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In This Issue...

- [Customer Service Doesn't Equal Accessibility - Play Hard to Get](#)
- [Competing with Other Agents - Don't!](#)

Customer Service Doesn't Equal Accessibility - Play Hard to Get



For 30 years we have been taught, as REALTORS® we must be there for our clients. I hear it all the time from Agents across North America; "I want to be there for my clients." What does 'be there' mean? Does 'be there' mean we are available 24 hours, 7 days a week for our clients? Does it mean that we miss soccer games, tee ball games, and piano recitals? For many Agents that is exactly what it means. **Many of us equate access with service.** We have been trained for years that access is the primary vehicle of customer service. We feel we need to be there at all times for our clients. We grant them access to our lives whenever they want it. **They can, and will, take over our business, if we let them.**

I want to share with you a new concept. **Access has nothing to do with customer service.** There are many professionals we do business with on a regular basis who are less than accessible. A skilled doctor cannot be contacted via phone and respond right away. A skilled doctor is busy with other patients and will get back to the caller during the course of the day. A professional attorney may be in court, in a conference, or taking a deposition. We don't expect them to return our call immediately. I would certainly question the ability of these two professionals if they could get back to me right away. That would tell me they are not very busy. It would cause me to question their capabilities. Yet, being phone available is like a badge of honor for a REALTOR®.

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Coming Up

Ben Franklin said, "If you want a job done right, ask a busy man to do it." Ben understood **the perception of industrious diligence**. He also understood human nature. When Ben Franklin was a young printer, he was seen daily on Market Street at noon pushing a wheelbarrow stacked with reams of paper. After becoming successful he later shared that the paper was not in the wheelbarrow because it needed to go somewhere, but it was there to promote Ben as a busy man. He created a public perception of value through his daily wheelbarrow walk. If we can meet with clients at all hours of the day and night, they will begin to wonder if we have any other clients. We are not promoting being a busy REALTOR®. To clearly separate access from customer service, here are a few steps:

Step 1: Set Boundaries

Your clients will respect you if you set specific boundaries. Set boundaries on your time away from selling real estate. **Take out the days off, the family activities, the time with your spouse, and the time for you.** You must plan that process before the week begins. The most effective way to set boundaries is work off a set schedule. A set schedule allows you to create each week to be exactly the same as the week before. Create specific boundaries for your client by taking your home phone number off your business card. Other professionals don't give out their home number. Turn your cell phone and pager off at specific times each evening. Set boundaries for your clients to follow regarding your time and time with your family.

Step 2: Treat everything as an appointment

Once you have set boundaries, **treat everything as an appointment.** Your time with your children and spouse are the most important appointments you have. Don't infringe on your family time. Your appointments to work out, to read, and to relax are your time; don't break those appointments.

You also have appointments in your workday. You have appointments to prospect and lead follow-up. These have a tendency to get pushed out of the way by clients. If you allow that to happen, you will see a drop in your business in 90 days. If you miss those appointments today, the effect is not felt for 90 days when you have no closings. It's easy to let other things move into those prospecting and lead follow-up appointment slots. You have to fight the urge to take care of clients in those times.

Step 3: Set specific times to return calls

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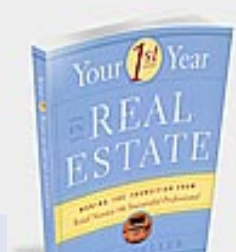
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Most of the calls we get are not important. They are someone trying to give us what they deem as urgent. They are rarely important and rarely must be handled now. **Most calls can wait a few hours to deal with.** Set specific times when you return calls. I would suggest once in late morning and once toward the end of the day. Tell people you are in appointments and you will be retuning calls at those specific times.

You need to **separate the concept of access from customer service.** Customer service is about getting the job done well. The client does not really care about your access. They care about a job done well. Become respected like your doctor, dentist, or attorney. Limit the instant access you grant to people. Don't be fooled by the old access model of customer service for real estate. To stay competitive with all the changes in the real estate industry, you need to raise the bar on service and professionalism. Access is not in either of these categories.

