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Young Realtor is a quick study

The sign read: "Sell your house in 35 days. Call Andrew. 256-2750."

Now, Hubby Dear and I may not be in the market to sell our house, but that sign made me look not just once but three times. In fact, I think I stopped traffic on U.S. 250 in Waynesboro when I slowed the Tot Taxi to a crawl to scribble down the phone number. This was, after all, a strange notion given today's real estate market.

Jenelle Watson
Home Front



Hubby Dear and I have moved multiple times, and fortunately for us we've been able to get contracts on the houses we leave behind fairly quickly. After covering the business and real estate beat for 17 years now, I've learned a few tricks for getting a quick sale. In the past, we've always been fortunate enough to accept a contract on a house within a month of listing.

But that was then. Had I seen that sign when we moved here in 2005, I would have scoffed. Homes frequently went under contract in a month to six weeks back

then. Knowing what I know now, there's no way I'd set a 35-day goal for myself or my agent. After all, today's homes are on the market for an average of about 4 months, local real estate data suggests. To think of selling a house in a little over a month is quite ambitious, to say the least.

So who in his or her right mind would suggest selling a house that fast? Who did this Andrew think he was, or better yet, what was he selling? I just had to call.

Defying expectations When I placed the call, I half expected the person on the other end of the phone to tell me about a seminar he was hosting, try to set up a listing appointment or add me to a mailing list. I was wrong; the sign should have been my first clue that whoever Andrew was, he wasn't what one would expect.

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Home Front

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Though he's only been in the real estate industry two years, Costa talks like someone who's been an insider for decades.

But it's more than just talk for Costa; when it comes to walking the walk, he does so in straight file at double time.

The son of Sonia and Stephen Costa of Fishersville, the Augusta County native watched the area blossom before his eyes. "I remember when there was nothing to do here," he said. "It's great to see everything that's happening; now I finally have something to do."

Not that he's twiddling his thumbs. Costa is a very busy young man.

While the typical homesellers may be twiddling their own thumbs waiting for potential buyers to walk through their door, Costa's actually out beating the pavement for his clients. "I try to make 25 new contacts every day," he said, explaining how he immediately begins knocking on the door or ringing the phone of every home within a 3-mile radius of his new listings. "I'm going to go out and look for someone to buy that house," he said. "I'm not going to sit around and wait for the phone to ring."

Yeah, the kid's that different; this is not your typical 21-year-old.

This kid is aggressive, and that aggressiveness is exactly why he can make such unbelievable claims and post them for everyone to see on a huge sign in front of the ReMax Advantage office in Waynesboro.

And as crazy as it sounds, he's delivering on his promise. For Costa's clients, the average days-on-market is that magical 35.

How does he do it, and better yet, how can local sellers hope to match his results? It's as easy as 1-2-3, he says.

His first secret, if you want to call it that, is aggressiveness. Here are the other two:

Price

"The key to pricing a house successfully is knowing what's been sold," Costa explained. "A lot of agents will look at what's active when they set a listing price. I rarely look at the active listings other than to see what the competition is. I'm not so much concerned what we can list a house for as what we can sell it for."

Costa admits that some people aren't exactly happy with his suggested listing price.

He has, he said, had potential clients walk away when he refused to accept their listing at their price. "But I want to sell as many homes as I can," he said. "I'm not going to take a listing that

won't sell. I'm in the business of selling houses, not listing them. If they're overpriced, they're not going to sell."

When setting a listing price, Costa approaches the task as if he were an appraiser, not a sales agent.

"Even if I could get a contract on a house for higher price, if the house isn't going to appraise out at that price, chances are that it's not going to sell," he said. "Those buyers aren't going to be able to get the financing they need, and there aren't too many people around who are able to pay cash."

Marketing

As down-to-business as he is in setting a listing price, Costa is just as down-to-earth when it comes to marketing his homes. "I go to the source with my listings," he said, explaining how he prepares a flier on each new listing that is then e-mailed to the area's top 100 Realtors.

"They have buyers waiting for properties and I have properties waiting for buyers," Costa explained. "I've earned a reputation for pricing my properties well, so I generally get a lot of showings — and contracts — from my flyers."

The Bottom Line

"Really, being aggressive

is the whole key to this or any market," Costa said. "You have to be an aggressive agent. You have to price your property aggressively and that means pricing it realistically and for a quick sell. You have to be aggressive in your sales approach. Some agents wait for the calls to come in. I don't. It's not my style."

To say that I was impressed at that point of the conversation was an understatement, and I told him so.

I've interviewed hundreds of Realtors and business professionals over the years.

Even at his young age, Costa made more sense in 10 minutes than a lot of people three times his age and with three times the experience.

But then, this relative rookie really wowed me. "I don't claim to be an expert," he said.

"I work in the market; I don't make it. If I start thinking I have all the answers, I start lying to people and I'm not going to do that. I'm not the type of person who will tell someone something they want to hear just to get a listing. I'm not that desperate. I don't need a ton of business. One of my mission statements is to be honest at all times with all people. Sometimes, people don't like what I have to say, and that's okay."

Sonia and Stephen: I hope you're reading this. You've raised quite a remarkable guy, and one who, if he sticks to his guns and his guiding principals, will do more than just fine. After all, "just fine" isn't an aggressive enough goal for Andrew Costa.

It's like he said: "There are two kinds of people in this world, people who make it happen and people who wait for it to happen. I'm the kind of person who's going to find a way to make it happen."

You go, Andrew!

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