

DAVE RAMSEY'S

HOME SELLERS GUIDE



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Introduction

Your home is your biggest asset. You've invested a lot in it over the years, whether it's time, money, or just plain emotion.

So when it comes time to sell, you want to get it right. The problem is there's a whole lot that can go wrong. You've worked too hard to let that happen!

That's why we created this guide.

You deserve to feel empowered in your home-selling decisions. So we're breaking the process down into basics. From deciding if selling your home is a good idea in the first place to handing over the keys on closing day, you'll find simple tips to steer you toward a successful home deal.

ARE YOU READY TO SELL?

Should You Sell Your Home?

Anytime the housing market heats up, it's tempting to put your home on the market just to see what happens. After all, if homes near you are selling like hotcakes, your home could move quickly too!

Of course, the decision to sell your home isn't solely based on market conditions. Your personal situation matters too. Here are three signs you may be ready to take the leap:

- Your home doesn't fit your lifestyle anymore.
- You can separate your feelings from your home.
- You won't go broke in the process.

**That covers the basics.
But let's dig a little deeper.**

Use the handy checklist on the next page to help you decide if selling your home is the right choice for you.

Ready, Set, Sell?

YES NO

1. Are homes in your neighborhood selling quickly?

2. Have home values in your area shown consistent growth?

3. Do you need extra space to accommodate your growing family?

4. Have you given up on home or yard maintenance because you just don't have the time to keep it up?

5. Do you find yourself with way more space than you need now that the kids have moved out?

6. Is your home worth more than you owe on it?

7. Are you ready to put in the work to get your home ready for house hunters even if it means packing up family photos and personal belongings?

8. Are you committed to keeping your home ready to show for weeks or months?

9. Are you ready to hear the reasons why potential buyers believe your home is not perfect?

10. Are you ready for honest—and sometimes hardball—negotiations over what buyers are willing to pay for your home?

11. Are you really ready to move out and leave the place where your family has made memories?

12. Can you cash flow the prep work needed to get your home ready for the market?

13. Do you have enough money to cover moving costs?

14. Can you afford to buy a new home?

a. Are you free of any nonmortgage debt?

b. Have you saved three to six months of expenses in an emergency fund?

c. Do you have enough cash to put at least 10–20% down on your next home?

Is It Worth It?

Selling your home is a big deal with a lot of dollars on the line. Obviously, you'd like to know it will be worth the effort you put into it before planting a For Sale sign in your yard. So let's do a little math to figure out your potential proceeds.

Don't try to figure out what your home is worth on your own. This job calls for a pro who knows firsthand what buyers are paying for similar homes in your area. **Ask an experienced real estate agent** for a free comparative market analysis (CMA) to ensure you're working with accurate numbers.

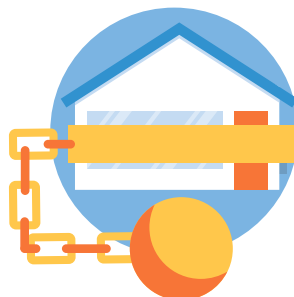
First, determine how much equity you have. To calculate equity, simply subtract your mortgage balance from the current market value of your home. If your home is worth \$200,000 and you owe \$120,000 on your mortgage, you'd have \$80,000 in equity.

Market Value



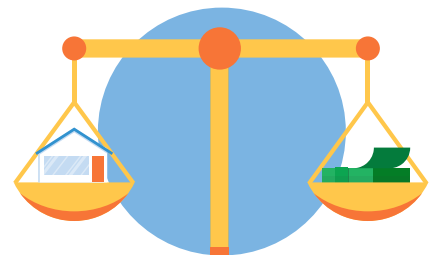
—

Mortgage Balance



=

Home Equity



Now, we need to factor closing costs into the equation. These typically come from the proceeds of your sale and cover fees like agent commission, prorated interest and taxes, and title insurance.

According to Realtor.com, closing costs can total 6–10% of your home's sale price. We'll aim high for this example and deduct an additional \$20,000 to cover potential closing costs. That means, in this example, you could expect to take \$60,000 home.



HOW TO CHOOSE A TOP REAL ESTATE AGENT

Should You Sell Your Home Yourself?

The True Cost of FSBO

Everybody loves saving money, and selling solo can seem like a great way to do just that. After all, the biggest chunk that comes out of your pocket at closing is the real estate agent commission. This fee traditionally runs around 6%. For the typical For Sale by Owner (FSBO) home—which sold for \$208,000 last year—that's almost \$12,500. Ouch!

But is FSBO really all it's cracked up to be?

Here are three ways taking your home sale into your own hands could cost you.



1 Limited Exposure

If you really want to sell your home, you need buyers—and lots of them. It's a classic example of power in numbers.

An experienced real estate agent exposes your home to thousands of potential buyers by:

- Giving your home a much-needed online presence through the Multiple Listing Service (MLS)
- Developing a targeted strategy for marketing your home to their extensive network of buyers and agents

According to the National Association of Realtors (NAR), 88% of buyers used an agent to purchase a home last year—and that share has grown from 69% in 2001.

2 Unintentional Mishaps

We appreciate an independent spirit as much as anybody. But your home is your largest asset. Even small mistakes can cost you big. You've worked too hard to risk losing money just to prove a point!

