The case for buying a home today is extremely compelling.

The emerging PR generation.

The American homebuyer is rapidly changing.

How digital are you?
We concluded my interview with the Today Show’s Barbara Corcoran, who is quickly becoming known for her investment prowess on the hit show, Shark Tank. Her strategies for success are the focus of our featured interview for the May issue - a perfect way to kick off the real estate season as we roll into the summer of 2012.

I am pleased, with the feedback we are receiving from our readers. Please keep sending us your feedback on how to improve our publication. What we are doing is unique and readers are noticing! Combining the best of mortgage, real estate and housing-related topics into a single publication, we are the only magazine that understands the industry as what it truly is: a huge professional family who depend upon one another in dramatic and yet unique ways compared to other industries. So, thank you readers – and keep the feedback coming our way.

This issue is exciting!

Our focus is on sales success - what makes you, your brand, your company and professional practice unique in your marketplace. I interviewed Afshar Properties, a real estate firm based in California, which has been negotiating distressed real estate on behalf of clients for over ten years. The professional demeanor and competence of this real estate team was ideal for the complexity of these sales, and I couldn’t have been happier to talk with them about their approach to the market and how they service their clientele.

Sales strategies are a dime a dozen.

It is difficult to separate the sales pitches from the sales methodologies that will take the average sales professional to new heights. The substance is difficult to discern; after you’ve spent money on that sales coach and software, and invested in some hard-earned marketing efforts, if you’ve come up empty handed this could be an expensive lesson to learn. In the real estate industry, while it truly is ‘every man, woman and child’ left to fend for themselves, there are some alternatives out there worth highlighting. Rene Rodriguez is a coach and sales expert based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His firm Volentum, for “Voluntary Momentum” (www.volentum.com), is a practice that is set up to deliver. If you are a real estate firm and you need to make drastic improvements in your firm’s sales and branding within your market or across the United States, Mr. Rodriguez can assist you by bringing about much-needed change to support the results you which to attain.

Mark your calendars for April 19th for the Pacific 2012 Northwest Housing Summit in Seattle, Washington at the Emerald Downs Racetrack. I was asked to speak and moderate a panel of a number of nationally recognized Mortgage and Real Estate figures and top producers who excel with cutting-edge marketing strategies. Be one of the 500+ to attend: call Martin E Lough at (253) 381 0933 or go to: http://nwhousingsummit2012.com/ to register on line.

My goal for The Niche Report, RealEstate Edition, is to provide useful insights into the real estate economy and how real estate professionals can grow their business in today’s challenging environment. Remember, if you want to learn more about what we are doing, email or call me (408.914.5895) and I’ll jump on a plane and come visit with your real estate team!

Thank you – I look forward to hearing from you!

Rick Roque
Managing Editor, rick@thenichereport.com
If Justin Timberlake can “bring sexy back,” then I’m “BRINGING SALES BACK!” It’s time that we return to the roots of what we really are – salespeople. That’s right, I said it, salespeople. Not Real Estate Agents, Real Estate Consultants, Account Supervisors, or Business Development Specialists. No matter what we call ourselves, no matter what our title says, at the end of the day we are salespeople. And it’s time that we bring the pride and professionalism back to the lost and ever-so-beautiful art of selling.

Okay, now that I got that off my chest, let’s talk about the first challenge in getting back to “Sales Professionalism.” If I asked you for the first words that come to mind when I say “Car Salesperson,” what would you say? If you are like several thousand other people I have asked, you probably thought of words like “sleazy, pushy, dishonest,” and you might have even said “con man.” Ouch!

The reality is that what you said about car salespeople is probably a pretty good reflection of how you subconsciously feel about salespeople in general. Sadly, you are not alone. Research shows that most people feel the same way. This fundamental belief means that no matter how great a case one can make for becoming a “sales professional,” no matter how much money someone would offer, nothing will make you feel okay with being pushy, sleazy or dishonest.

So step one is to change our beliefs – our basic feelings – about being in sales. We need to realize again that we are here to solve our clients’ problems, to make our clients’ lives easier and to make a good living doing what we are passionate about. And we can only achieve all those goals if we sell, which means we have to close deals. Though faced with decades of negative stigma, I am confident we can make the necessary changes.
TRUE SALES PROFESSIONALS

We've all experienced those rare but unforgettable moments of complete and utter surrender to the skills, technique and enthusiasm of a true “Sales Professional.” We entered the scenario totally convinced that we were not going to buy. We even had the conversation in the car on the way over, making a pledge with our spouses that no matter how good it sounded, we weren't buying! Then about half-way through the presentation you began to rethink your previous assumptions. You looked over at your spouse and shared a look that said “maybe there is something to this.” By the end of presentation, you did not change your mind, but you made a new decision based on new information that made you want to buy what they were selling.

It was masterful: the timing of his questions, the tone of voice, the amazing ability to listen to what you were really asking for. It was like poetry in motion. It seemed like that salesperson could read your mind – and wow – even understood your pain! We were helpless and totally at the mercy of the Sales Professional's defined sales process and perfect sequence, and the most fascinating part of it all, we loved every moment of it! The process was effortless and enjoyable, and we even spent more money than we had originally planned.

