

EXPIRED:

YOUR RELIST PLAYBOOK

A GUIDE FOR
SELLING HOMES
OTHERS COULDN'T SELL



A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

We identify what went wrong and what needs to change.



A STRATEGIC PLAN

We reposition your home for the right buyers.



STRONGER RESULTS

Better marketing. Better exposure. Better outcomes.

BY

TOM WEAVER



WEAVER

— TEAM REALTY —

REAL PEOPLE. REAL RESULTS.

EXPIRED
A GUIDE FOR SELLING HOMES
OTHERS COULDN'T SELL
Tom Weaver

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Printed in the United States of America

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CHAPTER 1

Why Should You Read This Book?

Here's something that probably nobody has explained to you yet—and it's going to change the way you think about selling your home.

Two houses sit on the same street in Brighton. Same school district. Same square footage. Same number of bedrooms and bathrooms. One sells in 34 days for \$312,000. The other sits on the market for six months and eventually sells for \$278,000.

What happened? Was the seller of the cheaper home just unlucky? Did the market shift? Was there something wrong with the house?

Almost certainly, none of the above. The difference between those two outcomes almost always comes down to strategy — specifically, how the home was marketed and how the agent managed the process.

This happens constantly in Livingston County. It happens in the neighborhoods around Brighton, Howell, and Hartland. Two nearly identical homes, sold at the same time, produce wildly different results. One family walks away with a check that lets them put a strong down payment on the next chapter of their life. The other family leaves money on the table — sometimes tens of thousands of dollars — without ever understanding why.

If your listing has expired, you've already experienced one side of that equation. That's a frustrating place to be. You did what you were supposed to do. You signed with an agent. You kept the house clean for showings. You waited. And nothing happened.

WHAT THIS BOOK WILL DO FOR YOU

This book is going to walk you through the real reasons homes don't sell — and the specific strategies that cause them to sell quickly and at full price. Not theories. Not generic advice. Real, proven tactics that the best agents in any market use to get results where other agents couldn't.

You'll see how the right marketing approach can attract the one buyer who will pay exactly what your home is worth — or more. You'll understand why dropping your price is almost never the right first move. And you'll learn how to make your home impossible to ignore, regardless of how long it sat on the market before.

The chapters ahead are direct and to the point. No padding, no fluff. Just the information you need to make a smart decision about your next step.

If you've been told that your home didn't sell because it was overpriced, keep reading. That explanation is almost always wrong — and I'm going to show you exactly why.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Two similar homes in the same market can sell for dramatically different prices based on strategy, not luck.

- An expired listing does not mean your home is unsellable — it means the approach needs to change.
- The strategies in this book are the same ones the top agents use to sell homes others couldn't move.
- Dropping your price is rarely the right answer — and this book will show you why.

CHAPTER 2

Does Listing Price Really Determine Whether Your Home Sells?

Let me guess what you've been told.

Your listing expired, and at least one agent — maybe several — told you the reason your home didn't sell was the price. "You're just a little too high," they said. "If you come down to X, we can make this work."

I want to challenge that assumption, because in most cases, it's wrong.

THE REAL REASON HOMES DON'T SELL

Here's the truth that most agents won't tell you: the number one reason homes fail to sell is not price — it's marketing. Specifically, it's the absence of a targeted, aggressive, well-executed marketing plan that gets your property in front of the right buyers.

Price matters, of course. Nobody is buying a \$400,000 home in Howell if it's listed at \$700,000. But in the realistic range — where most expired listings live — the difference between a home that sells and one that doesn't is almost never the asking price. It's everything the agent did (or didn't do) to find the buyer willing to pay that price.

Think about it this way. You can list a home at \$10 below market value and still not sell it if nobody knows it exists. Conversely, a well-marketed home at full price — or even slightly above — can attract multiple serious buyers.

A REAL EXAMPLE: THE SAME PRICE, TWO VERY DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

Consider what happened with a home in the lakes area west of Brighton. The owners had a beautiful property — four bedrooms, a finished walkout basement, and about 150 feet of private frontage on a small inland lake. They listed it at \$549,000.

Their first agent was perfectly competent by standard measures. Photos were taken. The home went on the MLS. There were a couple of open houses. Six months later, no sale. The agent's recommendation? Drop the price to \$499,000.

The sellers weren't convinced. They knew what their property was worth. They had comparable sales to support the price, and they understood that the lake frontage alone justified it. So instead of cutting the price, they changed agents.

The new agent kept the price at \$549,000 — not a dollar less. But this agent approached the marketing completely differently.

Instead of standard MLS photos, the agent hired a professional real estate photographer who also shot aerial drone footage of the lake frontage at golden hour. The listing description led with the waterfront lifestyle, not the bedroom count. The home was marketed specifically to buyers relocating from Ann Arbor and metro Detroit who were searching for lake access in Livingston County — a very specific, very motivated group of buyers.

The home sold in 47 days at \$537,000. Nearly full price. The sellers netted roughly \$38,000 more than they would have if they'd listened to the first agent and dropped the price.

Same home. Same price. Different agent, different marketing — completely different result.

WHY "WORTH" IS NOT A FIXED NUMBER

Here's a concept that most sellers don't fully understand: a home is not worth a single set number. The final sale price of any home is simply the amount one specific buyer agreed to pay. That number depends heavily on how many buyers saw the home, how well the home was presented to them, and whether the right buyer — the one who values exactly what your home offers — was ever found.

Two sellers in the same Howell subdivision listed comparable homes within weeks of each other last year. Both had three bedrooms, two and a half baths, and two-car garages. One sold for \$267,000. The other sold for \$249,000 — an \$18,000 gap on homes that looked nearly identical on paper.

The difference wasn't the homes. It was how they were presented and to whom.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- An expired listing is almost never proof that the home was overpriced — it's usually a sign the marketing didn't work.
- A well-marketed home at full price will outperform a poorly marketed home at a reduced price.
- The final sale price of a home is not fixed — it depends on finding the right buyer and presenting the home effectively.
- Before reducing your price, change your marketing strategy.

CHAPTER 3

What to Avoid: Agent Mistakes That Cost Sellers Real Money

The mistakes I'm about to describe are not rare. They happen in Livingston County every single month. And they cost sellers — sometimes dramatically.

THE \$47,000 MISTAKE

A few years back, a homeowner in the Howell area needed to sell a vacant lot she'd inherited. It sat just under three acres on the edge of a quiet road with mature trees on three sides. She didn't know the area well — she'd grown up downstate — so she relied completely on the agent she hired.

The agent was familiar with residential resale but had limited experience with land. He pulled a few comps, came in at \$95,000, and never put a physical sign on the property. The listing was buried on the MLS with two photos and a one-line description.

A neighboring homeowner — who shared a property line with the lot — found out about the listing through a friend two days before it went under contract. He was furious. He would have paid well over asking price because the lot would have more than doubled the size of his backyard. He had kids who needed room to run, and he'd been thinking about that lot for years.

He never got the chance to make an offer. A buyer who had no particular connection to the property picked it up for \$95,000 — a figure the agent later admitted was probably \$40,000 to \$47,000 below what an informed, competitive sale would have produced.

One sign. One week of targeted outreach to adjacent property owners. One phone call to the neighbor. That's all it would have taken to change the outcome entirely.

FUMBLING A PERFECT OFFER

Here's a different kind of mistake — one that's less about marketing and more about execution.

A seller in Brighton Township received a full-price offer within three weeks of listing. No contingencies beyond the standard inspection and financing. The buyers were pre-approved, motivated, and ready to close in 45 days.

Her agent let a minor title issue go unaddressed for two weeks. By the time it was resolved, the buyers had found another home and walked. The seller's home sat for another nine months. When it finally sold, the price was \$22,000 below that original full-price offer — and she'd made nine additional mortgage payments on a house she wasn't living in.

If you add up the lost sale price and the carrying costs, that agent's fumble cost this seller roughly \$30,000.

WHAT THESE STORIES HAVE IN COMMON

In both cases, the seller assumed the agent had a plan. Neither agent did — not a real one. Good intentions and a real estate license don't equal a proven system for selling homes.

Before you sign another listing agreement, ask the agent directly: "Show me the specific marketing plan you'll use for my home. Show me how you'll find buyers who want exactly what my property offers." If the answer is vague, that's your answer.

The good news is that a strong agent with the right system can prevent every mistake described above. That's exactly what the rest of this book is about.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Failing to market a property to all potential buyers — including neighbors and adjacent owners — can cost sellers tens of thousands of dollars.
- Carrying costs (mortgage payments, taxes, insurance) while a home sits unsold are a real and significant financial loss that sellers often overlook.
- Even a full-price offer can collapse if an agent doesn't manage the transaction competently.
- Ask any agent you're considering to show you their specific, proven marketing plan before signing anything.

CHAPTER 4

Why It's So Easy to Sell Your Home for Less Than It's Worth

At some point, almost every seller who's been through a failed listing reaches the same breaking point.

"I'm done. Just cut the price. I need to move on."

That feeling is completely understandable. It's exhausting to maintain a home in show-ready condition, week after week, while the days on market keep climbing. It's demoralizing to hear agents tell you the price is the problem. And after months of nothing, dropping the price feels like the only option left.

But I want you to hold on before you do that. Because the history of every industry is full of examples where the right product failed to find the right buyer — and the people who held firm were eventually proven correct.

THE SELLER WHO ALMOST GAVE IT AWAY

A few years ago, a couple in Green Oak Township had a situation that looked a lot like yours might right now. They'd built a high-end custom home on five acres — vaulted ceilings, a chef's kitchen, a three-stall garage with extra depth for a boat, and a finished walkout basement with its own full bath. The kind of home you don't see often in Livingston County.

They listed it. The home sat. Their first agent suggested dropping \$40,000. They did. It still sat. A second agent suggested dropping another \$25,000. They were close to doing it.

Before they signed the price reduction paperwork, they called me.

I walked through the home and could immediately see the problem. The home wasn't overpriced — it was undermarketed. It had been presented the same way every other house in the MLS was presented: three-bedroom, three-bath, acreage, asking price. Nothing that made a buyer feel what it would be like to live there.

We relisted at the original price — actually, \$5,000 above where they'd been before the reductions. We rebuilt the marketing from scratch. The home sold in 38 days.

They almost gave away \$65,000 because two agents convinced them the price was the problem.

THE TEMPTATION IS REAL — AND ALMOST ALWAYS WRONG

There's a reason sellers fall into this trap. When a home sits on the market, it starts to feel like a verdict — like the market is telling you something about your home's value. But the market isn't telling you the price is wrong. It's telling you the right buyer hasn't been found yet.

Think about any product or business you admire. The first version of almost every great product failed commercially before it found its audience. The problem was never the product — it was getting the product in front of the people who would truly value it.

Your home is no different. There is a buyer out there who wants exactly what your house offers — the layout, the location, the lot, the features. That buyer will pay full price, and possibly more. The question is whether your marketing is reaching them.

Slashing your price doesn't solve that problem. It just means that when the right buyer eventually shows up — and they will — you've already given away your equity.

DON'T NEGOTIATE AGAINST YOURSELF

Every dollar you drop from your asking price is a dollar out of your pocket, and you've dropped it before a single buyer has even made an offer. You're negotiating against yourself. You're doing the buyer's job for them.

Hold firm on your price. Fix the marketing. Find the right buyer. That's the sequence that works.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- The urge to drop your price after a failed listing is completely natural — and almost always premature.
- A home sitting on the market is not proof it's overpriced; it's usually proof the right buyer hasn't been reached yet.
- Reducing your asking price means negotiating against yourself before any buyer has made an offer.
- The correct response to an expired listing is to fix the marketing strategy, not surrender your equity.

CHAPTER 5

What Stops Perfect Homes from Selling

You have a great house. You know it. The people who've walked through it have said so. And yet it didn't sell.

How is that possible?

Let me introduce you to a concept that explains this better than anything else I've come across.

THE CRAFT BEER THAT ALMOST NOBODY FOUND

There's a small brewery in the Ann Arbor area that makes what a lot of people consider the best IPA in Michigan. Craft beer enthusiasts who've tried it tend to become loyal customers almost immediately. The ingredients are top quality. The process is meticulous. The product is genuinely excellent.

For the first two years, they nearly went out of business.

The beer was real. The quality was real. But the brewery had no marketing presence. They weren't on the main strip. Their social media was sparse. Distribution was limited to two specialty shops that most people didn't know existed. The people who would have loved that beer most — and paid premium prices for it — simply never found it.

Once they overhauled their marketing, partnered with a few well-placed restaurants, and built a real digital presence, everything changed. The same beer, with a wider, better-targeted audience, turned the business around in under a year.

Here's the thing: the quality of the product never changed. What changed was how many of the right people knew about it.

YOUR HOME IS THAT BEER

A great home that isn't marketed properly will sit on the market, just like that brewery almost went under. It doesn't matter how good the product is if the right buyer never finds it.

This is the fundamental misconception that costs home sellers money every year. They assume that because the home is on the MLS and there's a sign in the yard, the marketing is done. But putting a home on the MLS is a starting point, not a strategy. It's the equivalent of printing a business card and calling it advertising.