Let's face it. A top-notch agent sold more homes last week than you've probably sold in a lifetime. That kind of expertise is worth its weight in gold.

3 Lost Profits

Can you save money by going FSBO? Sure. But you're missing the chance to make a whole lot more.

Consider this: the latest NAR data shows that the typical home sold by an agent last year fetched \$235,000. That's \$27,000 more than the typical FSBO home sold for! Are you really okay with leaving five figures on the table?

We sold our home without the benefit of an agent just to try and save money. Unfortunately, the buyer's dad was a real estate agent, and his brother was the banker. We were taken royally—too many reasons not to use an agent! Penny wise and pound foolish.

—Lee A.

Interviewing Prospective Agents

Top 10 Questions to Ask

It may be tempting to hire the first real estate agent you talk to. But you'll be paying your agent thousands of dollars to get your home sold. You don't give that kind of dough to just anyone! Most experts agree you should interview at least three agents before deciding which one is worth the money.



> **Connect with a top agent in your area!**

Go with a real estate agent who knows how to do their job and read the market. . . .When we finally got the perfect real estate agent we sold our house in less than a month! Our first week had eight showings, and we live in a small town! A good agent makes a HUGE difference.

—Ashley L., Kansas

Don't know where to start?

These 10 questions can set you on the path to finding a pro with your best interests at heart.

1 How long have you been a real estate agent?

Real estate is a tough business. It takes perseverance to survive the lean times—and discipline to thrive when the market's strong. You can trust an agent with four or more years of experience to know what it takes to super-serve you, no matter the market conditions.

2 How many homes do you sell each year?

To sell your home for top dollar in the least amount of time, partner with a high-octane agent who is in the top 10% of agents in your area. It takes hard work and a good reputation to get that kind of business.

3 What is your average list-to-sale ratio?

This number can help you predict how accurately your agent prices the homes they list. The closer an agent's list-to-sale ratio is to 100%, the more accurate their pricing. A ratio over 100% means an agent consistently gets above asking price on homes they sell.

A ROCK-STAR AGENT IS A . . .

COMMUNICATOR:



Your first contact with an agent will tell you a lot. An agent who wants your business will return your call immediately—within minutes if possible. Waiting days to hear back? That's a clear sign excellent service isn't a priority.

4 On average, how long does it take you to sell a listing?

This isn't a guarantee that your home will sell within the agent's average time frame. But it can help you gauge how hard your agent works to get homes sold. Compare your agent's average to the standard in your area to see how their performance stacks up.

5 How well do you know my area?

Obviously, an agent who's sold a lot of homes in your area has proven expertise. But don't limit your view to neighborhood sales. Even a pro with personal ties to your community shows they have the inside track on what makes your particular corner of the world special.

We are currently under contract after just eight days on the market during a snowstorm! Other houses in our area are on the market an average of 100 days. [The] secret to our success is having an amazing real estate agent that we are sure we can trust.

—Deborah S., Virginia

6 How will you market my home?

It takes a creative mix of traditional and digital tools to reach today's buyers and their agents. An agent should outline their plan and tell you how each step will attract buyers. If an important component is missing, ask about that too. A true pro will explain why certain strategies may not work in your market.

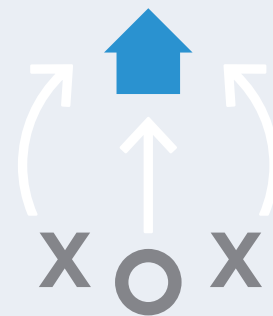
7 Will you tell me what I need to hear?

It's easy to fall into the trap of expecting your agent to tell you what you want to hear. But they don't get paid to puff up your ego. Look for a pro who can be blunt in the nicest way possible, whether it's advising you on home improvements or sharing buyer feedback after a showing.

A ROCK-STAR AGENT IS A . . .

COACH:

Selling a home may be complex, but that's no reason to surrender control. It's your money on the line! The right agent takes times to explain the process in plain English so you can make an informed decision at every step.



8 How do you deal with issues that come up?

Selling a home isn't always sunshine and roses. There will be bumps along the way. When that happens, you need a pro who isn't afraid to step up to the plate to ensure your home closes. A good agent uses proactive communication like a superpower to save the day.

A ROCK-STAR AGENT IS A . . .

CONFIDENCE BOOSTER:



An agent should be able to back up any recommendation with comps or sales data. If your agent tries to bully you into following their advice or gives in to all of your demands, look elsewhere.

9 What happens if I'm not happy with the job you are doing to get my home sold?

Be wary of agents who lock you into a lengthy listing contract that they can get out of but you can't. Ask your agent if you can cancel your contract without penalty if you're not satisfied with the service provided. Some agents charge a termination fee to cover out-of-pocket marketing expenses.

10 Who can I contact for a reference?

Want to know the good, the bad, and the ugly? Nothing beats talking to a former client about their personal experience with an agent!

Ready to get started?

Check out our Real Estate Agent Interview Worksheet on the next page. This simple tool makes it easy to compare notes and select the agent who's right for you.