Why? Because the level of professionalism made us feel that our needs were safe and we could trust this person. We felt comfortable enough to be confident that this process would solve our problem and add value to our lives. You see, we love working with true professionals. We love buying from them because they make our lives easier. Even better, we love referring them because they make us look good. We tell their stories at dinner and we go out of our way to ensure that our friends and family uses them.

So here are a couple of questions to consider. How many sales people do you know that are that good? My guess is that it's a low number. Why is that? I believe that the answer lies in the fundamental problem with the sales industry: there are few systems to create true “Sales Professionals.” There are often very few barriers to entry in the field, little real sales training and often poor management systems that fail to hold people accountable. The madness has got to stop!

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

As a consultant, over the last decade I have consistently seen the following gaps with many salespeople. I encourage you to use this article as a springboard for discussion with your business partners to delve into ways to improve your business models.

1. Using marketing as a cop-out to selling

Marketing and selling are both absolutely necessary to build a successful business, but very different. Struggling salespeople tend to prefer marketing because of the simple fact that it reduces the amount of rejection they need to face. Marketing, in its simplest explanation, attracts prospects to call us, while selling forces us to find people to call on and to risk rejection on a daily basis.

2. Lack of defined job descriptions

This problem is worse in some industries than it is in others, but is widespread enough to warrant a look. For example, ask 100 Real Estate Agents what their job is, and I would bet that all 100 would say something like “to sell homes.” Or they'll give the textbook answer, “to help my clients.” The challenge with seeing the job as “selling homes” is that getting a client into or out of a home is a “result,” but not a “job.”

3. Confusing activity with productivity (results)

This is a result of bullet point #2. If people don't know what their job truly is, then any opportunity can seem like a good way to spend time. They live their work life like a feather in the wind, going in whatever direction the winds of “opportunity” decide to blow. It’s easy to look “busy” while being broke. Perhaps this statement appears blunt, but the faster we can get real, the sooner we can solve the problem.

4. No structured, sequenced sales system

Not having a predefined, step-by-step process to take prospects from initial meetings to close, salespeople can find themselves eating up not only their time, but even worse, their clients’ time. TheSalesBoard.com research showed that “80% of salespeople do not understand what the primary purpose of their sales call is.” Their research goes on to say that by having a clear “commitment objective” you can cut your sales cycle by 25%. That equates to three extra months of sales time!

5. No “canned” presentation of value

I have seen many people go into sales calls without a prepared presentation, resulting in saying something different at every sales call. You cannot depend on your ability to talk to save you from this one. Every successful salesperson you know has perfected their scripting and presentation. And the true “Sales Professional” can deliver
his or her presentation on a napkin just as effectively as using a PowerPoint. The ultimate goal of having a “canned” presentation is to make it sound and feel natural.

6. No training in the fundamentals of selling

This was the first thing I noticed years ago. In many industries, either because of a very favorable market or because of a great marketing department, there was no great need for sales skills. Business was so abundant that anyone could make a great income. This was particularly true in the mortgage industry during the early 2000s. I was challenged about this once by an originator who said, “Well I made $250,000 in the ‘Refi’ boom, so I must be a sales professional.”

My response was that a lot of people made $250,000 then. The sales professionals, however, made $700,000-$1,000,000 during that time.

7. Ashamed to be identified as salespeople

This is at the core of the problem. People who are ashamed to be salespeople don't engage in the habits of successful salespeople such as closing, driving commitment, countering objections, prospecting, etc. The Resurgence of the Sales Professional is about bringing true skill and pride back to the profession of sales.

Our industry, unfortunately, is full of “order takers” NOT “Sales Professionals.” A good friend and true sales professional, Scott Hardy, defines an “order taker” as someone who “facilitates a transaction that would have happened anyway.” If the transaction would have happened anyway, then wouldn’t a computer suffice to get the job done? Isn’t that what vending machines are for? The world has changed and technology will continue to become more advanced, which is why becoming a “Sales Professional” is becoming more and more crucial to long-term success.

WHAT IS A “SALES PROFESSIONAL?”

My years of selling and studying successful sales professionals have resulted in the creation of the 7 PILLARS OF A SALES PROFESSIONAL™. Professional sales people build a solid foundation in each one of these pillars and grow in each one on a daily basis. They are as follows.

1. The fundamentals of selling

The fundamentals of selling consist of a basic, foundational sales skill set. This includes features and benefits, hot buttons, closing, silence after asking for the sale, the law of averages, the 80/20 rule, the six money-making activities, open-ended questions, etc. It is virtually impossible to build a career as a sales professional without this foundation. Returning to the fundamentals is the secret to getting out of a selling slump.

2. The art of selling

Anyone can draw a picture of an apple, but an artist draws an apple so beautifully that you might pay to put it on your wall. Learning the fundamentals is a great start and will make a dramatic impact on your sales career and pocket book. Now add learning how to deliver those skills in the same way an artist makes a painting, and see your results soar. The art of selling consists of the proper use of voice inflection, body language, presentation skills, timing of questions, use of silence, pace of speech, etc. Research shows that tone of voice and body language make up 93% of the impact we make on other people. Essentially, it’s NOT what you say; it’s HOW you say it that matters.

