incredibly awkward.

Lack of experience was one of the reasons. She didn't have the experience or confidence to give us the feedback and advice we needed.

Another item I'd add to this list is "hustle." For our former realtor, real estate was a new hobby... something she did on top of another job, and which also came after her social calendar on her list of priorities. I had to beg her to hold open houses (we were trying to sell our condo, while also looking at houses).

You need a realtor who will make you a priority. And you need a realtor who will pound the pavement and do everything in her power to sell your property, find you a good sale, etc.

We met our new realtor when checking out open houses on our own. She loves real estate... lives and breathes it. She's hands on. She's confident. She has a strong network. She knows how to hustle.

So I'd also ask a realtor: What would be your game plan for us?

stephaner May 6, 2011



Ahh, jeez. That's so stressful. I definitely agree that you need a realtor who will make you a priority– they're working FOR you, after all. It sounds like your new agent knows her stuff and will put your needs first.

I think your experience is a good example of a realtor who may not have the chops, time, or experience to be a success. There's definitely a difference between the process being unsuccessful and the agent being unsuccessful; in our case, we had difficulties with the house hunt, but it had nothing to do with our agent. I'm sure it's awkward when you get a sense that things aren't working out with you and a realtor (family member or not).

I'm glad you were able to find a better fit, though!

Kristin Offler May 9, 2011

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