> **Connect with a top agent in your area!**

Real Estate Agent Interview Worksheet

Agent Name: _____ Agency: _____

Years' Experience: _____ # of Homes Sold Last Year: _____

Average Time to Sell: _____ Average List-to-Sale Ratio: _____

How well do you know my area? _____

How will you market my home? _____

Will you tell me what I need to hear? _____

How do you deal with issues that come up? _____

What happens if I'm not happy with the job you are doing to sell my home?

REFERENCES

Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN PRICING YOUR HOME

How to Price Your Home Right the First Time

Now that you've chosen an agent, it's time to work together to price your home.

Your agent will walk you through the pricing strategy they recommend. But ultimately, the final number is up to you.

So how do you ensure you don't get it wrong? Here are four common pricing fails to watch out for—and how to price to win.

FAIL #1:

Starting with Sentiment

Nothing tugs at the heartstrings quite like selling a home. How do you put a price on all those years of warm and fuzzy memories? The answer is easy: you don't. We hate to burst your bubble, but buyers are no more attached to your place than any other home on the market. Price it too high, and you can count on sending buyers running the other direction.

According to the National Association of Realtors, 45% of recent home sellers had to reduce their asking price at least once, delaying the sale of their home.

FAIL #2:

Using Fuzzy Math

Pricing your home may seem like the perfect chance to put your calculator to good use. After all, you've got lots of big numbers to crunch. Unfortunately, basing your sales price solely on how much money you need to buy your next home just doesn't equate. Leave your bottom line out of it, and you'll have a better chance of landing on a price that's in line with the market.



FAIL #3:

Testing the Market

When the market's hot, it's tempting to shoot for the stars to see just how much money you can get. After all, you can always negotiate it down or drop the price if buyers don't bite. But that's a bad approach. Here's why: buyers don't waste time on overpriced homes, much less make offers on them. And the longer your listing lingers, the more money it costs you in the end.

Price your home according to the market, not what you think it's worth. We had four buyers get into a bidding war and sold our house for \$15,000 over asking price!

—Jennie F., South Carolina

FAIL #4:

Trusting the Internet

These days, you can find oodles of home values online. Sounds great . . . until you actually dig into the data. Three different sites show three different values. How do you know which one is right? The truth is, you don't—and neither does a computer programmed to pull numbers from the shelf. This job calls for a real, live expert with personal experience in your market.



If your home is overpriced, you can't lower the price fast enough. People will overlook it initially, and prospective buyers will try to take advantage of what they see as a desperate situation after your house has been on the market awhile.

—Jane M., Maryland

Your Fail-Safe Secret to Success

Simply put, your home is worth what someone will pay for it. The best way to get an idea about that number is to compare recent sales of homes like yours in your area. Your real estate agent has access to all of this information and can provide a comparative market analysis (CMA) to help you get top dollar for your home in the least amount of time.

What's a Comparative Market Analysis?

A comparative market analysis (CMA) is a detailed report that compares homes near you that are either on the market or have sold in recent months. The goal is to find homes in your immediate area that are most like yours. This enables your agent to more accurately predict what buyers will pay for your home.

For instance, if you live in a 2,000-square-foot home with three bedrooms, your agent won't pull a list of 3,000-square-foot homes with four bedrooms. Why? Because that wouldn't be a fair comparison. Likewise, a home that's just like yours but located in a highly desirable school district across town also doesn't get you any closer to your home's market value.



Connect with a local agent to start the process!

Price is everything. If you overprice your home, you cut out potential buyers. Market value is simply what a buyer is willing to pay. The buyer doesn't care why you think you must get a certain price for your home.

—Laura S., Pennsylvania

Here's an example of a side-by-side comparison you may find in your report.

The image shows three overlapping cards representing property comparison cards. Each card contains the following information:

- COMP #2:** 6432 Elm Rd. List Price: \$299,999. List Date: 1/4/2015. Levels: 2. Sq. Feet: [blank]. Bedrooms: 3. Acres: [blank]. Baths: 2. Year Built: [blank]. Parking: Carport. Features: Screened-in porch, 9-ft ceilings, NEW Carpet throughout.
- COMP #1:** 1234 Main Drive, Reno, NV. List Price: \$309,000. Sale Price: \$311,500. List Date: 2/15/2015. Sale Date: 3/19/2015. Levels: 2. Sq. Feet: 2,013. Bedrooms: 3. Acres: 0.6. Baths: 2.5. Year Built: 2002. Parking: 2 car. Features: Fireplace with built-in bookcase, Stainless appliances, Hardwood floors on main level.
- Property 3:** 7891 Rock Ave, Reno, NV. List Price: \$305,999. Sale Price: \$300,000. List Date: 12/10/2014. Sale Date: 1/29/2015. Sq. Feet: 1,899. Acres: 0.75. Year Built: 1997. Features: [partially obscured].

Your CMA will offer pages and pages of information and will usually feature photos and a location map of all the properties. A true pro will take time to walk you through the results so you understand exactly how your home stacks up to the competition. With this information in hand, you can work with your agent to set a competitive price that's based on fact, not emotion.

PREPPING FOR THE SALE

Setting a Timeline

Want to make the most of the months and weeks leading up to your home sale? Break your to-do list down into bite-sized chunks with these handy timelines as your guide.

SELLER TASKS

Interview Real Estate Agents

Take time to find a pro who has a proven track record and inspires you with confidence.