The buyers who would pay full price for your specific home — because of the specific features it has, the specific neighborhood it's in, the specific lifestyle it enables — may never have seen it. Not because they don't exist. Because the marketing never reached them.

THE WRONG AUDIENCE IS AS BAD AS NO AUDIENCE

There's another version of this problem that's less obvious: marketing to the wrong buyers.

If your home has a large finished basement and a fenced backyard, it's a natural fit for families with young children. If your marketing materials look the same as every other generic listing in

the area — no emphasis on those features, no language that speaks to that specific buyer — you might get foot traffic from empty nesters looking for a low-maintenance condo lifestyle. They walk through, shrug, and move on. Not because the home is bad — because they're the wrong audience.

A great product marketed to the wrong people produces the same result as no marketing at all: no sale.

The chapters ahead will show you exactly how to identify what makes your home unique and how to build a marketing strategy around that specific thing — so the buyers who see your listing are the ones already predisposed to love it.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- A great home with poor or misdirected marketing will sit on the market just as long as a mediocre home.
- Putting a home on the MLS is a starting point, not a complete marketing strategy.
- The buyers who would pay full price for your home's specific features may have simply never been reached.
- Effective marketing means targeting the right buyers — not just generating the most general traffic.

CHAPTER 6

How to Sell a Home That Didn't Sell — Without Dropping the Price

Here's what most real estate agents get wrong about selling a home that's already failed once.

They think the problem is exposure. They assume that if they just put the home in front of more people, eventually someone will buy it. So they run another round of open houses, boost it on social media to a broad audience, and send out more mailers. More volume, more activity, more hope.

But volume is not the same as precision. And when it comes to selling a home at full price, precision is everything.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ANY BUYER AND THE RIGHT BUYER

Here's the honest truth about real estate buyers: most of them will not pay full price for your home. That's not an insult to you or your property. It's just the nature of how buyers think.

The average buyer walking through homes in Livingston County is comparing options, looking for the best deal, and always conscious of what they could get for less. They'll make offers. Those offers will often be 5 to 10 percent below asking. They'll negotiate. They'll ask for concessions. That's how the typical buyer operates.

But there is another kind of buyer. This buyer isn't shopping for the best general deal — they're looking for a specific thing. Maybe it's a particular school district in Brighton. Maybe it's a walkout basement they can finish as a home gym. Maybe it's a quiet cul-de-sac lot they can let their kids roam. Maybe it's lake access within 30 minutes of their office in Ann Arbor.

When this buyer finds the home that has exactly what they've been searching for, the negotiation dynamic changes completely. They don't want to lose it. They come in close to asking price — sometimes at or above it — because they're not choosing between five acceptable options. They found the one they want.

Your job — and your agent's job — is not to tell everyone about your home. It's to find that specific buyer.

WHAT THAT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Finding the right buyer requires understanding what makes your home uniquely valuable and then marketing that specific thing to the specific segment of buyers who care about it most.

That might mean running targeted digital advertising to buyers currently searching in your zip code with specific filters (certain price range, certain bedroom count, certain lot size). It might mean direct outreach to relocation buyers coming into the Ann Arbor metro from out of state. It might mean personal outreach to people currently renting in your school district who are ready to buy. It might mean hosting a broker-to-broker preview specifically attended by agents who work with buyers in your price range.

It's not one-size-fits-all. It's built around your home's specific advantages — and directed at the specific people who will pay to have them.

THE STANDARD APPROACH IS BACKWARD

The conventional approach is to cast a wide net and hope someone bites. Drop the price a little so the home looks competitive across the board. Market to everyone. Show to anyone who asks.

That approach keeps your home generic. It puts you in direct competition with every other house in the area at a similar price point. And it attracts buyers who are choosing between your home and five others — buyers who have no particular reason to pay full price.

The right approach is narrower and more deliberate. It finds the buyer for whom your home isn't one of six options — it's the only option.

That buyer exists. They're out there right now, probably frustrated that they can't find what they're looking for. Your home might be exactly it. The question is whether they'll ever find it.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- More exposure is not the same as better marketing — precision matters more than volume.
- Most buyers will negotiate for a discount; the right buyer, who wants exactly what your home offers, will pay full price.
- Effective marketing means identifying your home's specific advantages and directing them at the specific buyers most likely to value them.
- The goal is not to appeal to everyone — it's to be irresistible to the one buyer who will pay what your home is worth.

CHAPTER 7

Avoid This Rule at Your Own Risk

There's a principle that shows up in almost every area of business, economics, and daily life. Once you understand it, you'll see it everywhere — and you'll understand why it holds the key to selling your home at full price.

It's called the Pareto Principle. Most people know it as the 80/20 rule.

WHERE IT COMES FROM

In the late 1800s, an Italian economist named Vilfredo Pareto noticed something unusual while studying land ownership in Italy. Roughly 80 percent of the land was owned by about 20 percent of the population. Curious, he started looking at other areas of economic life. The same ratio kept appearing.

He found that roughly 80 percent of a country's tax revenue came from 20 percent of taxpayers. That 80 percent of agricultural output came from 20 percent of farms. That the pattern repeated itself across industries, geography, and time.

Later economists and business thinkers extended the principle into virtually every field. And it held up.

- 80 percent of a company's revenue typically comes from 20 percent of its customers.
- 80 percent of workplace results come from 20 percent of employees' efforts.
- 80 percent of customer complaints come from 20 percent of products or service issues.

The exact numbers don't always land at 80 and 20. Sometimes it's 75/25 or 70/30. But the core insight holds: a small fraction of causes drive the overwhelming majority of effects. Most of what we do, buy, and focus on is in the 80 percent — the stuff that generates relatively little impact.

HOW THIS APPLIES TO YOUR HOME

Here's where this gets directly relevant to your situation.

When a buyer walks through a neighborhood and looks at five comparable homes, roughly 80 percent of the features across those homes are shared. Three bedrooms, two bathrooms, attached garage, Central Michigan-grade winters driving the same utility demands, comparable lot sizes. That 80 percent doesn't differentiate one home from another in any meaningful way.

But 20 percent of the features — the things that are truly different about one specific home — drive nearly all of the buying decision.

The buyer isn't going to pay more because your home has a kitchen. Everybody has a kitchen.

They'll pay more because your kitchen has a layout that works for how they actually cook. They won't pay more because you have a basement — plenty of homes have basements. They'll pay

more because your finished basement has a full wet bar and egress windows that make it feel like a genuine second living space.

The features in the top 20 percent — the ones that make your home genuinely distinct from the others on the block — are the ones that create emotional buy-in. And buyers in the grip of emotional buy-in don't nickel-and-dime on price. They make real offers.

THE MISTAKE MOST SELLERS MAKE

The most common mistake I see sellers make — and that their agents enable — is marketing the 80 percent. The listing talks about bedrooms, bathrooms, square footage, and general location. Those details belong in the listing, sure. But they're not the reason the right buyer is going to choose your home.

Marketing the 80 percent means you're indistinguishable from your competition. You look like every other listing in the MLS, and buyers treat you like every other listing in the MLS: they compare prices and go with the cheapest.

Marketing the 20 percent — the genuinely unique attributes of your home — is what separates you from the competition entirely. It's what attracts buyers who aren't price-shopping, because they're feature-shopping. And feature-shoppers pay full price.

The next chapter will show you how this plays out in real-world home sales, including some examples from right here in Michigan.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- The Pareto Principle (the 80/20 rule) holds that roughly 80 percent of results come from 20 percent of causes.
- In home selling, 80 percent of features are shared across comparable homes — they don't drive buying decisions.
- The 20 percent of features that are genuinely unique to your home are what buyers make emotional decisions about.
- Most sellers and agents make the mistake of marketing the 80 percent; the winning approach focuses on the 20 percent.

CHAPTER 8

Why This 20% Rule Applies to Hard-to-Sell Homes

Let me show you exactly how this plays out in the real world — with homes that had been sitting on the market, stuck, until someone identified the right 20 percent and marketed it properly.

THE BUYER WHO DIDN'T CARE ABOUT THE HOUSE

An agent I know had a client — a single professional relocating from Chicago to the Ann Arbor area — who was serious about buying but nearly impossible to work with. He'd been looking for three months. He'd toured over 20 homes in Washtenaw and Livingston counties. Every time, he came in low. Not negotiation-low. Insulting-low. Ten to fifteen percent under asking, take it or leave it.

His agent started to wonder if this guy would ever actually buy.

They drove out on a Saturday to see a handful of homes in the Pinckney area — all reasonably priced, all solid properties. He shrugged his way through four of them.

The fifth was a three-bedroom ranch on a sloping lot that backed up to a small chain of lakes. The house itself was nothing special — it needed some updating, the kitchen was dated, the master bath was small. By every objective measure, it was the least impressive home they'd seen all day.

But when they walked out onto the back deck, this buyer stopped talking mid-sentence.

The lot sloped down to a private dock. The sun was low. The water was catching the light. You could hear absolutely nothing but a light wind and some distant birds.

He made a full-price offer before they left the driveway.

The 80 percent — the house itself — was actually the weakest of everything he'd seen that day. But the 20 percent — the waterfront access, the privacy, the view from that deck — was something none of the other homes could match. He wasn't buying the house. He was buying the lifestyle that dock represented.

THE CUSTOM HOME THAT NOBODY NOTICED

Here's another one, and this one hits closer to what many of you may be experiencing.

A builder in Livingston County completed a high-end spec home — custom cabinetry, radiant floor heating, a three-stall garage, and a thoughtful open floor plan. He priced it fairly and listed it. Seven months went by without a single offer.

He fired his agent and brought in someone new. The new agent's first move wasn't to adjust the price. It was to walk the entire property and ask one question: what does this home have that nothing else in this price range offers?

The answer was sitting right there: the lot. While everything else in that area was on half-acre or one-acre parcels, this home sat on 6.2 acres. Wooded on two sides, open meadow on the third, with a small seasonal creek running along the back edge of the property.

The previous agent had mentioned the acreage in the listing. One line. "6.2 acres." Buried at the bottom.

The new agent rebuilt the entire marketing campaign around the land. Aerial drone photography. A listing description that opened with the acreage and the privacy it provided. Targeted advertising specifically aimed at buyers from metro Detroit and Ann Arbor who were searching for space and quiet without leaving Livingston County.

The first call came in four days. A buyer from Rochester Hills who had been frustrated for eight months because he couldn't find enough land in Oakland County. He'd been watching Livingston County listings and had actually seen this home before — but the listing had never flagged the acreage prominently enough to catch his eye.

Once the 6.2 acres was front and center, he drove out. He made an offer the same day he toured the property. The home sold in 31 days. Sight-unseen offer came in before the in-person showing was even scheduled from a second interested party.

THE POOL NOBODY MENTIONED

One more example, because it illustrates a different version of the same mistake.

A family in Brighton had a four-bedroom colonial with an in-ground pool and a fully fenced backyard. The pool was a relatively rare feature in their subdivision — only a handful of homes in the area had one. They'd lived there 11 years and their kids had grown up in that pool.

Their listing agent photographed the home in November. The pool was covered, the backyard was bare, and the listing photos made it look like any other fenced yard. The word "pool" appeared once in the listing description, in the middle of a long amenities paragraph.

The home sat for four months. The agent suggested a price reduction.

Instead, they hired a new agent who immediately recognized what had happened. The pool wasn't being sold. It was being footnoted.

The new marketing led with the pool — summer lifestyle photography from the prior year, a description that opened with the backyard experience, targeted advertising to buyers with kids and dogs who specifically filtered for fenced yards and outdoor features.

New offers came in within three weeks. The home sold for \$8,500 over the final reduced asking price the first agent had recommended — which means the sellers actually netted more than they would have by dropping the price.

FINDING YOUR 20 PERCENT

Every home has something. Some of those features are obvious — waterfront access, significant acreage, a pool. Others take a sharper eye.

Here are some features that have driven full-price sales in this market when they were properly highlighted:

- A finished basement with egress windows and a separate entrance — positioned as a potential in-law suite or rental income possibility.
- A location at the end of a dead-end road, marketed specifically for its privacy and minimal traffic.
- A large, flat backyard in a subdivision where most lots are sloped — positioned for families who wanted a playable outdoor space.
- A three-stall garage with extra depth, marketed to buyers with boats, motorcycles, or work-from-home workshop needs.
- A home backing to a natural area or greenspace, emphasized through photography and description for buyers who wanted separation from neighbors.
- A location within walking distance of a downtown in Brighton or Howell — specifically marketed to buyers who wanted walkability in an otherwise suburban market.

Whatever your 20 percent is, the principle is the same: identify it, lead with it, and direct it at the buyers for whom that feature is the thing they've been looking for.

Those buyers don't haggle. They've already decided before they finish the tour.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Every home has a 20 percent — a set of features that are genuinely distinct from the competition — even if it hasn't been identified or marketed yet.
- Buyers who find the specific feature they've been searching for stop negotiating on price — they make real offers.
- The most common marketing failure is burying the 20 percent in a generic listing description instead of leading with it.
- Unique features don't have to be dramatic — acreage, privacy, garage size, walkability, and backyard characteristics have all driven full-price sales in this market.
- Your agent's job is to find your home's 20 percent and build the entire marketing strategy around it.

