



June 28, 2000

Before The Showing: A Few Tips for Turning 'Maybe' to 'Yes'

by Courtney Ronan



During a recent tour of a townhome for sale, I was struck at the owner's apparent apathy for increasing her odds. My Realtor and I tripped over a pile of tennis shoes in the front entryway. Newspapers were littered about the living room floor. A pile of shirts drooped over the recliner. The morning's breakfast dishes were still on the table, being hungrily eyed by a pair of vicious Pugs confined to another section of the kitchen behind a baby gate. We walked out to the backyard to discover overgrown grass, chipped and peeling paint, and dog toys strewn about the lawn.

The truth is that the townhome had potential, but after being met with this display, I had little interest in heading upstairs to view the bedrooms. It didn't dawn on me until that moment that how owners display their homes during showings is critical. Even in hot markets like Dallas, buyers are savvy enough to know that they have plenty of other options -- homes which have been well-maintained and convey the owner's sense of pride. It may sound like a stretch, but it isn't ... a prospective buyer, when met with a messy home like this one, can't help but wonder: If the owner has such little regard for the part of the home I can see, how has he maintained the part I *can't* see? There's a distinct possibility that, upon inspection, you could find some serious and costly flaws in need of repair -- termite infestation and heating and air conditioning units in poor condition, to name but two possibilities.

Your Realtor will probably tell you the basics: Pick up your clothes, bake cookies, anything to butter up those buyers. Actually, however, those tips are just the beginning of the checklist you should follow prior to showing your home. Many nooks and crannies of your home -- spots about which you've never given a passing thought -- can make the difference if you swipe a dust rag or polishing cloth over them. Many aspects of a home which appeal to prospective buyers aren't even in their conscious awareness. All of your home's aesthetic elements combine to create an impression which could very well lead to a contract.

Before you begin showing your home, complete as many of the following tasks as you can:

- Clean behind your appliances, removing dust bunnies.
- Clean your carpets, either yourself or professionally, if you're willing to assume the expense.
- Dust and/or clean your light fixtures.

- Clean your windows and window coverings.
- Wash baseboards and walls and touch up scuffs with extra paint.
- Clean your furniture.
- Clean your closets. Unless you bolt them shut, those prospective buyers will open every door. And besides, you want those closets to be inspected; extra storage space is what helps sell your home.
- Clean your kitchen pantry and any cabinet space. Buyers and Realtors open those doors, too.
- Dust and vacuum your home thoroughly before each showing.
- Purchase soap scum and mildew removers for your bathrooms, and use them liberally to help your bathrooms shine. Don't clean them right before a showing, however; you don't want your prospective buyers to be overwhelmed by chemical odors. Put an air freshener in a discreet place in each bathroom, and add a decorative element to each vanity. If you don't have presentable towels to drape over the rods in your bathrooms, purchase some inexpensive but coordinating hand towels.
- Clear as much clutter as you can from every counter surface; for example, in the bathroom, remove personal items (toothbrushes, combs and grooming supplies, all of which are turn-offs) from vanities. Store appliances you typically keep out on the kitchen counter. De-cluttering creates the illusion of more space (i.e., more counter space).
- If you have excess furniture in any room, either sell it or store it. Your goal should be to create as much open space as possible, throughout every room in your house.
- If you'd painted your walls in an "experimental" color (deep burgundy, for example), paint them white or neutral. Those two shades not only open up rooms and make them appear larger; they also appeal to prospective buyers for their versatility.
- Open up drapes and blinds to invite natural light into your home. If a room tends to be dark, purchase light bulbs with brighter wattage (not too bright, however).

I can't help but wonder if that seller whose unkempt townhome I viewed ever received an offer. It's as true in real estate as it is in any other facet of life: Humans make instant judgments. The impression a home makes in the first few seconds after a prospective buyer's entry will determine the likelihood of an offer.