Outline a Plan

Work with your agent to set priorities so you can focus on knocking out one task at a time.

Declutter

Decide what you can live without until your home sells. Then pack it up and get it out!

Hire a Home Inspector

Identifying issues early lets you work fixes into your budget now so they don't wreck your deal later.

Tackle Repairs

Ask your agent where your fix-it dollars will do the most good.

Set the Stage

Create an inviting space that enables buyers to see your house as their home.

Deep Clean

Scrub every surface to a shine. Hire a pro to make carpet and rugs look—and smell—new again.

Apply Finishing Touches

Get your home picture-perfect so your photographer can capture it in the best possible light.

TAKING YOUR TIME?

IN A HURRY?

ASAP

2-3
months*

3-4
weeks*

1-2
months*

2-3
weeks*

1 week*

* Before the list date

Why You Need a Home Inspection Before You List

Most home buyers know it pays to get a home inspection. But did you know it's a worthwhile tool for home sellers too? It's true!

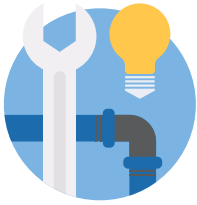
A presale inspection might cost a few hundred dollars, but it's money well spent. Why? Because it can keep buyers from demanding big bucks at the negotiation table or, worse, skipping out on the deal at the last minute.



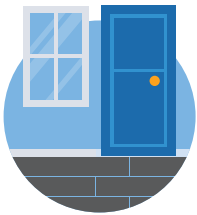
> **Connect with a top agent in your area!**

What's Included?

According to the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI), a home inspection includes:



Electrical, plumbing, heating, and cooling systems



Walls, ceilings, floors, windows, and doors



Roof, attic, and visible insulation



Foundation, basement, and structural components

We had our own inspection done before we put the house on the market. My husband grumbled at the price but was happy when it revealed a leak in our electrical box. He fixed it on our timeline, and it cost a lot less than it would have if their inspector had found it and had to call in another electrician.

—Anna Marie P., North Carolina

Here's How It Works

A qualified home inspector combs a property's accessible areas to assess the home's condition and identify any health and safety issues. Once the inspection is complete, you'll receive a detailed report outlining what works and what doesn't, with recommendations for maintenance and repair.

Don't worry about checking every single to-do off your list, but do pay attention to big-ticket issues. These can scare buyers into asking for way more money than it actually takes to fix them. Your agent can help you sort through the findings, but the roof and electrical, plumbing, and HVAC systems typically take priority. If you have room in your budget, take care of those before planting the For Sale sign in your yard.



How to Find a Home Inspector

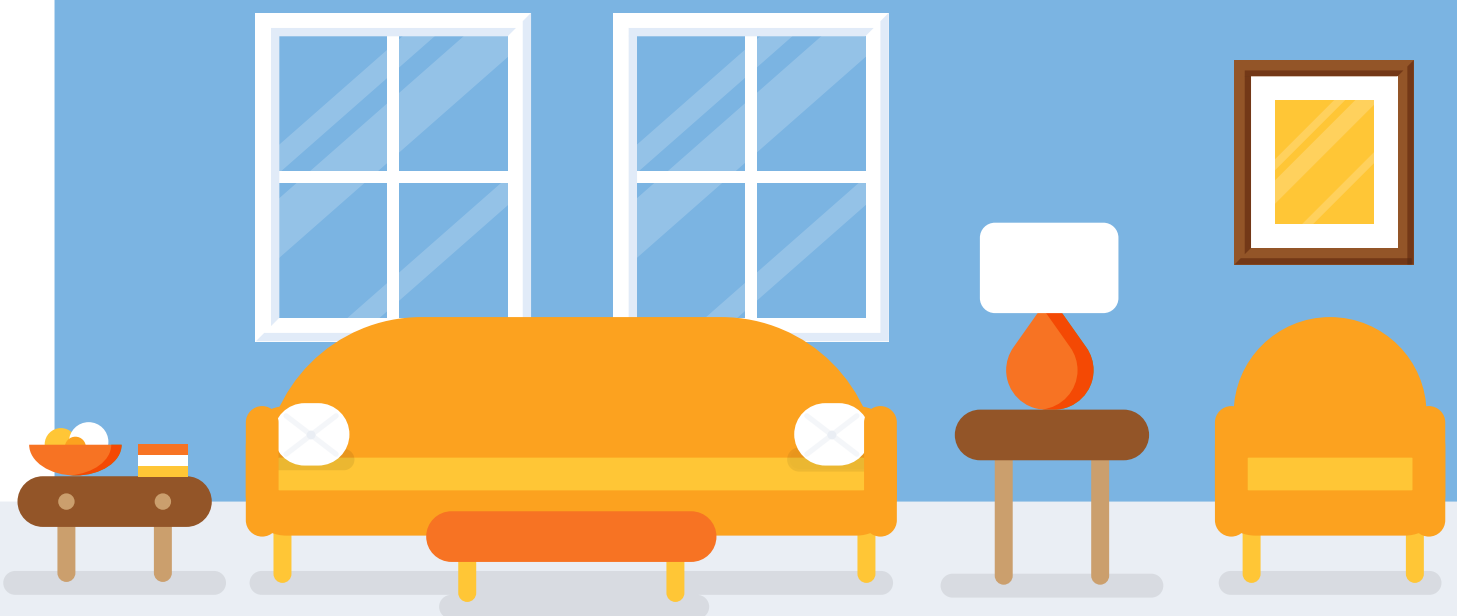
- Your real estate agent can recommend a trustworthy home inspector.
- If you prefer to pick your own, be aware that licensing and certification requirements vary by state.
- You can search for reputable pros through the American Society of Home Inspectors (www.ashi.org) or the National Association of Home Inspectors (www.nahi.org).