CHAPTER 9

Stop the Scroll: How to Grab a Buyer's Attention Before They Move On

Here's a question worth thinking about: When a buyer is sitting on their couch in Ann Arbor on a Tuesday night, scrolling through Zillow or Realtor.com, what makes them stop on one listing and keep swiping past another?

It's not the square footage number. It's not the list of features. It's the first image on the screen.

Buyers make a gut-level decision about whether they're interested in a property before they've even consciously processed what they're looking at. That reaction happens in less than a second. And it's based almost entirely on your lead photo.

This is why I say your marketing has to do its job before a buyer ever picks up the phone.

BEGIN WITH YOUR HOME'S BEST FEATURE

The biggest mistake I see in expired listings is a lead photo that shows the front of the house on a gray Michigan November day — flat light, dead grass, bare trees, and a generic suburban facade that looks identical to the five houses on either side of it. That photo doesn't stop anyone's scroll. It blends right in.

Your lead photo needs to lead with what makes your home different.

If you have a finished walkout basement with a bar and a home theater, that room should be in your first photo. If your back deck overlooks a pond or a tree line in Livingston County, that view is your lead image. If you have a chef's kitchen with quartz countertops and a double island, buyers need to see that the moment they land on your listing.

The entire point is to find the one feature your home has that most other homes on the market don't — and put it front and center. That photo acts as a filter. It pulls in the exact buyers who will pay top dollar for that feature, and it lets the wrong buyers pass you by. That's not a bad thing. You don't need every buyer in Livingston County to fall in love with your home. You just need one.

And that one buyer? They're out there right now searching for exactly what you have. Your job — my job — is to make sure they find it.

WRITE DESCRIPTIONS THAT ACTUALLY SAY SOMETHING

Most listing descriptions read like they were written by someone who had never seen the home. Three bedrooms, two and a half baths, open floor plan, move-in ready. That describes roughly half the homes in Brighton right now. It says nothing memorable and gives buyers no reason to feel anything.

Your description needs to paint a picture. It needs to make someone sitting in an apartment in downtown Detroit close their eyes and imagine themselves in your space.

Think about it this way. If your home sits on a half-acre wooded lot in Genoa Township and you can hear the frogs at night and the kids can play outside without the neighbors being twenty feet away — say that. That detail matters to the right buyer far more than the fact that the HVAC was replaced in 2021 (though we'll mention that too).

Lead with your home's defining feature in the first sentence of the description. Don't bury it. Buyers on mobile devices often see only the first two lines before they have to tap to expand. Make those two lines count.

If your home has a finished basement, call it a bonus living space. If it has a three-car garage, note that it's rare in the neighborhood. If it's within walking distance of downtown Brighton's shops and restaurants, that's a lifestyle detail that resonates.

Be specific. Be honest. And write like you're talking to a person, not filling out a form.

TURN A NEGATIVE INTO A COMPETITIVE EDGE

Here's a situation I run into fairly often in Livingston County. A seller has a solid, well-maintained home that was built ten to fifteen years ago, and right down the road there's a new subdivision going up — Pulte or Ryan Homes building brand-new houses with fresh finishes and that new-construction smell.

At first glance, it feels like a losing battle. Why would someone buy your 2010 colonial when they can get a brand-new house?

But buyers who think it through — and good marketing helps them think it through — quickly realize that new construction comes with a price premium that doesn't hold over time. That brand-new house costs \$60,000 more today. In five years, it won't fetch \$60,000 more than your home. The buyers of that new house will actually take a financial hit on the depreciation of the "new" premium when they go to sell.

Meanwhile, your home has mature landscaping. Real trees that provide shade and privacy, not the six-foot saplings a builder threw in before handing over the keys. Your yard is established. Your neighborhood has character. The growing pains of a new development — construction traffic, muddy roads, half the neighbors not moved in yet — are not your problem.

There's a headline that works well in this situation: "Before you buy new construction in [Development Name], see this home." Then walk buyers through the comparison honestly. You don't need to attack the competition. You just need to show them what they'd actually be getting — and what they'd be giving up — by going new.

Your older home isn't the inferior option. It's just a different value proposition, and it's your job (and mine) to frame it correctly.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Your lead photo should showcase your home's single most distinctive feature — not a generic front-of-house shot.

- A buyer's decision to click or keep scrolling happens in under a second. Win that moment with the right image.
- Write descriptions that are specific, vivid, and lead with what makes your home stand out from everything else on the market.
- If your home faces a perceived negative — like competing with new construction — reframe the comparison so buyers can see the real advantages of your property.
- You're not trying to appeal to every buyer in the market. You're trying to find the one buyer who will pay full price because your home is exactly what they've been looking for.

CHAPTER 10

The Strategy the Wealthy Use to Sell for 15% More — And Why You Should Too

I want to tell you about two condos. Same building. Same floorplan. Listed within a few months of each other in the same market. And yet one sold for dramatically more than the other.

I'll tell you exactly what the difference was — but not yet. First, let me walk you through the story, because understanding how this played out matters more than just knowing the punchline.

A TALE OF TWO SELLERS

One seller had owned his condo for several years and decided it was time to move on. He reached out to a real estate agent, did what most sellers do — cleaned things up, took some photos, put a price on it — and listed the property.

The condo sat on the market. Showings happened. Agents walked their clients through. Most of those clients walked out the door and kept looking. A few made offers, but they were low, and negotiations stalled. Months passed.

Meanwhile, a different seller in the same building decided to do things differently. He had watched what the wealthy buyers and sellers in his circle did when they listed high-end properties. He had a specific method in mind, and he made his agent agree to use it before he'd sign the listing agreement.

The agent thought the approach was unusual. Maybe even a little over the top. But the potential commission was enough to make him curious, and he agreed to give it a shot. Here's what happened next.

The condo went on the market at a price well above what comparable units in the building had sold for. The agent braced himself. He expected buyers' agents to scoff at the number. They did. He expected showings to produce no offers. For months, that was exactly what happened.

Then one afternoon, a different kind of buyer walked through. And something clicked.

That buyer didn't walk through the condo. He stood in the entryway, took it in, and made an offer before he'd finished the tour.

The place sold for significantly more than any other unit in the building. Far more than the other seller's condo sold for just a couple of months earlier.

WHAT DID THE SECOND SELLER DO DIFFERENTLY?

This is where I'm going to make you work for it just a little, because I want you to actually think about it.

Was it the location within the building? No — both units were on comparable floors.

Was it a renovation or upgrade? No — the floor plans were identical, the finishes were similar.

Was it the price itself? Obviously not — the higher price didn't cause the sale, the higher sale price was a result.

The answer is something almost every top agent knows about, something most sellers give lip service to, and something the majority of listings still don't do properly.

It's staging.

Not just "cleaning up" or "decluttering" — though those matter, and we'll get to them. I'm talking about deliberate, strategic staging. The kind of preparation that transforms a residence into a property that feels aspirational the moment you walk through the door.

THE PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND THE PRICE DIFFERENCE

Here's what staging does that almost nothing else can. It shifts a buyer from evaluating a property to feeling a property. And emotion — not logic — is what drives people to pay full price.

When a buyer walks into a beautifully staged home, they're not doing math. They're imagining their life there. They're picturing Sunday mornings in that kitchen, holidays in that living room, their kids in those bedrooms. They stop thinking about price per square foot and start thinking about how soon they can move in.

The condo that sat on the market for months? Buyers walked in and saw furniture they didn't like, rooms that felt smaller than they were, and a space that felt lived-in by someone else. Their brains stayed in evaluation mode. They compared, calculated, and decided they could probably do better somewhere else for the price.

The staged condo? Buyers walked in and felt something. That feeling is what you're buying when you stage a home. And as it turns out, buyers are willing to pay quite a bit for that feeling. I've seen this play out right here in Livingston County. Homes that sat for months, relisted with proper staging and professional photography, and sold within weeks — often at or above asking price. The home didn't change. The market didn't change. The way it was presented changed.

That's the strategy. And in the next chapter, I'll show you exactly what it looks like with a side-by-side comparison that makes the case better than any argument I could make on my own.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Staging is the strategy wealthy sellers use to get premium prices — and it works at every price point, not just luxury properties.
- The difference between a staged and an unstaged listing is often tens of thousands of dollars in final sale price.
- Staging shifts buyers from evaluation mode to emotional connection — and emotional buyers pay more.
- The physical structure of a home doesn't have to change for staging to dramatically change the result.

- If your listing expired without staging, this is one of the most impactful changes you can make before relisting.

CHAPTER 11

Why Home Staging Really Matters — With the Numbers to Prove It

I know what some of you are thinking. Staging sounds nice in theory, but does it actually move the needle on price? Or is it one of those feel-good real estate concepts that sounds better in a seminar than it works in the real world?

Fair question. Let me give you the real-world answer.

THE CASE STUDY THAT SETTLED IT FOR ME

A few years back, I was tracking sales in a townhome development — one of those neighborhoods where the builder used the same floor plan for every unit. Every home: three stories, three bedrooms, two and a half baths. Identical square footage. Identical layout. The only variation from unit to unit was the direction the unit faced and whatever the owners had done inside over the years.

I found two sales within a month of each other. Two units about five doors apart from each other on the same street. Close enough that I knew both properties well, and I could tell you with confidence that in terms of location within the development, lot desirability, and basic interior condition, these two homes were as close to equal as you're ever going to find in a real comparison.

One sold for \$40,000 more than the other.

I dug into it. Looked at every detail. The kitchens were comparable — same cabinet style, same tile floors, same general layout. Both had hardwood in the living areas and carpet in the bedrooms. There was no obvious reason for a \$40,000 gap.

Two factors explained the entire difference.

The higher-priced home had been professionally staged before it hit the market. The furniture placement, the décor, the way each room was set up — it all worked together to make the space feel intentional and inviting. Every room had a clear purpose. Nothing was cluttered or confusing.

The second factor: the agent handling the staged home invested in professional photography. Real estate photography from someone who knows how to manage light, angles, and composition — not snapshots from a phone camera or a basic point-and-shoot.

That combination — staging plus professional photos — was the entire \$40,000 difference. Not a renovation. Not a location premium. Not a hot market. Just two straightforward decisions about how to present the home.

That story is why I believe in staging as deeply as I do. When I see an expired listing in Howell or Brighton that sat on the market for six months, staging and photography are almost always the first two things I look at.

WHAT STAGING ACTUALLY MEANS

Let me clear up a common misconception. Staging is not the same as decorating. You're not trying to make the home reflect your personal style. You're doing the opposite — you're making the home feel like a clean canvas that buyers can project their own lives onto.

Staged homes typically have:

- Less furniture than the sellers normally live with — rooms feel more spacious when they're not crowded
- Neutral colors and minimal personal items — family photos, collections, and personal knickknacks disappear
- Deliberate focal points in each room — a reading nook, a conversation area, a well-lit kitchen island — so buyers understand the purpose and potential of every space
- Fresh, clean scents and bright lighting — nothing that triggers a buyer's "something is wrong here" instinct

When it's done well, buyers walk in and feel like the home is already theirs. That feeling is worth money. Consistently, measurably, in markets big and small.

YOUR TWO OPTIONS

You don't have to hire a staging company to get results, though that's one path. You have two solid options.

Option 1: Do it yourself. The chapters that follow will walk you through the specifics — decluttering, cleaning, painting, room-by-room improvements, curb appeal. If you're willing to put in the work, the return is real.

Option 2: Hire a professional stager. I have relationships with stagers who work in Livingston County and the surrounding area and who understand what today's buyers in this market respond to. If you want that list, reach out and I'll share my recommendations. A professional stager typically charges a fraction of what the added sale price is worth.

Either way, do not skip this step. The homes that struggle to sell, that sit on the market through two or three listing agreements and eventually sell for less than they should — those are almost always homes that skipped staging.

Don't be that story. Be the \$40,000 difference.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Side-by-side comparisons of identical homes consistently show staged properties selling for significantly more than unstaged ones.
- The combination of professional staging and professional photography is one of the highest-return investments a seller can make.
- Staging is about depersonalizing and presenting your home so buyers can imagine their own life there — not showcasing your personal taste.

- You can stage your home yourself using the steps in the following chapters, or hire a professional stager. Both options work.
- Contact me if you want a referral to a staging professional who knows this market.

CHAPTER 12

Make Your Home Spotless — A Room-by-Room Game Plan

Buyers decide fast. I mean really fast. Within the first few moments of walking through your front door, they've already formed an opinion about your home — one that will color everything they see for the rest of the showing.

If the first impression is "this place is clean and well-cared for," you've got them leaning toward yes. If it's "this feels cluttered" or "something smells off" or "I'm not sure what I'm looking at," you're already fighting an uphill battle.

The good news: this is almost entirely within your control. A thoroughly prepared home sells. A neglected home sits. Here's how to prepare yours.

DECLUTTER FIRST — AGGRESSIVELY

Before you clean a single thing, you need to declutter. This is not optional, and most sellers don't go nearly far enough.

The rule I use with my clients: Remove at least 50 percent of what's currently in your home.

That sounds extreme. It's not. American homes are full. Full of furniture, full of accumulated stuff, full of personality. All of that worked great when you were living there. None of it works when you're trying to sell.