To your Success,

Dirk Zeller
CEO
Real Estate Champions, Inc

P.S. For information on Time Management, check out my new book [here](#).



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- Elaine Bierstock, Lyon Real Estate, Sacramento, CA

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 [Top](#)

Competing with Other Agents - Don't

All agents are at different stages of their career and different levels of production. Each has their own philosophy of running their business and different levels of staffing for accomplishing it. I get asked constantly, "How do I compete with agents that have more listings, staff and production than I do?" That is certainly a valid question; since there are a whole lot more new agents, inconsistent agents and average agents then there are mega-producers. **How do you compete against a mega-producer?** Before I answer that let me give you some rules of how you don't.

- **Don't compete on numbers or production: The number of listings or sales.**

If someone does a whole lot more than you, you don't want to point that out to the client.

You do want to question the client if that is an issue for them. A great question to ask: "Is a certain production level of the Agent important to you?" or "Provided that an Agent clearly demonstrates their ability to do an outstanding job for you, does it matter the size of their operation?" or "What are the top three items that you are concerned about when selecting an Agent?"

- **If you are newer, don't compete on years in the business.**

We need to shift that discussion to a job well done or satisfied

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clients. When competing with mega-agents, make sure you have testimonials handy. Clearly demonstrate the success you have achieved with satisfied clients.

- **Focus on per agent productivity if it's a competitive point of difference.**

I have seen far too many mega teams that do a lot of business only because they have a lot of bodies on the team. One of the first things we look at when working with a mega-agent team is the production in units divided by the number of people on the team. This number really demonstrates the skill level of the people on the team. **Too often those mega-agents only have warm bodies.**

I recently talked with a mega-agent that had a large ego. He was only a mega-agent because he had lots of assistants. He had 10 people on his team with 150 gross units sold – that's only 15 units a person or only 1.25 homes a month per person. The truth is that's pretty poor production for all those people. He is also fooling himself that he is making any money. You could easily explain to the seller that with all those listings and all those leads they are working with, they only get 1.25 transactions a month – which is not right. The conversion rate on leads is extremely low. **You can do much better than that and not waste opportunities to sell their home and actually increase the probability of sale for them.**

If a mega-agent has 20 active listings with an average of 10 calls a month per listing – that's 200 calls a month. To only convert 1.25 transactions a person from over 200 inbound calls a month shows there is a problem. You then **assure them that you personally take all the calls on their home.** That you are not passing it to someone who is obviously not prepared to convert the call to an appointment – which is the key to sales and that your conversion ratio and production ratio is much higher.

The fundamental argument for any agent competing against a mega-agent is service based. **A mega-agent cannot provide the personal service themselves that a singular agent can provide.** They can provide great service through others on their team, but not themselves. When I was selling 150 homes a year there were only so many touches I could provide my clients in a personal manner. I had to rely on my transaction coordinator or marketing coordinator to do more touches than I did. Since the biggest complaint the consumers have toward Realtor's, other than they falsely believe we make too much in commission, is communication.



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When competing against a mega-agent, we must **sell personalized service and personalized communication.**

“You won’t hear from three other assistants, you will hear from me. You aren’t listing with these assistants, you are listing with me. Who better to handle all facets of the transaction than the Agent you list with ... the one that you trust.” Doesn’t that make sense?

As a mega-agent it was my job to be prepared for this discussion by the other agents and show them the benefits to my system or business model. What it boils down to - is **who has the best presentation and sales skills.** Does the need for personal service carry greater weight than more production? Did you convince the client the production part is easy, the service part is hard? Did you share with them you could run your business like the mega-agents, but you decided your clients were too important? You decided that you don’t want to take the risk of a dissatisfied client. (Provided you really believe that and can demonstrate that to the client or prospect.) It is better to position yourself with a competitive advantage. There is an old adage that we must define our competition before they define us. When trying to grow your business and compete with mega-agents, take the right steps and make a strong belief-driven presentation. More often than you think you will come out on top!

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Dirk Zeller

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[Top](#)

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