Staging Tips for Every Budget

Once your home's in good working order, it's time to show off its best features. Thankfully, you don't have to spend a fortune to do it.

Make sure any improvements or upgrades will be a good return on your investment. Talk with your agent about what additions or upgrades add value or will increase your listing price in a cost-effective way. Your personal opinion about what should increase the listing price of your home isn't always in line with the market.

—Andrea M., Minnesota

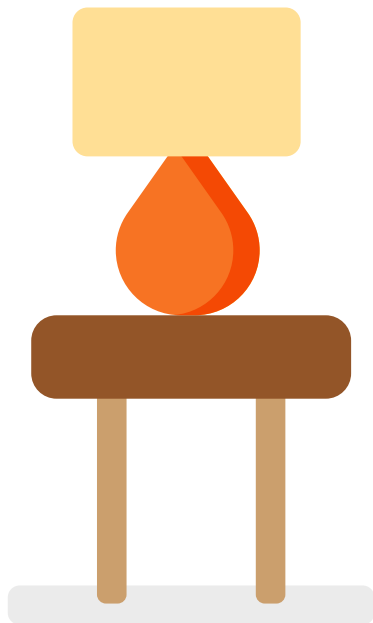


Why Stage?

In her book *Psychological Staging*, Kristie Barnett—an award-winning staging pro and author of The Decorologist blog—says effective staging taps into buyer minds by:

- Making rooms appear bigger
- Making a home feel more high-end
- Accentuating the positives
- Downplaying the negatives

So is it really worth it? Consider this: According to the Real Estate Staging Association, sellers who staged before listing sold their homes 87% faster than those who waited until late in the game to do so. And a HomeGain survey found that staging brought an average 196% return on investment.



Sellers who stage get a

196%

return on investment

Must-Dos for Every Room

Before you dig into the details, you have a little housekeeping to do. Clear the slate with these heavy-hitting tasks:

Apply a fresh coat of paint

Scrub every surface until it shines



Minimize clutter to maximize space

Pay a pro to deep clean rugs and carpets

You are moving anyway. Get rid of clutter and clean your house within an inch of its life!

—Jacky J., Pennsylvania

Where to Focus Your Wow Factor

We asked **Dave's real estate Endorsed Local Providers (ELPs)** to give us the inside scoop on how to make the most of your staging dollars. Here's what they recommend.

Most experts agree that three areas bring the most bang for your staging buck:

- Living room
- Kitchen and dining
- Master suite

87%

Homes that are staged first sell 87% faster.



ZERO BUDGET

- LIVING ROOM** Arrange seating with conversation—not channel surfing—in mind. Borrow pieces from other rooms if needed.
- KITCHEN & DINING** Clear off countertops. Set the table with your best dishes, flatware, and linens.
- MASTER SUITE** Bedroom: Go minimal by storing bulky furniture. (That means you, treadmill!) Bathroom: Straighten up your linen closet, and hide the hamper.



MINI BUDGET

LIVING ROOM Add a colorful vase of flowers to your mantle or coffee table.
Update lighting fixtures.
Buy new throw pillows for your sofa.

KITCHEN & DINING Refresh cabinets with new paint and hardware.
Install an entry-level backsplash.
Paint brass light fixtures.

MASTER SUITE Bedroom: Create a spa-like feel with fresh new bedding and throw pillows.
Bathroom: Buy fluffy new towels. Update faucets and cabinet hardware.



MAX BUDGET

LIVING ROOM Bring worn-out flooring up to standard with the rest of the neighborhood.
Replace tired furniture or freshen it up with a tasteful slipcover.

KITCHEN & DINING Upgrade to stainless appliances and/or natural stone countertops.
Buy a statement light fixture to hang over your dining table.

MASTER SUITE Bedroom: Add window treatments. Hire a pro to organize your closet.
Bathroom: Upgrade to granite countertops and ceramic tile flooring.

Budgeting for Improvements

Every home is unique, and what works for one home may not work for yours. Before you get to work, sit down with your agent and come up with a plan. (And by plan, we mean budget!) Here's an example to get you started.

Home Improvement Worksheet

ROOM	IMPROVEMENT	BUDGETED	SPENT
Home Interior	Paint (DIY)	\$ 250	\$ 237
	Carpet Cleaning	\$ 150	\$ 169
Home Exterior	Mulch	\$ 150	\$ 103
	Welcome mat	\$ 15	\$ 18
Living Room	Throw pillows	\$ 40	\$ 40
	Lamps	\$ 80	\$ 78
Kitchen	Cabinet hardware	\$ 50	\$ 49
	Pendant light	\$ 75	\$ 69
Dining Room	Statement light fixture	\$ 200	\$ 189
	Table linens	\$ 30	\$ 35
Master Bedroom	Bedding	\$ 80	\$ 75
	Throw pillows	\$ 40	\$ 40
Master Bathroom	Sink faucets (2)	\$ 150	\$ 148
	Towels	\$ 25	\$ 25
Guest Bedroom		\$	\$
Guest Bathroom(s)	Towels	\$ 25	\$ 25
		\$	\$
Other	Fresh flowers	\$ 20	\$ 18
		\$	\$
TOTAL		\$ 1,380	\$ 1,318

Now It's Your Turn!