Go room by room. Pull out everything that doesn't serve the space — extra furniture pieces that crowd the room, seasonal items you're storing in closets, the pile of things that landed on the kitchen counter and never left, family photos and personal collections on every wall, the kids' art on the refrigerator, the trophies on the shelf, the exercise equipment in the corner of the bedroom.

Box it up. Put it in a storage unit. Donate it, sell it at a garage sale, give it to family members. You're not throwing it out — you're getting it out of the way so your home can breathe.

After decluttering, buyers can see the home. Before, they were seeing your stuff. There's a difference.

Deep clean everything — and I mean everything. Rent a pressure washer for the driveway and exterior if you need to. Steam clean the tile grout. Wash the baseboards. Get behind the refrigerator and stove. Wipe down every cabinet front in the kitchen. Clean the inside of the microwave. Scrub the tracks of your sliding glass door.

Make sure you hit:

- Ceiling fans and light fixtures — dust accumulates up there and buyers notice
- Window blinds — run a damp cloth across each slat
- Windows inside and out — natural light is your friend, and grimy windows block it

- Baseboards and door casings — they collect dust and scuff marks and tend to be overlooked
- The inside of closets — buyers look in there, and a clean, organized closet signals a well-maintained home

PAINTING — THE HIGHEST-RETURN PREP DOLLAR YOU CAN SPEND

If your walls haven't seen fresh paint in the last couple of years, paint them before you list.

I'm serious about this. Paint is the single highest-return preparation investment you can make. A fresh coat of paint makes a home feel clean, new, and well-maintained. It covers years of scuffs, marks, and wear. And it's relatively inexpensive compared to almost any other improvement.

Paint everything: walls, ceilings, trim, window casings, and the insides of closets. Do not skip the ceilings — yellowed or water-stained ceilings are among the first things buyers notice and one of the quickest ways to create doubt.

Here's the critical rule on color: neutral, neutral, neutral.

I understand you painted the master bedroom that deep blue because you love it, and you redid the powder room in burgundy because it looked great in the magazine. That's fine for living in the house. It's not fine for selling it.

Buyers need to be able to imagine themselves in your home, and it's very hard to do that when the walls are screaming someone else's personality at them. Stick with warm white, soft gray, greige, or beige. These tones read as fresh, clean, and modern without being cold or institutional.

You are creating a canvas, not expressing yourself. The buyer gets to express themselves — after they buy.

KITCHEN AND BATHROOMS — YOUR HIGHEST-PRIORITY ROOMS

I'll be direct with you: buyers make a lot of decisions based on what they think about the kitchen and bathrooms.

These are the two rooms where cleanliness and condition matter the most. A buyer can forgive a bedroom that feels a little small. They will not forgive a grimy bathroom. Not because they can't clean it themselves, but because a dirty bathroom signals that the home hasn't been well cared for — and that makes them wonder what else has been neglected.

Kitchen priorities:

- All appliances should be spotless inside and out — including the oven interior, microwave, and dishwasher
- Counters should be clear of almost everything — a bowl of fruit, a coffee maker, and a cookbook are fine; the rest goes into storage
- Cabinet fronts should be wiped clean and free of grease
- Sink and faucet should shine

Bathroom priorities:

- Grout lines should be clean and fresh — if grout has darkened beyond cleaning, regrout
- No mold or mildew anywhere
- Mirrors gleaming
- Fresh hand towels displayed neatly
- Everything on the counter put away except one or two tasteful items
- Toilet and toilet seat in perfect condition — if the seat is old and stained, a new one costs less than fifteen dollars

HARDWARE UPDATES — CHEAP BUT IMPACTFUL

Take a good look at the knobs, pulls, hinges, and handles throughout your kitchen and bathrooms. After years of use, these pieces tend to look worn and dated even when the surrounding cabinetry is fine.

You don't necessarily need to replace everything. Hardware stores carry spray paint specifically designed for metal and brass finishes — matte black, brushed nickel, oil-rubbed bronze. A can of the right finish and an afternoon of work can make fifteen-year-old cabinet pulls look like they were installed last month.

If hardware is broken or beyond saving with paint, replace the whole set with a consistent style.

Mismatched hardware throughout a kitchen sends the wrong message about the overall condition of the home.

Other quick upgrades worth the few dollars they cost:

- New toilet seats in bathrooms
- New caulk around tubs and sinks where old caulk has yellowed or cracked
- Re-grouted tile backsplashes and shower walls
- Fresh towel bars or rings if yours are rusted or broken

ON THE QUESTION OF NEW APPLIANCES

Should you buy new appliances before listing? Here's my honest answer: it depends.

If your appliances are functional and relatively clean, a deep clean is enough. Buyers care that appliances are present and working far more than they care whether they're the latest model.

If your appliances are clearly outdated, heavily rusted, or in poor condition, upgrading makes sense — though even then, I'd have a conversation with you about whether the sale price bump is likely to exceed the cost of replacements.

Stainless steel appliances tend to read as desirable to most buyers. But an old appliance that's immaculately clean is better than a new one with a greasy front. Clean first. Upgrade only if it genuinely needs it.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Buyers form their initial impression within moments of entering. Make that impression count.
- Remove at least 50 percent of the contents of your home before any showing — rooms should breathe, not feel crowded.
- Deep clean every surface including the ones buyers might think you'd miss — they'll look in closets, behind doors, and at ceiling fixtures.
- Repaint in neutral tones before listing. It's the highest-return preparation investment available to most sellers.
- Kitchen and bathrooms are the rooms where cleanliness and condition matter most to buyers — give them extra attention.
- Update or repaint worn hardware for a fraction of the cost of full replacement.

CHAPTER 13

Details Win Home Sales — The Things That Move the Needle When Everything Else Is Equal

You've decluttered. You've painted. The kitchen is clean enough to eat off the floor. But there are other details — less glamorous, more often overlooked — that can make the difference between an offer and another showing that goes nowhere.

This chapter is about those details.

STORAGE: BUYERS NEVER HAVE ENOUGH OF IT

Ask any buyer what they wish they had more of in their home, and the answer is almost always storage.

Michigan families accumulate a lot of gear. Ski equipment for winter. Kayaks and bikes for summer. Kid stuff in every stage and size. Holiday decorations. Power tools. Sports equipment. The average Livingston County household has more stuff than the average home was designed to store, and buyers know it.

When buyers see a home with smart, organized storage — closets that are well configured, cabinets that are well utilized, a basement with clear shelf systems — they feel relief. They feel like this home will actually work for their life. That feeling is worth money.

When buyers see closets that are jammed floor to ceiling with disorganized stuff, they don't just mentally add a "this closet needs work" note. They walk away feeling like the house is too small. You can have the same square footage as the house next door and lose a sale simply because your storage reads as inadequate.

Here's what you can do.

First, after you've decluttered (and you have decluttered, right?), look at what's left in your closets and cabinets. Organize it. Use containers, bins, and shelf organizers from any home improvement store. The goal is to make your storage look spacious and intentional.

You can find closet organizer systems at Home Depot or Menards that install in a weekend and transform a cluttered closet into something that looks like a custom build. These systems cost a few hundred dollars and add perceived value far above their price.

Look beyond bedroom closets. Your linen closet, the coat closet by the front door, the cabinets in the laundry room, the built-ins in the garage — every storage space matters. Every one of them is going to be opened during showings.

THE BEDROOM COUNT TRICK

Here's something many sellers never think about: you may be able to add a bedroom to your home without any structural work.

The legal definition of a bedroom in Michigan requires a closet (among other things — adequate egress, minimum square footage). That means if you have a room that functions as an office, a hobby room, or a flex space, and that room doesn't have a closet, it's listed as "other" on the MLS — not as a bedroom.

Add a closet, and it becomes a bedroom. Add a bedroom, and you've changed your home's market position.

A three-bedroom home in Howell competes in one price band. A four-bedroom home competes in a different one — often with significantly higher sales comparables. This single improvement, done thoughtfully, can justify a substantially higher asking price.

Before you do anything, do your research. Look at what's actually selling in your area, and at what configurations. If most buyers in your neighborhood are searching for four-bedroom homes and you're listed as three, this is worth exploring. If you're already at the top of the bedroom count for your area, adding another may not move the needle.

Talk to me. I can pull the data on what buyers in your specific neighborhood are searching for and whether this makes sense for your situation.

DON'T NEGLECT THE MECHANICAL SYSTEMS

I know. The furnace isn't glamorous. But let me tell you what happens when a home inspection comes back with a "recommend replacement" note on a fifteen-year-old HVAC system or an electrical panel that an inspector flags as a concern.

One of three things happens. The buyer asks for a price reduction. The buyer asks for a credit to address the issue. Or the buyer walks.

None of those outcomes is good for you.

Michigan winters are not forgiving. Buyers in Livingston County are very aware that heating costs are real and that a failing furnace is a serious problem. A home where the mechanicals are clean and recently serviced signals a home that has been taken care of. That matters to buyers in ways that go beyond the mechanical systems themselves — it builds trust in the overall condition of the property.

Here's what I recommend:

- Have your HVAC system serviced before you list. Replace the filter. Get a technician's report showing it's functioning properly. Keep that report available to show buyers.
- Have a licensed plumber look at your water heater, any exposed supply lines, and any area where you've had drips or leaks. Staining under sinks, water marks on ceilings, or soft spots around toilets will be noticed during inspection — better to address them before listing.
- If your electrical panel is older or has been flagged in past inspections, have a licensed electrician assess it. Aluminum wiring, double-tapped breakers, and certain older panel brands are items buyers' inspectors will note, and they can derail a deal.

- Well and septic systems, common in rural Livingston County, should be recently inspected and documented.

THE POWER OF A PRE-LISTING INSPECTION

Consider getting a home inspection done on your own home before you list it.

I know this sounds counterintuitive. Why would you pay for an inspection that might find problems?

Because finding them first puts you in control. You can fix the issues before they show up in the buyer's inspection and become negotiating leverage against you. Or you can disclose them upfront with a clear plan, which builds trust with buyers and prevents the deal from falling apart mid-contract.

Sellers who do pre-listing inspections tend to have smoother transactions. The home has already been vetted. Buyers have fewer surprises. Agents on the other side have less ammunition to use in negotiation.

It's a few hundred dollars that can save thousands. Call it the most boring high-return investment in real estate.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Buyers consistently cite storage as one of their top priorities. Organize and maximize every storage space in your home before showings.
- A bedroom conversion — adding a closet to an existing flex space — can move your home into a different (and better-compensated) market category.
- Mechanical systems matter enormously to buyers. Have your HVAC serviced, plumbing checked, and electrical assessed before listing.
- A pre-listing home inspection is one of the best investments you can make — it puts you in control of any issues before buyers use them against you.
- Buyers who trust that a home is well-maintained tend to make stronger offers and fewer demands.

CHAPTER 14

Floors, Light, and Curb Appeal — First Impressions Inside and Out

When it comes to the features that buyers notice and remember, a few things consistently rise to the top: how the floors look and feel, how bright and welcoming the home feels inside, and what the home looked like before they ever walked through the door.

None of these things are magic. All of them are actionable. Let's go through them.

FLOORING — CLEAN IT BEFORE YOU REPLACE IT

Flooring is expensive. New carpet in a 2,000-square-foot home can run several thousand dollars. Hardwood installation is more. Tile work even beyond that.

The good news is that most flooring doesn't need to be replaced — it needs to be properly cleaned and cared for.

Carpet takes the most abuse in most homes. Michigan mud seasons, pets coming in from the backyard, kids with juice boxes — carpets in active households tend to look and smell like they've been through a lot, because they have.

Start with a rented carpet shampooer. Shampooing is dramatically more effective than vacuuming, and a single good shampooing session can make carpet look several years younger. Move furniture out of the rooms you're treating, follow the machine's instructions, and go over every area thoroughly. Give the carpet sufficient time to dry before anyone walks on it.

For stained carpet that shampoo alone won't fix, step up to professional steam cleaning. Steam cleaning with targeted spot treatments handles stains that shampooers can't touch. Get an estimate first — compare the cleaning cost against the cost of replacement. In most cases, professional cleaning is dramatically cheaper and produces comparable results.

If a stubborn spot remains even after steam cleaning, a tasteful area rug placed over it is a legitimate short-term solution. Be honest with buyers, though — if the carpet is worn beyond the point of repair, acknowledge it. A buyer who loves everything about your home might offer a flooring allowance rather than walking away. But a buyer who feels deceived about the carpet condition will walk away from more than just the carpet.

For hardwood floors, try a thorough cleaning and a good-quality hardwood floor polish before considering refinishing. Refinishing is disruptive and expensive. Often, you'll be surprised how much life a proper cleaning and buff restores to wood floors that looked dull and worn.

For tile, scrub the tile surfaces and, critically, clean the grout. Darkened grout is one of the fastest ways to make a bathroom or kitchen feel old and neglected. Try a dedicated grout cleaner first. If that doesn't cut it, re-grouting is inexpensive and makes a striking visual difference.

Last resort: replacement. If flooring is genuinely beyond help, look for cost-effective replacement options. Luxury vinyl plank is durable, looks excellent, and costs a fraction of hardwood. It's a legitimate choice and one that resonates with buyers who understand value.