3. The psychology of selling

All sales people face the same psychological challenges of facing rejection, insecurity, fear, call reluctance and procrastination. These are not logical problems but rather problems of emotional self-regulation. Pure will power can sometimes be sufficient, but when we fail to overcome these challenges it may be due to taking a purely logical approach (better time management) to solve emotional problems (lack of impulse control). The psychology of selling consists of coping strategies and tools to deal with the realities of being a salesperson, and creates the proper mindset and winning beliefs of a “Sales Professional.” This is a complex topic, which is why it is so difficult to master.

4. The science of selling

This pillar is exciting because it offers the opportunity to take a giant leap forward in generating results if applied correctly. By using key scientific methodologies understanding the role the human brain plays in making buying decisions, the Sales Professional can experience vast improvements in closing ratios and speed the trust-building process with clients and referral partners. Plus, the results can be achieved on purpose every time by following the scientific process/methodology, versus crossing fingers and hoping that the gift of gab or instinct will get you by.

5. A defined sales process

Sales professionals know exactly what their job is on a daily basis. They know what their objective is on every sales call and are comfortable driving the sales process forward because they are crystal clear on what step is next. Their clients find it easy to do business with them because they reduce the number of decisions the client needs.
to make, allowing them to focus on their business. The foundation of a defined sales process is made up of what I call the Six Money Making Activities: Prospecting, Setting Appointments, Presenting Value, Closing, After Care/ Follow-up, and Referrals.

6. Advanced selling strategies

Advanced Selling Strategies consist of creating leverage and compression, preemptive selling to eliminate all objections before they come up, and consultative selling. In essence, here you begin moving from $25/hr. activity to $2,500/hr. activity.

7. A lean sales accountability system

All of the first six pillars are, fundamentally, subject matter and skills that can be learned and honed by committed sales professionals. However, the key to bringing them all together and turning them into more income is a lean system that ensures that all the right things happen, at the right time, every time, with minimal wasted effort and maximum benefit both to the customer and to the sales professional. These principles are ones that have been applied for years and with great success in the manufacturing world, but have yet to really break through to the service world. Essentially, this would apply a “Toyota-like” approach to your business, leading to tremendous efficiency and quality gains.

Such a system should keep track of every one of your contacts as well as your current lead pipeline, and then drive each lead through the Defined Sales Process (Pillar 5) that you created to take advantage of best practices. Contact management and CRM systems can be helpful here, but a lean workflow automation solution is the way to get it done right. Such a system brings accountability to how you are handling the leads in your pipeline and whether you are moving them through your Defined Sales Process at a pace and conversion ratio that ensures that you are consistently making money.

With competition high and unskilled salespeople lowering their prices on a daily basis, Sales Professionals need to streamline their business, focus on highest payoff activities and still deliver more value than competitors. By defining your sales process and accountability system, you then can focus on creating the life and business you’ve always dreamed of.

A FOUNDATION OF INTEGRITY

I purposefully waited until the end to talk about the importance of integrity in the world of selling. Bottom line, we are fighting against the negative stigma because of the previous lack of integrity in our profession. Stanley Kubrick is quoted as saying, “If you can talk brilliantly about a problem, it can create the consoling illusion that it has been mastered.”

Given all the general press, business publications, self-help books, research data and market analysis over the last decade, it is possible we have mastered the talk about integrity, but progress on the practical, applied “how” of integrity continues to confound even the best business leaders, managers and employees. There is much to be done to move the integrity rhetoric into a common business practice.

In conclusion I would like to call on you all to join me in bringing pride, integrity and professionalism back to the world of selling. Take pride in being a salesperson. Continue to educate yourself in your chosen profession. Go back to why you sell what you sell, and be willing to act on the care that you feel for your clients. Care enough to be unreasonable when they don’t understand the value of what you are offering and ask again for the sale. Your customers need the value you are offering.

I hope that the fire of pride and passion has been re-ignited inside of you. The world needs salespeople of integrity to sell the right things to the right people at the right time. I look forward to seeing you all out there in the trenches as we lead the Resurgence of the Sales Professional! Now go make some sales calls and make us proud!

The 7 Pillars of a Sales Professional is a trademark of Rene F. Rodriguez. Rene is Chief Executive Officer of Volentum, (www.volentum.com) a Management Consulting Firm that specializes in sales training, employee engagement, professional influence & change management, with significant expertise in applying brain research to improving results. He has a trusted advisor to Leadership and Business Teams Bank of America, Coca-Cola, Liz Claiborne, Daimler Chrysler, dozens of mortgage and real estate companies and many other major corporations. As a highly sought after keynote speaker, Rene’s mission is to lead the Resurgence of the Sales Professional and to ignite the voluntary momentum within organizations to reach their goals. For more information on improving your sales process or how to become a more influential leader, please visit www.Volentum.com, www.FollowRene.us or call 612-310-4010.