Work with your real estate agent to create a plan of your own. Then use the Home Improvement Worksheet on the next page to keep your budget on track.

Home Improvement Worksheet

ROOM	IMPROVEMENT	BUDGETED	SPENT
Home Interior	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
Home Exterior	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
Living Room	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
Kitchen	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
Dining Room	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
Master Bedroom	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
Master Bathroom	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
Guest Bedroom	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
Guest Bathroom(s)	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
Other	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
	_____	\$ _____	\$ _____
TOTAL		\$ <input type="text"/>	\$ <input type="text"/>

Preparing for a Photo Shoot

These days, listing photos matter. A lot. Just ask the National Association of Realtors. According to their latest data, 92% of buyers search for homes online.

Of course, good lighting and a wide-angle lens can only do so much. You've got work to do too. Get your home ready for the big shoot with these expert tips.

92%
of buyers search
for homes online

Do Put Everything in Its Place

Channel your inner Mary Poppins and sing a little ditty if you have to. Whatever it takes to ensure your home looks practically perfect in every way. It's show time!

Don't Leave Toys and Pet Stuff Out

Babies and puppies may sell breakfast cereal, but homes . . . not so much. Keep the kid clutter and pet paraphernalia under wraps so buyers can focus on your home in all its awesomeness.

If your home makes a lackluster on-screen appearance, you'll lose buyer interest before they ever pull up to the curb. That's why it pays to put a pro behind the camera. Thankfully, the right agent should have a good photographer on speed dial so you don't have to round one up.

Do Add Extra Touches

Breathe life into your home with just a few accessories. Think simple but warm. Maybe it's a pair of colorful pillows on the sofa or a super-soft throw draped over the corner of the bed.

Don't Use Counters as Open Storage

This is not the time to show off your favorite juicer. Counters should be sparse and spacious. That goes for bathrooms too. Throw your personal items in a drawer to keep them out of sight.

Do Let There Be Light

Bright rooms make your home look bigger. So throw back the curtains, pull up the blinds, and let the sunshine in! Just be sure to wash your windows until they sparkle first.

Don't Scatter Rugs in Every Room

Rugs generally don't photograph well and can make your space look smaller. Ask your agent which rugs can stay and put the rest away. Don't be surprised if your fluffy new bathmat doesn't get a pass.

Do Put a Lid on It

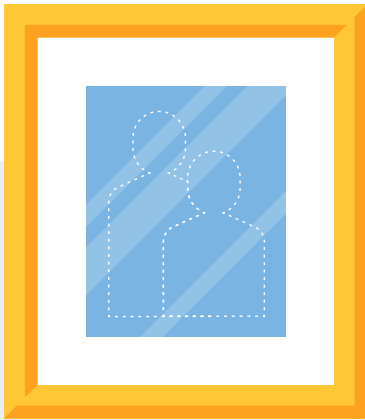
Your toilet, that is. Nothing turns a buyer's stomach like an up-close look at your home's biggest germ-fest. Do us all a favor and shut it before snapping photos. It's the polite thing to do.



MAKING THE MOST OF HOME SHOWINGS

Stress-Free Survival Tactics for Showing Your Home

Home showings are hard to juggle, whether your home is bare bones or full of kids running around. Whatever your situation, these handy tips can help you stay sane and get your home sold.



IF YOUR HOME IS VACANT:

Make it easy for buyers to see the possibilities.

Breathe Life into Empty Spaces

Most buyers need help in the imagination department. Give them a hand by lightly staging the most important rooms. Can't afford to stage your whole home? No problem! Focus your efforts on the living room and master bedroom then add a few accessories to your master bath and kitchen counters.

Hire a Few Helping Hands

Nothing's worse than a home that screams "nobody lives here" because the grass is knee-high and there's dust everywhere. Budget for basics like lawn and cleaning services while you're away to ensure your home looks like it's getting the TLC it deserves.



IF YOUR HOME IS

OCCUPIED:

Strike a balance between “at home” and “for sale.”

Make a Daily To-Do List

Surprise showings always seem to happen when your home’s a complete wreck. Reduce last-minute panic by putting things away as soon as you’re done with them and creating a checklist of simple tasks to knock out before you leave every morning. That way you’re always ready for guests.

Get the Pets out of Dodge

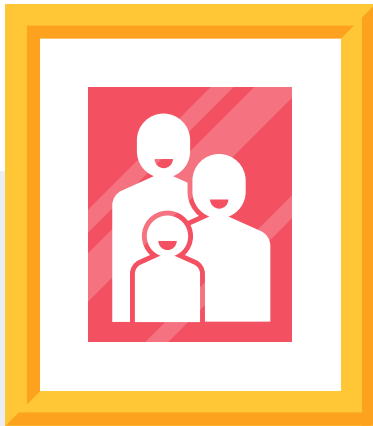
Man’s best friend can be your home deal’s worst enemy. Leaving pets home for showings just brings mess to mind, and a yap-happy dog is just plain annoying. Take the fur babies for a joy ride or send them to Grandma’s house so buyers can focus on your home’s best features.