LIGHTING — THE CHEAPEST IMPROVEMENT WITH THE BIGGEST IMPACT

This is the one I tell every seller: before you do anything else, change every light bulb in your home to the highest-lumen bulb that fits each fixture.

Bright homes sell faster. Full stop.

When buyers walk into a dim, shadowy house, they feel an unease they can't quite name. The rooms feel smaller. The corners feel suspicious. The whole showing has a slightly off energy. When they walk into a home that's flooded with light — windows clean, lamps lit, overhead lights maxed out — they feel open, welcome, and optimistic.

Light is one of the most powerful emotional triggers in real estate. And new light bulbs cost almost nothing.

Beyond bulbs:

- Clean every light fixture. Dusty and grimy fixtures reduce output and look neglected.
- Replace any fixture that is broken, flickering, or genuinely outdated. You don't need to spend a lot — clean, simple fixtures at any price point beat a broken or ugly one.
- If you have ceiling fans with blades that are warped, stained, or badly dated, replacement blades are available at any hardware store for a modest cost.
- Don't forget outdoor lighting. Buyers often look at homes in the evening, and a well-lit exterior sends a message of security and pride of ownership.

One specific note for Michigan sellers: the natural light in this part of the world ranges from abundant summer sun to the flat gray overcast of November and February. During winter showings, artificial lighting is doing more work. Make sure yours is up to the task.

THE FRONT DOOR — YOUR HOME'S HANDSHAKE

The front door is the first thing a buyer physically touches when visiting your home. That moment — hand on the knob, key in the lock, door swinging open — sets a tone for the entire showing.

Walk up to your own front door and pretend you're seeing it for the first time.

Is the door in good shape? Is the paint fresh or is it faded, cracked, or peeling? Is the lockset solid and easy to operate, or does it stick? Does the hardware look finished and secure, or does it look like something from a different decade?

A solid, modern deadbolt and handle set communicates security. Buyers feel it, often without consciously registering it. A flimsy, dated set communicates the opposite — and that unease can follow them through the rest of the showing.

Paint or refinish the door if it needs it. A fresh coat of paint in a complementary or slightly bold color — navy, deep green, red — on a front door is one of the most commented-on upgrades in buyer feedback. It's a small thing that makes a real impression.

CURB APPEAL — BECAUSE THEY'RE ALREADY JUDGING BEFORE THEY GET INSIDE

In a market like Livingston County, where neighborhoods run the range from quiet subdivision streets to rural properties with long driveways, curb appeal varies dramatically by property. But the principle is the same everywhere: buyers make a judgment about your home before they park the car.

If that judgment is negative — overgrown shrubs, a sad-looking lawn, peeling trim paint, a cluttered porch — they walk inside already looking for reasons to leave. If it's positive — a neat yard, a clean exterior, a welcoming entryway — they walk in already looking for reasons to stay.

Walk to the end of your driveway or across the street and look at your home honestly. Then work through this list:

- Lawn mowed, edged, and free of weeds
- Shrubs and trees trimmed — not sculptural, just neat
- Flower beds cleared of dead plants and debris
- Walkway clear and in good repair
- Exterior siding, trim, and fascia clean and freshly painted where needed
- Gutters clean and properly attached
- Front porch or stoop swept and free of clutter
- House numbers visible and clean

These are mostly afternoon projects. None of them require a contractor. But together, they change what a buyer sees and feels before they even knock on the door.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Clean and treat flooring before considering replacement — professional cleaning is far cheaper and often produces equally good results.
- New light bulbs throughout the home are the single cheapest, highest-impact improvement most sellers can make.
- Your front door and lockset are a buyer's first physical interaction with your home — make sure that moment creates confidence, not doubt.
- Curb appeal sets the emotional tone for the entire showing. Buyers who are impressed from the curb walk inside already inclined to say yes.
- Michigan's gray winters put extra pressure on artificial lighting and exterior presentation. Compensate accordingly.

CHAPTER 15

Why Your Listing Photos Might Be the Reason Your Home Didn't Sell

Let me say something that might surprise you.

Your home might be beautiful. It might be well-priced, well-located, and genuinely one of the better options on the market in Brighton or Howell right now. And if the photos in your previous listing were bad, none of that matters — because buyers never gave it a second look.

I'm not being harsh for the sake of it. This is just how buyers work in today's market, and if we're going to fix what went wrong with your last listing, we need to look at this honestly.

THE CAMERA DOESN'T LIE — BUT IT CAN KILL A DEAL

More than 90 percent of buyers today begin their home search online. They're on Zillow, Realtor.com, and MLS sites during lunch breaks, on the couch at night, while waiting for their kids at practice. They see thumbnails. They scroll fast. They click on the ones that look good and skip the ones that don't.

When they click through to a listing, the photos are the entire first experience of your home. Not the neighborhood. Not the price. Not the description you spent time writing. The photos. If those photos are dark, shot with a wide-angle lens that warps perspective, taken before decluttering was done, or snapped quickly from angles that make the rooms look cramped — buyers move on. They don't give the home a second look. They don't call the agent for clarification. They just swipe.

I've relisted homes that had been sitting for months, and in many cases the first thing I do is look at the existing photos. What I find often tells me exactly why the home didn't sell. Blurry images. A lead photo of the front of the house taken on an overcast day. Kitchen photos with overhead lights creating harsh shadows. Bedroom photos taken from the doorway that show the bed and nothing else.

These aren't small problems. They are the problem.

WHAT PROFESSIONAL REAL ESTATE PHOTOGRAPHY ACTUALLY DOES

A professional real estate photographer does things a listing agent with an iPhone simply cannot replicate.

They manage light. Real estate photography requires balancing interior lighting with exterior light coming through windows — a technical challenge that requires either specialized equipment, HDR techniques, or both. When done properly, photos show your home the way your eyes see it in person. When done poorly, windows blow out to white and rooms look like caves.

They know angles. Experienced real estate photographers understand which position in each room shows the space to its maximum advantage. They get wide without making rooms look

distorted. They capture depth. They make a 300-square-foot bedroom look like a place someone would actually want to sleep.

They edit. Post-processing is a standard part of real estate photography. Colors are corrected, white balance is adjusted, images are sharpened. A good edit makes your home look clean and inviting. A bad edit — or no edit — makes it look like it was shot in 2003.

I hire professional photographers for every listing I take. That's not optional in my process. The cost is a rounding error compared to what a stronger set of photos does for the listing.

SWEETEN THE DEAL — GIVE BUYERS A REASON TO CHOOSE YOU

In competitive neighborhoods — and in Livingston County there are often multiple comparable homes on the market at the same time — the listing that sells is often the one that made buyers feel they were getting something extra.

This doesn't mean discounting the price. It means thinking creatively about what you can offer that no other seller on your block is offering.

The classic move is to offer to prepay a year's worth of property taxes. If your annual tax bill is in the three to four thousand dollar range — common for homes in Brighton or Genoa Township — this is a concrete, visible benefit that shows up as real money in a buyer's pocket. It gets their attention. It creates urgency.

Other incentives that work in this market:

- A home warranty — a one-year warranty covering major systems and appliances typically runs \$400 to \$600, and buyers love the peace of mind it provides. It removes one of the "what ifs" that causes hesitation.
- Contribution to closing costs — buyers, especially first-timers, are often stretched by the cash requirements of purchasing. A seller credit toward closing costs can be the difference between an offer and a pass.
- Including appliances that are not typically conveyed — if your washer and dryer are newer and the buyer mentions they'd need to buy them, including them in the sale may cost you very little and close the deal.
- Prepaid lawn care or snow removal for the first season — this sounds small, but for a buyer moving from out of the area or one who's stretched on time, it's a genuine convenience.

The key is to think from the buyer's perspective. What friction can you remove from their purchase? What would make this home feel like the obvious choice over the one down the street?

You're not bribing anyone. You're making a smart offer to the right buyer at the right time. And sometimes, the right incentive closes a deal that was right on the edge.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Professional photography is not optional — it is the primary factor in whether buyers click on your listing or scroll past it.
- Buyers make decisions based on photos before they ever see your home in person. Bad photos mean no showings, regardless of price.
- A professional real estate photographer manages light, angles, and editing in ways that cannot be replicated by a phone camera.
- In competitive markets, incentives — prepaid taxes, home warranty, closing cost contributions — can differentiate your home from comparable listings and close deals that would otherwise stall.
- Think from the buyer's perspective: what can you offer that removes friction and makes your home the obvious choice?

CHAPTER 16

The 3-Step Formula I Use to Sell Homes Others Couldn't Sell

Let me bedirectwith you.

If your listing expired, something went wrong. It might have been the marketing. It might have been a problem with the property that no one identified or addressed. It might have been the way the home was presented to buyers. It was probably some combination of all three.

The reason I know this is that I've been called in to sell homes after one agent, two agents, sometimes three agents couldn't get the job done. And in virtually every case, the answer wasn't "the home is unsellable." The answer was "nobody diagnosed the actual problem."

Here's what that looks like in practice, and here's the framework I use to fix it.

RESULTS THAT SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

Before I walk you through the process, let me share a few of the situations I've worked through in this market.

A home in Howell sat on the market for nearly a year. Two agents had listed it. Neither had any showings produce a serious offer. When I took the listing, I started from scratch — new photos, new description, new marketing strategy built around the home's unique features. Under contract in six weeks.

A property in rural Livingston County had been listed for seven months with an agent who marketed it as a standard residential listing. The home sat on several acres and had a substantial outbuilding. I repositioned the marketing to lead with the land and the outbuilding for buyers who needed that combination — hobby farmers, small business owners, and buyers relocating from areas where that kind of space is simply unavailable. The right buyer found it within the month.

A home in Brighton had gone through a full listing term with no sale. The price wasn't the issue — it was right for the market. What we found when I went in was a title complication that had never been identified, let alone resolved. We got the right attorney involved, cleared the issue, and the home sold within two weeks of the resolution without any price reduction.

Three different situations. Three different root causes. One process that caught all of them.

STEP 1: IMPROVE THE MARKETING

This is where most expired listings went wrong, and it's the first thing I address.

I conduct what I call a marketing audit on every expired listing I take. I look at what was done before and ask: did the marketing actually reach the right buyers? Was the home's best feature front and center, or was it buried or missing entirely? Were the photos professional-grade and visually compelling? Was the listing description doing real work, or was it generic filler?

In most cases I find the same issues: photos that didn't represent the home well, descriptions that were interchangeable with any other listing in the zip code, and a marketing strategy that was essentially "put it on the MLS and hope someone shows up."

Hope is not a marketing plan.

I build a specific strategy for each property. Where are the right buyers for this home likely to be found? What is the home's strongest feature, and how do we make sure that feature is what buyers see first? What platforms and channels make sense for this listing? How do we create a sense of urgency and desirability rather than a feeling that this is a home that's been sitting?

Better marketing produces better results. In most cases, this step alone is what turns an expired listing into a sale.

STEP 2: SOLVE WHATEVER IS BLOCKING THE SALE

Sometimes there's something specific holding the sale back that has nothing to do with price or marketing.

Title issues. HOA violations that need to be cleared. An estate situation where authority to sell isn't fully established. A boundary dispute. An old lien. A disclosure question that was handled poorly and made buyers nervous. A condition issue that an inspection flagged and no one followed up on.

These problems don't resolve themselves. They compound over time as days on market accumulate and buyers move on.

Good real estate agents are problem solvers, not just marketers. When I take an expired listing, I'm not just relisting it and hoping the result is different. I'm looking for whatever the obstacle is and bringing in the right people — attorneys, title specialists, inspectors, contractors — to clear it.

Price reductions are not problem-solving. They're cost-shifting. If the actual problem is a title defect, reducing the price doesn't fix the title — it just makes you take less money for a home that's still unsellable until the issue is resolved. Find the problem first. Then solve it. Then price appropriately.

STEP 3: IMPROVE THE SHOWING CONDITION

Buyers who tour a well-prepared, well-presented home make different decisions than buyers who tour a home that hasn't been properly prepared.

The chapters before this one covered the specifics: staging, cleaning, decluttering, paint, flooring, lighting, curb appeal. This step is about making sure all of that is actually done before the first new buyer walks through the door.

Staged homes consistently sell faster and for more money. This is well-documented and not a matter of debate. A home in excellent showing condition — even if not formally staged — commands better prices than a home that reads as tired or neglected.

When I bring a home back to market, I walk the property with the sellers and we build a specific preparation plan. Not a generic list of suggestions — a prioritized plan based on this specific home, this specific market, and what today's buyers in this area actually respond to.

BACK TO BASICS — THE COACHING APPROACH

Imagine a basketball coach who takes over a team that's been losing. The previous coaches had elaborate playbooks, sophisticated schemes, and complex strategies. And the team was still losing.

This coach comes in and does something the players didn't expect. First practice, first day, she walks into the gym, tosses a ball to the starting point guard, and says, "Show me your free throw."

The guard shoots. The form is a mess. So is the next player's. And the next. The team has been running complex plays without mastering the fundamentals. The coach scraps the playbook for the first month and they work nothing but the basics: ball handling, defensive footwork, free throws, boxing out. The stuff that wins games regardless of the scheme on top of it.

By midseason, the team is winning.

Your home sale is the same. I've seen sellers blast social media with listing posts, print full-color flyers, host open houses every weekend — and still not sell. Because none of it works when the fundamentals aren't right. Bad photos. No staging. A unaddressed problem that keeps coming up in due diligence. A description that says nothing.

I don't start with the elaborate plays. I start with the basics, make sure they're done right, and then build the strategy on top of a solid foundation.

If your home expired, the fundamentals weren't right. Let's figure out which ones and fix them.

That's what I do, and that's why homes that didn't sell before sell when I list them.

Give me a call. Let's talk about what happened and what we do differently this time.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- An expired listing is a diagnostic problem, not a price problem. Find the real cause before relisting.
- Step 1: Audit and rebuild the marketing. Better photos, better descriptions, a strategy built around your home's best features and the right buyer for those features.
- Step 2: Identify and solve any specific obstacle holding the sale back — title issues, condition issues, disclosure problems, liens, HOA complications. Fix the problem rather than discounting around it.
- Step 3: Prepare the home properly for showings. Staging and presentation are not optional extras — they directly affect both how quickly your home sells and how much it sells for.
- The basics — done right — win every time. Complex marketing on top of a weak foundation doesn't work. Master the fundamentals first.

- I have a documented track record of selling homes others couldn't sell. If your listing expired, let's talk.

CHAPTER 17

Know When to Hold 'Em: Why the Right Negotiator Always Wins

Let me give you some straight talk before we get into the nuts and bolts of negotiation.

The person buying your home has likely bought and sold homes before. Or they have an agent who has. Either way, there's a real chance they know more about real estate negotiation than you do — and if you're not prepared, that gap can cost you tens of thousands of dollars.

That's the uncomfortable truth. Here's the good news: you don't have to be a master negotiator to protect yourself and your money. You just need to understand the fundamentals. And that's exactly what the next few chapters are going to give you.

TWO THINGS DETERMINE WHO WINS AT THE TABLE

Every real estate negotiation comes down to two factors:

- How motivated each party is to make the deal happen.
- How skilled each party is at negotiating.

Sometimes a highly motivated seller faces a calm, well-prepared buyer. That's when things can go sideways fast. Let me walk you through a scenario I've seen play out right here in Livingston County.

A homeowner in Howell had his house on the market for seven months. He'd already taken a job in Columbus, Ohio, and was paying rent there while still carrying his mortgage back home. Every month that went by was another mortgage payment, another utility bill, another lawn service charge. His stress level was through the roof. He'd mentioned in a neighborhood Facebook group that he "just needed to get out from under this house," and even posted a photo of himself looking exhausted standing in front of a moving truck.

Meanwhile, a buyer — a sharp woman who does this kind of research before she ever makes an offer — did her homework. She found his Facebook post in about ten minutes. She checked the MLS history and saw the home had been sitting. She noted the price reductions. She called the listing agent and asked a few casual questions, learning the seller had already relocated.

By the time she walked through the front door, she knew everything she needed to know. He knew almost nothing about her.

She loved the house. In fact, her husband was half-afraid she'd scare the seller off by being too eager. But she wasn't worried. She stayed cool, made a calculated offer, and held firm. The seller, carrying two housing payments and mentally exhausted, accepted a price that was \$38,000 below what the home was actually worth on the open market.

Both parties wanted this deal done. But only one of them had done the work to understand the other's position. And that made all the difference.

DON'T GIVE YOUR HAND AWAY BEFORE THE GAME STARTS

That story isn't meant to scare you — it's meant to prepare you. The buyer in that scenario didn't do anything illegal or even unethical. She gathered publicly available information and used it wisely. That's smart negotiating.

Your job is to make sure you're not the seller in that story. Don't post about your timeline, your financial stress, or your urgency on social media. Don't tell the buyer's agent how long you've been waiting to move. Don't volunteer that you've already made an offer on another house.

When you hold your cards close to your chest and go into negotiations informed and calm, you dramatically increase your chances of walking away with the number you deserve.

The chapters that follow are going to show you how to do exactly that. We'll cover the mistakes that sink sellers, the techniques that work, and how to position yourself to win even when a buyer comes in hard.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Two factors drive every negotiation outcome: motivation and skill. The party who controls both wins.
- A buyer who researches your situation — your timeline, your financial pressure, your online activity — has a significant advantage over an unprepared seller.
- Never publicly reveal your urgency, your deadline, or your bottom line before negotiations begin.
- You don't need to be a professional negotiator to protect yourself — you need a strategy. The next few chapters give you one.

CHAPTER 18

The Six Negotiation Mistakes That Cost Home Sellers the Most Money

Here's a truth that surprises a lot of people: what you avoid doing in a negotiation matters more than what you actually do.

You can use all the right techniques and still blow it with one careless comment. One slip, one wrong move, and a buyer who might have paid your asking price ends up getting the house for \$20,000 less. I've watched it happen.

Let's walk through the six most common negotiating mistakes home sellers make — so you can sidestep all of them.

NEGOTIATING MISTAKE #1: NEVER LEARNING WHY THE BUYER WANTS YOUR HOME

Most sellers assume a buyer's decision is 100% about price. It's not. Buyers are driven by emotion, timing, location, and a dozen other factors that have nothing to do with the number on the listing sheet.

Maybe your home backs up to a nature preserve and the buyer has been searching for exactly that for two years. Maybe they're moving from Novi and your Brighton home sits in the exact school district they've been targeting for their kids. Maybe they've got family nearby on your street and this property gives them something that no other listing in Livingston County can offer. Any of those things make them willing to pay more — sometimes significantly more.

Your goal is to figure out what's driving them. If you get a chance to talk with the buyer directly, ask open-ended questions. "What brought you out to Brighton?" or "Is this area new to you?" can start a conversation that reveals a lot. You'd be surprised how much people share when you just ask. "Oh, my parents live on Oak Knoll Drive, we've always wanted to be close to them" tells you everything you need to know.

If their agent is the point of contact, ask the agent: What drew your clients to this home? Have they been looking long? Is the timing flexible on their end?

The information you gather here is gold. Use it.

NEGOTIATING MISTAKE #2: SPLITTING THE DIFFERENCE

This is the one I see most often, and it quietly costs sellers thousands of dollars every single time.

Here's how it plays out. A home is listed at \$425,000. A buyer comes in at \$400,000. The seller thinks, "Well, we're \$25,000 apart — let's just meet in the middle at \$412,500." Done. Easy. Nobody fights.

But here's the problem: that "easy" middle ground cost you \$12,500 you didn't have to give away.

There's no law that says you have to split the difference. There's no rule written anywhere that obligates you to compromise at the exact midpoint. It just feels like the polite thing to do. But politeness in a negotiation is expensive.

A better approach: when a buyer comes in low, counter closer to your original price. Make them move more than you move. Give ground slowly. A home in Brighton came in \$22,000 under asking last spring. The seller countered at only \$5,000 off the list price. The buyer came up \$10,000. The seller gave another \$3,000. Final sale price? A full \$14,000 more than a simple split-the-difference approach would have produced. The seller stayed patient, moved in small increments, and let the buyer do the heavy lifting.

NEGOTIATING MISTAKE #3: TALKING TOO MUCH

I can't stress this enough. Silence is a powerful negotiating tool, and most people are too uncomfortable with it to use it effectively.

When a buyer or their agent is touring your home or discussing terms, be friendly — but be brief. Don't fill every quiet moment with information about your situation. Don't explain why you're selling in detail. Don't mention that you've already put an offer in on a place in Ann Arbor. Don't talk about how long the house has been on the market or why the last deal fell through.

Every piece of information you volunteer is a data point a smart buyer will use against you.

Think about what happens if you let it slip that you're already under contract on your next home and your close date is locked in. Suddenly, the buyer knows you're on a hard deadline. They may slow-play the negotiation, knowing that as the clock ticks, you'll get more flexible. That's not paranoia — that's exactly how experienced buyers think.

When someone asks why you're selling, keep it simple. "We're looking for a change of scenery" or "We want to be closer to family" is enough. You don't need to hand them a roadmap to your pressure points.

NEGOTIATING MISTAKE #4: SHOWING YOUR BOTTOM LINE

Buyers will ask for it. Sometimes directly: "So, what's the lowest you'd actually take?" Sometimes more subtly: "Give us a number you'd be comfortable with and we'll work around that."

Don't answer. Not ever.

You've already signaled your position by setting a list price. That's your first move. Making another move before they commit to an offer is giving away negotiating ground for free.

Here's a real-life example from outside of real estate that makes this crystal clear. A friend of mine was buying a piece of used landscaping equipment from a guy down in Ann Arbor. He was prepared to pay up to \$3,200 for it. He knew that was fair market value and he was comfortable there.

But instead of making an offer first, he asked the seller what he wanted for it. The seller, unsure of the value and a little eager to move it, said \$2,400.

My friend bought the equipment for \$2,400. He saved \$800 because he waited two seconds and asked the other guy to go first.

The same dynamic applies to your home. Let them tell you what they're offering. Then respond.

NEGOTIATING MISTAKE #5: LETTING YOUR EMOTIONS RUN THE TABLE

You've lived in this home. You've built memories here. You've put your own money and sweat into it. It is personal to you.

But the negotiation table is not the place to let that show.

Some buyers make lowball offers as a pure tactic — they're not trying to insult you, they're just starting low to see where the floor is. If you get offended and shut down the conversation, you may have just walked away from a buyer who would have paid close to your asking price if you'd kept talking.

I've seen home sellers in Livingston County terminate negotiations over a \$5,000 gap, purely out of frustration — and then sit on the market for another four months watching that same \$5,000 become irrelevant in comparison to the carrying costs they piled up waiting.

Your goal isn't to win an argument. Your goal is to sell your home for the most money possible. Stay focused on that. If a buyer is being difficult or rude, that's their problem. Your job is to stay professional, keep the conversation moving, and let your agent help you navigate the friction. A deal that closes at a slightly lower price than you wanted still beats a deal that collapsed because someone said something that rubbed you the wrong way.

NEGOTIATING MISTAKE #6: JUMPING AT THE FIRST COUNTEROFFER DEADLINE

When a buyer submits an offer, they often want an answer immediately. They'll say the offer expires tonight. They'll push their agent to call yours every few hours. They create urgency — sometimes real, sometimes manufactured.

Here's what that urgency usually means: they really want your house and they're afraid someone else is going to buy it first.

Breathe. Take your full time. There's nothing wrong with using the deadline clock to your advantage. Use that time to think clearly, gather information, and consult with your agent rather than reacting in the heat of the moment.

Buyers who are truly committed will wait. Buyers who walk away over a 24-hour deliberation period were probably not going to be easy to close anyway.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Find out why the buyer wants your home — price is rarely the only factor, and their motivation is your leverage.

- Never automatically split the difference — move in small increments and let the buyer make the bigger concessions.
- Keep your personal situation private — don't reveal timelines, urgency, or financial pressure.
- Never share your bottom line — let the buyer make the first offer.
- Keep emotion out of it — lowball offers and difficult buyers are part of the process, not personal attacks.
- Use the full time available to you before countering — urgency from the buyer usually means they really want your home.

CHAPTER 19

Five Negotiation Moves That Put More Money in Your Pocket

Now that you know what not to do, let's talk about what to do instead.

The moment that first offer lands in your lap can feel disorienting, especially if you've never sold a home before. You've cleaned, decluttered, staged, and fretted — and now someone is standing across the table with a number written on a piece of paper. What do you do with it?

There's no single right answer, but there are several proven approaches that work. The best move depends on your specific situation — how long the home has been on the market, how much buyer interest you're seeing, and how flexible your timeline is. Here's a breakdown of the five most effective techniques I use for clients here in Livingston County.

NEGOTIATION TECHNIQUE #1: THE STANDARD OFFER-COUNTEROFFER APPROACH

This is the most familiar route. A buyer submits an offer, you respond with a counter, they respond to that, and so on until you reach an agreement or part ways.

WHAT WORKS ABOUT IT

It's straightforward. Both sides know the rules. If a buyer is motivated and acting in good faith, this back-and-forth moves relatively quickly. For sellers who have a realistic price and a buyer who's close to it, a few rounds of counters can get you across the finish line without drama.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK ABOUT IT

The moment you accept an offer and sign the contract, your home is off the market. Full stop.

Here's the scenario that keeps me up at night on behalf of my clients: You've been fielding a somewhat low offer from a buyer for several days. You finally give in and sign. Four hours later, your agent gets a call from a buyer who saw your home last week and wants to submit an offer at full asking price.

Too late. You're legally bound to the first contract. That second buyer will buy someone else's house, and you'll spend the next sixty days hoping the first deal closes — while quietly wondering what might have been.

The standard approach works well when market conditions are stable and the offer is reasonably strong. It's less ideal when buyer traffic is picking up or an open house is coming up soon.

NEGOTIATION TECHNIQUE #2: REJECT THE LOW OFFER — AND INVITE THEM BACK

This takes a little nerve, but it works.

When a buyer comes in significantly below your price, you have every right to simply say no. Not "no, unless..." Not a formal counter. Just: we're not accepting this offer, but we'd welcome a more competitive bid.

This does a few things simultaneously. It signals that you're not desperate. It tells the buyer their opening number was nowhere close. And it keeps the door open without locking you into a counteroffer that the buyer can accept and hold you to.