Let It Go

Separating yourself from the place you’ve called home can be hard. But if you want to make a deal, you’ve got to give buyers time and space to fall in love with your home. Be flexible about scheduling showings, and don’t make buyers step around you—or your feelings—when they visit.

We have our house on the market currently, and I've learned where to hide things. Laundry goes in the washing machine during the week, and then I wash it on the weekend.

—**Bethany M., Missouri**



IF YOUR HOME IS

A KID-ZONE:

Contain the chaos without missing a beat.

Tackle the Toys

Paring down the piles of plastic is a tough task, but it sure does make clean-up a breeze. Ask your kids to choose a few favorites to keep in their room then store the rest in plastic bins. Be sure to explain that they'll see their toys again. If they get bored with their selections, you can always rotate toys out.

Enlist Help from the Kids

Want to ease your load? Give Junior a job to do! It's a great way to teach the value of hard work. Have a little fun and build big motivation by running timed practice drills. Don't forget to recognize a job well done. If you can't spare extra cash, quality time spent with you works too!

Try Your Best...But Be Human

There will be days you just can't get everything put away and make it out the door on time. If you get a call for a showing, tell your agent what happened so they can prepare the buyer ahead of time. Just don't miss an opportunity to get your home seen!

GETTING FROM CONTRACT TO CLOSE

You Got an Offer. Now What?

Selling your home takes lots of time and energy. By the time you finally get an offer, it's tempting to let go of the reins and coast through the contract stage. But that's a bad idea.

Finding a buyer is one thing. Getting to the closing table is quite another. This is where the rubber meets the road.

We asked **Dave's real estate Endorsed Local Providers** what it takes to go from contract to closing and still keep your sanity intact. If there's one thing we learned, it's the importance of an experienced pro to guide you to the finish.

Let's take a closer look at five key steps you can expect once you have an offer in hand.



STEP 1:

Initial Offer

The purchase agreement kicks off the offer stage and sets the tone for the rest of the process. Your agent should explain the offer to you in simple terms to ensure you understand what you're agreeing to before you sign on the dotted line.



Items to pay close attention to include:

- Purchase price
- Closing or escrow date
- Special allowances for personal property, home improvements, and closing costs
- Contingency deadlines for the home inspection, appraisal, and buyer financing
- Additional contingencies such as the sale of the buyer's current home

Important Note:

The contract stage works differently in every state. Ask your real estate agent for details specific to where you live.

With any offer, it's important to look beyond the purchase price and take the whole package into account. For example, a buyer might offer full asking price but want you to pay all of their closing costs plus throw in your washer and dryer. Alternately, a second buyer might offer \$5,000 under asking with no other seller concessions requested.

Your Asking Price: \$250,000

	Purchase Price		Seller Concessions		Net Offer
Offer #1	\$250,000	-	\$10,000	=	\$240,000
Offer #2	\$245,000	-	\$0	=	\$245,000

Think of it this way: even a low offer is an opportunity to get your home sold, so don't take it personally. With some skillful negotiating, you can turn a disappointing offer into a deal where both sides win.

Read the contracts thoroughly! Two years ago, we inadvertently sold our brand-new washing machine and dryer with our house. . . . We moved the machines to our new home and then had to PAY to move them back to our previous home and buy new machines. That was really maddening, and it was our own fault.

—Athena R., California

STEP 2:

Home Inspection

Even if you paid for an inspection before you listed your home, your buyer will likely want to get an inspection of their own. Hopefully, there won't be any big surprises. But don't be shocked if the buyer's home inspector uncovers a few issues yours didn't.

So how do you know what needs to be fixed to close the deal? Your agent can help you make the call. In some cases, you can offer cash at closing or a discount on the sales price to cover the cost of repairs. In other cases, the buyer's appraiser may require certain repairs for the sale to go through based on the buyer's loan and the value of your home.

If a major fix does rear its ugly head, your agent can help you gather a few professional quotes for the repair. That way you have an accurate dollar amount to work with as you negotiate an agreeable solution.



Hire a professional to fix anything the buyer requests . . . or discount the selling price. My husband is a do-it-yourself type, and that wasn't good enough in the buyer's eyes, even though the job was done correctly and to code.

—**Brandi G., Indiana**

STEP 3:

Appraisal

This stage of the process can be a real nail-biter. After all, the buyer's ability to fund the purchase depends on it.

Obviously, success starts with a price that aligns with the market. But it's also important to do everything in your power to ensure appraisal day goes off without a hitch.



Tips for Improving Your Appraisal Odds:

- Leave your home sparkling clean so the appraiser knows your home has been well-maintained.
- Make a detailed list of any improvements you've made to the home and include invoices or receipts if available.
- Ask your agent to provide well-researched comparables to support your sales price.