Think about what a buyer is actually doing with a low offer: they're testing you. They want to see how far down you'll go. When you reject outright and tell them to come back stronger, you answer that test immediately. Serious buyers — the ones who actually want to live in your home — will come back with a much more reasonable number.

This approach works best when your home just came on the market, or when you have an open house scheduled within the next week or two. The more potential competition a buyer senses, the more seriously they'll take the message you're sending.

NEGOTIATION TECHNIQUE #3: THE CONTROLLED OPEN HOUSE BIDDING APPROACH

This is one of my favorite strategies, and when it works — and it often does — it can push your sale price above your asking price.

Here's the concept: When you list your home, you simultaneously schedule an open house three to five days out. You also state clearly in your listing that you will not be reviewing any offers until after the open house concludes.

I know what you're thinking — why would you refuse to look at offers? Aren't you leaving money on the table?

Actually, you're doing the opposite.

When buyers see a home that has an open house approaching and a "no offers until after the open house" clause, something powerful kicks in: competition. Human beings are wired to want things that other people want. Every buyer who walks through your home on that open house day knows they are walking through alongside other potential buyers. Every one of them is wondering who else loved the house. Every one of them is wondering how high they need to go to win.

You've created an auction atmosphere without a single buyer having to know how many others are genuinely interested. Even if only one offer comes out of it, that buyer made their decision in a competitive environment — and that alone typically produces a stronger number.

I used this strategy last year for a family selling their home near Brighton. Three families attended the open house. Two made offers. The final accepted price came in \$11,000 above the original asking price.

NEGOTIATION TECHNIQUE #4: PUT AN EXPIRATION DATE ON YOUR COUNTEROFFER

When you make a counteroffer, don't leave it open-ended. Give it a firm deadline — and make it shorter than whatever the standard is in your market.

If the customary response window in Michigan is three days, counter with two. If it's forty-eight hours, make yours thirty-six. This communicates that you're serious, you're not waiting around, and you have other options you could be pursuing.

There's another reason this matters beyond psychological pressure. Every day your home sits in a pending-offer limbo without a signed contract is a day you're off the market but not officially sold. If the buyer drags their feet and ultimately walks away, you've lost that time from your market days count. And as we discussed earlier, days on market affects how buyers perceive your home's value.

A clear expiration date protects you from that. It also creates just enough urgency to move a motivated buyer from "we're thinking about it" to "let's do this."

One word of caution: be reasonable. If a buyer is genuinely close to your price and simply needs another day to talk things over, an unnecessarily tight deadline can sour the relationship. Use this tool thoughtfully, not aggressively.

NEGOTIATION TECHNIQUE #5: COVER THE CLOSING COSTS — BUT RAISE THE PRICE

This one sounds counterintuitive at first, so stay with me.

Buyers, especially first-time buyers, sometimes get all the way to the finish line only to realize they're short on cash. They've used most of their savings on the down payment, and closing costs — which typically run around 3% of the purchase price — feel like an unexpected gut punch.

So they ask you to pay those closing costs.

Your first instinct is probably to say no. And I get it. Why should you hand back money you've already negotiated?

But here's the move: agree to pay the closing costs, then raise the purchase price by the same amount.

Let's put some numbers to it. You're asking \$380,000. The buyer offers \$360,000 and asks you to cover roughly \$11,000 in closing costs. If you accept that as-is, you're walking away with \$349,000 net.

Instead, counter at \$380,000 with you covering the closing costs. The buyer still needs a loan for \$380,000, but they no longer need to bring \$11,000 in cash to the table. You net \$369,000 after covering costs — which is \$20,000 more than their original offer would have given you.

Why does this work? Because buyers can often borrow more than they can save. Getting an extra \$11,000 added to a mortgage costs them very little per month. But coming up with \$11,000 in cash before closing feels impossible.

A bank will need to appraise the home to support the higher price, so this approach only works when your home's value genuinely backs up the number. But when it does, it's a clean, effective way to close a deal that might otherwise fall apart over cash-on-hand issues.

THE POWER MOVE: THREATEN TO TAKE IT OFF THE MARKET

I'll leave you with one final technique — one to use only when you feel a negotiation slipping away from you.

If a buyer is grinding you down, making unreasonable demands, or pushing you toward a number that just doesn't work, you have the right to end the conversation entirely. Tell them you've decided to take the home off the market for now.

Watch what happens next.

The buyer who had all the leverage a moment ago is suddenly in a very different position. They've been negotiating against you — but now the thing they want isn't even available. They need to make their case to you for why you should sell to them, and they need to make it convincingly.

This isn't a bluff you should throw around casually. It's a tactic for genuine moments of frustration when the deal is going nowhere and you'd rather start over than give more ground. But used at the right moment, it shifts the entire dynamic of the conversation in your favor.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- The standard offer-counteroffer approach works well in stable markets but locks you out of other offers once you sign.
- Rejecting a low offer outright — and inviting the buyer to return with a better number — signals strength and filters out casual deal-seekers.
- Holding offers until after an open house creates a competitive environment that can drive your final price above asking.
- A short expiration date on your counteroffer creates urgency and protects your market days.
- Agreeing to pay closing costs in exchange for a higher purchase price can close cash-strapped buyers without reducing your net proceeds.
- Taking your home off the market is a last-resort power move that immediately shifts negotiating leverage back in your favor.

CHAPTER 20

Why Your Dog Really, Really Wants You to Call Me

(This chapter is for dog owners. Cat owners, I apologize—your cat doesn't care either way.)

A LETTER FROM YOUR DOG:

Dear Human,

I need to talk to you about something. I've been thinking about this for a while, and I finally decided I had to speak up. It's about the house. Specifically, it's about selling the house.

I know you've been stressed. I can feel it. You keep looking at your phone and making that face you make when you're worried. I don't like that face.

But here's the thing that's really bothering me.

The showings.

Every time someone comes to look at the house, I get put in my crate. You know I hate the crate. Last week I was in there for three and a half hours. I could hear people walking around upstairs, and I couldn't do a single thing about it. I don't know if they touched my toys. I have to assume they touched my toys.

And here's the worst part: those people didn't even buy the house! They walked through, they said some things in low voices, and then they left. I suffered through three and a half hours in that crate, and it was for nothing.

This has happened too many times now.

So I started thinking — because I think a lot while I'm in the crate — what if there was a way to only bring serious buyers to the house? What if the people who came through the door already knew everything about the house and were already excited about it before they ever showed up?

We would have fewer showings. But the ones we had would actually matter.

I did some research (I use your laptop when you're not home — sorry about that). There's a strategy called "Sell It Before You Show It." The idea is that instead of just putting the house on a website and hoping someone wanders in, you give buyers so much great information upfront — photos, videos, details about the neighborhood, what makes this house special — that by the time they schedule a showing, they're already halfway to making an offer.

The showings that do happen are faster and more focused. The buyers who show up are serious. Less time in the crate for me. Less time cleaning the house for three hours before every showing, only to have someone leave without so much as a follow-up call, for you.

This seems like a good deal for both of us.

There's actually a real story that made me think of this. A family in southeast Michigan had their home on the market for eighteen months. Eighteen months! Two different agents. Countless showings. No sale.

Then they hired a new agent who used the "Sell It Before You Show It" approach — doing the marketing work upfront to pre-sell buyers on the home before they ever set foot inside. Within 65 days, the house was sold.

Here's the part that gets me. The buyers who purchased it were smart, savvy negotiators. They had built a successful business and were not the kind of people who overpaid for anything. But they walked in already knowing they wanted that house, and the final sale price came in \$57,500 higher than a nearly identical home that had sold just seven doors down on the same street.

Not because the price was lowered. It wasn't — not by a single dollar. Not because it was suddenly visible to new buyers. It had been on the MLS for a year and a half.

It sold for more because the right buyers arrived already convinced.

That's what good marketing does. It doesn't just find buyers — it finds buyers who are ready.

Now, I'm a dog. I understand my motivations are somewhat self-interested here. Fewer showings means fewer hours in the crate, and that is genuinely my primary concern. I'll admit that freely.

But here's the thing: what's good for me in this situation is also what's good for you. You get less disruption to your daily life, fewer last-minute clean-up scrambles, and ultimately, a better buyer pool. And I get to stay on the couch instead of counting ceiling tiles in a crate.

This seems like a problem with an obvious solution.

I believe Tom Weaver can help with this. His contact information is at the end of the book. I have already nudged it open to that page with my nose. It wasn't easy.

Please think about it.

With love (and a very sincere personal interest in the outcome),

Your Dog

Okay, I'll take it from here.

Your dog makes a fair point. The "Sell It Before You Show It" strategy is something I implement for my clients here in Livingston County, and the results consistently outperform the standard list-and-wait approach. If you'd like to see how it works for your specific home, I'd be glad to walk you through it. My contact information is at the back of this book.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Most traditional home marketing brings in browsers — the "Sell It Before You Show It" approach attracts buyers who are already sold on the home before they arrive.

- Pre-marketing your home with detailed information, photos, and compelling content up front leads to fewer showings — but more qualified ones.
- Homes marketed this way can sell faster and for more money, even after sitting on the market for months with no results under a different approach.
- Fewer showings means less disruption to your daily life — and, if relevant, less time your dog spends anxious in a crate.

CHAPTER 21

The \$36,000 Mistake You Can Avoid With One Phone Call

I want totell youabouta guyl'll callGary.

Gary owned a nice ranch home in Genoa Township, just outside of Brighton. He'd kept it up well over the years — new roof, updated kitchen, fresh paint. He was proud of it, and he should have been.

An agent called him one afternoon with what sounded like great news: a qualified buyer was ready to make an offer on his home sight unseen. The buyer had been pre-approved, the agent said, and was prepared to move quickly. The number on the table was \$297,000.

Gary hadn't looked at any comparable sales. He hadn't asked another agent for a second opinion. He hadn't done an appraisal. He thought \$297,000 sounded decent, figured the smooth process was worth something, and accepted the offer.

Two months later, his neighbor — whose home was slightly smaller, with a kitchen that hadn't been updated since the Obama administration — sold for \$334,000.

Gary left \$37,000 on the table. Not because he did anything wrong in the negotiation. Not because he didn't love his home. Because he didn't know what it was worth before he agreed to sell it.

PRICING YOUR HOME IS A DANGER ZONE — AND HERE'S WHY

Here's the honest truth about homeowners and pricing: we are almost never objective about the value of our own homes. Either we've convinced ourselves our home is worth more than the market will bear, or we're so eager to be done with the process that we'll accept any number that sounds reasonable. Neither of those leads to a good outcome.

Add to that the pressure of a smooth-talking agent presenting a "ready buyer," and you've got a recipe for exactly what happened to Gary.

The solution is simple: know your number before any conversation about selling even begins.

DANGER ZONE #1: PRICING YOUR HOME TOO LOW

Conventional wisdom says a low price will attract more buyers and create competition. Sometimes that's true — but only when conditions are right and the strategy is executed well.

When a home is priced below market value without a clear plan behind it, something else happens. Buyers start wondering what's wrong with it. In Livingston County, where buyers research everything, a price that looks too good to be true often gets treated with suspicion rather than enthusiasm. They assume there's a structural issue, a neighborhood problem, or something that the seller isn't disclosing.

That suspicion is hard to shake, even after they walk through and see that the home is in great condition. A mispriced home can actually sit longer than a properly priced one, and the longer it sits, the more leverage buyers have when they finally do make an offer.

DANGER ZONE #2: PRICING YOUR HOME TOO HIGH

This one's more common, and the consequences are just as real.

When a home is overpriced, it sits. And while it's sitting, every week that passes sends a message to every buyer who sees it: something must be wrong here. Smart buyers check days on market. When they see a home has been listed for 60, 90, or 120 days, their first thought isn't "what a great opportunity" — it's "what are they hiding?" and "how far will they come down?"

Meanwhile, your home is absorbing carrying costs — mortgage, taxes, insurance, utilities, maintenance — with no end in sight. And when you finally do reduce the price, you've often had to go lower than your actual market value just to counteract the stale listing stigma.

Start at the right price. You won't regret it.

HOW TO PRICE IN A SELLER'S MARKET

When demand is high and inventory is low — which we've seen frequently in the Brighton and Howell corridors over the past several years — recent comparable sales matter less than current active listings.

If nothing comparable to your home is currently available for under \$550,000, and a similar home sold for \$510,000 six months ago, you don't have to price at \$510,000. Prices have moved. Price to match what the current market will actually support, not just what it supported six months ago.

HOW TO PRICE IN A BUYER'S MARKET

When supply is high and buyers have options, the calculation changes. Your competition isn't just the home around the corner — it's every other motivated seller in your price range. In a buyer's market, your home needs to be the obvious choice when a buyer stacks it against the alternatives.

That doesn't mean giving it away. It means pricing accurately, presenting it well, and not deluding yourself that the market will come to you. It won't. You have to meet it.

HOW TO FIND ACCURATE COMPARABLE SALES

The most reliable way to understand what your home is worth is through a Comparative Market Analysis — a CMA. As a licensed agent in Michigan with deep knowledge of the Livingston County market, I prepare CMAs for sellers at no charge. It covers what similar homes have sold for recently, what's currently active and competing with yours, and how those factors shape a realistic pricing strategy for your specific property.

You can also research on your own using sites like Zillow or Realtor.com. Search for homes with similar square footage, bedroom count, lot size, and condition within a two-mile radius and sold within the last six months. That'll give you a reasonable ballpark. Just understand that the online estimate tools — Zillow's Zestimate, for example — are algorithmic guesses. They're not appraisals. They can be off by tens of thousands of dollars in either direction, especially in a market with limited inventory like ours.

COMPARABLE SALES TO IGNORE

Not all sales are created equal. Some transactions reflect distressed conditions that have nothing to do with what your home is worth. Specifically:

Bank-owned and REO properties: When a bank takes back a home through foreclosure, they sell it to get it off their books, not to maximize value. Those sales typically come in 5% to 10% below fair market value even for homes in decent condition. Don't use them as benchmarks for your pricing.

Short sales: Short sales involve sellers who owe more than the home is worth and are negotiating with their lender to accept less. The pool of buyers for short sales is smaller, the timelines are unpredictable, and the prices don't reflect what motivated buyers will pay for a well-positioned home.

Neglected or severely dated homes: A home that hasn't been maintained — peeling paint, broken mechanicals, outdated everything — will sell for less than a maintained home in the same neighborhood. That price gap doesn't apply to your home if you've taken care of it. Don't let someone else's deferred maintenance set your ceiling.

IT'S ALL ABOUT TIMING

The first serious offer you receive is often close to the strongest offer you'll receive. Market research consistently shows that the longer a home sits, the lower the eventual sale price tends to be. Buyers know this, and they'll wait you out if you're overpriced.

Price it right from the beginning, and you attract the buyers who are serious, competitive, and ready to move. That's the combination that gets you both speed and money.

If you'd like me to run a CMA for your home — free, no obligation — my contact information is at the back of this book. It takes me about twenty-four hours to pull together, and it will give you a clear, data-backed picture of what your home is actually worth in today's Livingston County market.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Not knowing your home's true market value before you agree to sell is one of the most expensive mistakes a seller can make.
- Pricing too low can signal problems that don't exist and invite suspicious buyers rather than competitive ones.

- Pricing too high leads to a stale listing, reduced leverage, and ultimately a lower final price than a well-priced home would have produced.
- In a seller's market, price to reflect current conditions — not just past comparable sales.
- In a buyer's market, accurate pricing and strong presentation are essential to standing out among the competition.
- Bank-owned properties, short sales, and neglected homes are not reliable benchmarks for pricing a well-maintained home.
- A free Comparative Market Analysis from a qualified local agent is the most accurate and lowest-risk way to set your price.

CHAPTER 22

Don't Sign Anything Until You Read This

Let me paint you a picture.

You've been through everything. You cleaned the house, kept it show-ready for weeks, sat through six showings, and finally — finally — a buyer makes you an offer you're happy with. You sign the contract. The home comes off the market. You start mentally planning your next move.

Then, forty-five days into the process, your agent calls with news you didn't want to hear: the buyer's loan fell through. They couldn't get financing. The deal is dead.

You've just lost more than a month of market time. While your home was sitting under contract, other buyers moved on. The buyer who stopped by your open house and seemed genuinely interested? They bought a house in Howell three weeks ago. The spring selling rush you were counting on? Half over.

And now you're starting from scratch.

This happens more than you'd think, and the heartbreaking part is that it's almost entirely preventable.

WHAT PREQUALIFICATION IS — AND WHY IT MATTERS

Before you sign any purchase contract with any buyer, you should know — not hope, not assume, but know — that they are actually capable of obtaining a mortgage.

Prequalification is the process of verifying that a buyer meets the income, credit, and debt requirements necessary to get a loan for the amount they're offering. It's not the same as preapproval, which goes a step further, but even basic prequalification weeds out the buyers who are going to waste your time.

Think of it this way: a buyer who can't prove they're qualified to borrow \$380,000 has no business making an offer on a \$380,000 home. And yet it happens constantly, because sellers are so eager to get a contract signed that they don't ask the right questions first.

HOW I CAN HELP YOU WITH THIS — AT NO COST

Here's something I offer to all of my clients that most agents don't: I will personally help prequalify any prospective buyer before you ever sign a contract with them.

This isn't a sales pitch for a side business. It's a service I provide because I've watched too many good sellers get hurt by unqualified buyers, and I don't want that to happen to you. If a buyer is interested in your home, I can evaluate their financial picture, determine whether they're realistically positioned to get a loan, and give you a straight answer before you commit to anything.

If they're not in a position to buy right now, you'll know that before you take your home off the market — not sixty days later when you've lost the selling season.

And if they are qualified? You can sign that contract with actual confidence, not just hope.

UNDERSTANDING THE TYPES OF LOANS YOUR BUYER MIGHT USE

Part of evaluating a buyer's ability to close is understanding what kind of financing they're working with. Here's a quick overview of the most common loan types:

CONVENTIONAL LOANS: These are standard mortgage products not backed by a government agency. They typically require stronger credit scores and a larger down payment than government-backed options, but they're the most flexible and widely used loan type. Conventional buyers are often the easiest to close with because their financing conditions are the most predictable.

FHA LOANS: Backed by the Federal Housing Administration, FHA loans allow buyers with lower credit scores or smaller down payments to qualify for a mortgage. They're a great option for first-time buyers, but they come with specific property condition requirements. If your home has deferred maintenance issues, an FHA buyer may face complications at the appraisal stage that a conventional buyer wouldn't.

VA LOANS: Available to veterans and active-duty military, VA loans offer excellent terms — often no down payment required and competitive interest rates. They also have property condition requirements, but VA buyers are typically well-prepared and their loan programs are among the most reliable to close. Livingston County has a meaningful military community, and working with VA buyers is something I have direct experience with.

USDA LOANS: These are government-backed loans designed for homes in rural or semi-rural areas. Depending on the location of your property in Livingston County, your home may qualify for USDA financing — which can open up your buyer pool to people who couldn't otherwise afford a down payment. USDA loans have geographic eligibility requirements, so this is worth checking if your home is outside the immediate Brighton city center.

Knowing which loan type a buyer is working with — and whether they're actually qualified to close it — is information you need before you sign anything. I can help you get it.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Signing a contract with a buyer who can't actually get financing can cost you sixty or more days of market time and force you to start the selling process all over again.
- Always verify a buyer's ability to obtain a loan before committing to a purchase agreement.
- I offer free buyer prequalification to all my clients — it costs you nothing and protects you from one of the most common and avoidable delays in a home sale.
- Common loan types include conventional, FHA, VA, and USDA — each has different requirements that may affect how the transaction unfolds.
- An unqualified buyer who disappears after sixty days is not just an inconvenience — it could cost you the best buyers in the market who moved on while you were tied up.

CHAPTER 23

Why Hiring a Real Estate Agent Is Almost Always the Right Call

I know what some of you are thinking. "Agents cost money. I've sold things before. How hard can it be?"

Fair question. Let me answer it honestly.

REASON #1: AGENTS SELL HOMES FOR MORE MONEY

I'm not saying this to sell you on using me. I'm saying it because the data is consistent and has been for years.

According to the National Association of Realtors, the typical home sold by an agent sells for significantly more than the typical For-Sale-by-Owner home. The gap often runs \$40,000 to \$60,000 or more. Yes — in many cases, the agent's commission is more than covered by the difference in sale price alone.

Here's how it plays out in real life.

A homeowner in Hamburg Township listed his home himself at \$315,000. He got some calls, a few showings, and two lowball offers over the course of about three months. Frustrated, he reached out to me. We listed the home at \$349,000, did some targeted marketing work, and held a structured open house. He accepted an offer of \$341,000 within three weeks. After paying commission, he netted more than \$18,000 more than his best offer as a FSBO seller.

That story doesn't happen every time. But it happens far more often than not. The agent's commission isn't an expense — it's usually an investment that pays for itself.

REASON #2: THE PROCESS IS DRAMATICALLY EASIER WITH AN AGENT

Here's something most sellers don't realize until they're already deep into a FSBO transaction: the paperwork alone is overwhelming.

Michigan real estate transactions involve purchase agreements, disclosure forms, inspection addendums, title commitments, mortgage contingencies, closing documents — page after page of legal language that means something specific, and where signing the wrong line or missing a deadline can have real financial and legal consequences.

I've talked to attorneys and title company professionals in the Livingston County area who handle both FSBO and agent-assisted closings regularly. The difference in process efficiency is stark. In an agent-represented sale, the purchase contract is typically signed within 48 hours of the offer. In a FSBO situation, that same process often takes three to four weeks — sometimes more, and sometimes they're still sorting out paperwork at the closing table.

Why does the timeline matter? Buyer's remorse. It's real, it happens to motivated buyers, and it can derail a deal that should have closed easily. The longer the gap between "I want this house"

and "I've signed this contract," the more time a buyer has to talk themselves out of it. A fast, professional process keeps momentum — and keeps your buyer committed.

REASON #3: AN AGENT SAVES YOU 80 TO 100 HOURS OF YOUR OWN TIME

Selling a home isn't a part-time project. It is, for the duration of the sale, essentially a second job.

There are showings to schedule and coordinate. Inquiries to respond to. Offers to evaluate. Inspections to manage. Appraisers to prepare for. Title work to track. Lender conditions to chase. Problem buyers to navigate.

I've seen estimates suggesting there are upward of 200 distinct tasks involved in taking a home from listed to closed. Whether that number is exactly right is less important than understanding that the list is genuinely long, and that every item on it requires someone's time and attention. When I'm working for you, that someone is me — not you.

What is a hundred hours of your time worth? For most of the homeowners I work with here in Brighton and Howell, that's a meaningful number. That's time with your family. That's time running your own business, doing your own job, or just not being consumed by the stress of an open transaction.

REASON #4: A GOOD AGENT SOLVES PROBLEMS — THE ONES YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW EXIST YET

This is the reason I think matters most, and it's the hardest one to explain to someone who hasn't been through a complicated transaction.

Let me tell you about a seller I know in Ann Arbor — let's call her Linda. She had her home on the market herself, found a buyer she liked, and signed a contract. The buyer was motivated. Both parties wanted the deal done.

Then the buyer hit a snag with their financing. A flagged item on their credit report triggered a condition the lender required them to clear before the loan could close. The buyer panicked. Linda didn't know what to do. Nobody involved understood that the issue was actually fixable — that a simple letter from a creditor and a quick rescoring process could have resolved the problem within two weeks.

The deal fell apart. The buyer walked. Linda put the home back on the market.

The agent she eventually hired heard the story and recognized the situation immediately. He'd seen it a dozen times. He could have solved it with three phone calls in the time it took Linda to repaint the spare bedroom and reschedule her move.

Linda paid five extra months of mortgage, property taxes, insurance, and maintenance costs before the home finally sold. The problem that ended her deal wasn't a big problem. It was a known problem. It just required someone who knew where to look and what to do.

That's the value of specialized knowledge. It's like the story of the old boiler engineer who was called in to fix a massive steamship engine that had the whole crew stumped. He walked in,

studied the machinery for a few minutes, reached into his bag, and tapped one valve with a small hammer. The engine roared back to life. He sent a bill for \$1,000.

The ship's owner was furious. "You were here for fifteen minutes! How do you justify \$1,000?"

The engineer sent a revised invoice the next day:

- Tapping the valve: \$1.00
- Knowing which valve to tap: \$999.00
- Total: \$1,000.00

That's what you're paying for when you hire a skilled agent. Not just effort — knowledge. The kind of knowledge that comes from doing this hundreds of times, knowing every lender in the area, knowing how to handle a low appraisal, knowing how to keep an inspection from blowing up a deal, knowing exactly which valve to tap and when.

I have that knowledge. I've built it over years of working in this market, specifically with sellers here in Livingston County — sellers who've been through expired listings, delayed closings, difficult buyers, and financing disasters. I know what the problems look like before they become emergencies, and I know how to solve them.

RUN THE NUMBERS

Let's put this all together.

An agent who sells your home for \$30,000 more than you would have on your own, saves you 100 hours of your time, and keeps your deal from falling apart when the buyer's financing hiccups — that's not an expense. That's one of the best returns on investment you can make.

If you're ready to talk about what your home is actually worth in today's market, and how I'd approach selling it specifically, I'd love to have that conversation. My contact information is at the back of this book. Give me a call. There's no pressure, no obligation, and no pitch — just a straight conversation about your situation and your options.

Let's figure out how to get you where you want to go.

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- National data consistently shows that agent-represented homes sell for significantly more than FSBO homes — often enough to cover the commission and then some.
- The transaction process is faster, cleaner, and far less stressful when handled by a professional who does this every day.
- A skilled agent saves sellers an estimated 80 to 100 hours during the sale process — time that has real value.
- Agents solve problems that sellers don't know how to navigate — financing conditions, inspection issues, appraisal gaps, and contract complexities that can derail a deal if handled incorrectly.

- Specialized knowledge — knowing exactly which problems to look for and how to fix them — is what you're really paying for when you hire the right agent.
- When you're ready to talk, reach out. The first conversation is free, and it might be the most valuable real estate call you ever make.