Give yourself plenty of time to deal with appraisal issues before closing day. You don't want to be packed up and ready to move only to find out you have to start back at square one.

STEP 4:

Loan Commitment



The ball may be in the buyer's court at this stage, but this is no time to sit on the sidelines. You've got skin in the game too, and no one wins if the deal implodes in the final seconds.

That's why you need an agent who's willing to carry the ball to get you to the goal.

A true pro rallies for your best interests by:

- Maintaining a clear stream of communication
- Contacting the buyer's lender to push the approval process through on time
- Actively investigating red flags that could put your deal in danger
- Connecting the buyer with an alternate lender if the original one falls through

So how do you keep a lack of financing from killing your deal? Look for a buyer who's already been preapproved for a mortgage. That means they've submitted the required paperwork and the lender has verified exactly how much they're willing to fund.

Just know it's not bulletproof. Buyers lose jobs, open credit cards, and take out new car loans—all of which can throw a wrench into the final approval. If that happens, the right agent will help you make the best of a bad situation.

Last-Minute Deal Wreckers

Nothing's more frustrating than working hard to sell a home only to have the deal crash and burn. Here are common pitfalls that can put your home deal at risk as well as tips to help you bring it back from the brink.

› **A title search uncovers an open lien on your property.**

Open liens—and any other title problems—must be cleared before you can close the deal.

Recovery Tactic

If the lien in question is covered under your title insurance policy, that should make it go away. If not, you'll have to resolve or pay the lien before you can close.

› **The home inspection identifies a big-ticket repair.**

This means another round of negotiation with the buyer—and the potential for more money out of your pocket.

Recovery Tactic

With an expert negotiator in your corner, your deal should have no trouble moving forward. You just may need to be willing to meet the buyer in the middle to address the issue.

› **Your buyer's financing falls through.**

Without financing, your buyer likely won't have the cash to close on the home.

Recovery Tactic

Unless your buyer wins the lottery—or secures another lender before closing day—you can pretty much count on going back to square one to find a buyer who can afford to buy your home.

› **Your home appraises for less than the sale price.**

For the deal to go through, someone's going to have to shell out more money to bridge the gap.

Recovery Tactic

Odds of recovery depend on how big the gap is between the appraisal value and the sales price. You and the buyer may have to split the difference.

Appraisal Too Low? Here Are Some Options:

1. Your agent can dispute a questionable appraisal.
2. You can drop your contract price.
3. The buyer can bring the difference in cash.
4. You and the buyer can meet somewhere in between.
5. Both parties can call the deal quits.

› **An issue comes up in the final walk-through.**

Last-minute surprises in your home's condition must be addressed before closing.

Recovery Tactic

Follow the Golden Rule by leaving the home the way you'd want someone to leave it for you. It's as simple as that!

STEP 5:

Closing the Deal

There's no getting around the fact that the week leading up to closing can send your stress level soaring. Between juggling your own move and making sure you leave your home in tip-top shape, the struggle is real. The good news is you will get through it.

Here's how to do it and keep a smile on your face.

Don't Wait Until the Last Minute to Pack

You should already have nonessentials—like books and knick-knacks—boxed up by this point. Now it's time to tackle the heavy-duty stuff. If moving everything all at once overwhelms you, rent a storage pod so you can load stuff a little at a time during closing week.



Do Keep Your Buyer in the Loop

As you make plans to pack up and move out, don't forget to take your buyer into consideration. After all, they have stuff to move too! If you run into a snag, tell your agent so they can prepare the buyer. Sometimes good communication is all it takes to keep everyone happy.

Don't Put the Cart before the Horse

Remember, the deal isn't done until everyone has signed on the dotted line. Don't cancel your home insurance or hand over the keys until ownership has officially transferred—no matter how harmless it may seem. You don't want to be caught between a rock and a hard place if the contract falls through.

Do Uphold Your End of the Bargain

If you agree to fix something as part of the contract, by all means, do it! Aside from being a legal obligation, it's just the right thing to do. Want to be extra nice? Thank the new homeowners for loving your home by handing it over in sparkling-clean condition.

Don't Forget Important Items on Closing Day

Your closing day to-do list will depend on where you live. Some states do everything electronically while others require in-person signings. If you gather around a table, bring your photo ID and, of course, the keys to your home. Your agent should tell you what else you'll need. Be sure to leave warranty documents and appliance manuals behind for the next homeowners.

Do Expect the Best . . . But Prepare for the Worst

Want to know the secret to saving your sanity? Get used to the fact that delays will happen. The trick is keeping your head on straight when the unexpected smacks you in the face. Rolling with the punches is a lot easier when your agent's a pro at turning lemons into lemonade. A real expert will handle last-minute surprises so you can close with confidence.

Congrats!

You're one step smarter to selling your home!

We've given you a few tools to help you get started. But this guide doesn't have all the answers.

Want to know the secret to success? **Partner with a pro.** An experienced agent will guide you every step of the way so you don't feel overwhelmed.

If you're looking for an agent to take the stress out of your home sale, why not try one of **Dave's real estate Endorsed Local Providers (ELPs)**? Your ELP is an expert in your area with a proven track record for great results and excellent service. Best of all, you can trust an ELP to give you the same helpful advice you'd hear from Dave. Why? Because ELPs are Dave fans too!



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