



What does a real estate agent do all day anyway?

It's not as easy as it looks on TV

Key Takeaways

A real estate agent's job is to make sure everyone else involved in the transaction is doing their job.

Agents have to continually shift gears to quickly adapt and respond to customer needs.

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What does a real estate agent do? Oh, where to start. Trying to explain to the public how real estate agents spend their time is akin to explaining what a doctor or lawyer does all day. There's a lot more that goes into "treating patients" or "handling legal matters" and the same goes for "helping people buy, sell or rent property."

From a consumer's first thought about making a real estate move to actually taking the leap (whether that means right now, next month or three years from now), the agent is incubator, initiator, action-taker, coordinator, scheduler, personal concierge, resource person, problem-solver, mediator, miracle worker, red-tape cutter, transaction manager and chief make-it-happen officer of everything else that doesn't fall into the prior categories.

They may delegate some of these roles, but nothing gets completed without their oversight and input into what needs to be done and how.

An agent has a workday like anyone else, but there are typically little to no boundaries to that agent's day and week. Here's how an agent's workday often goes:

Responding

There are no official days off in real estate. You might have spans without any scheduled appointments, but there are always inquiries, emails and texts to respond to.

Agents are "on" no matter where they are. In our instant-response society, there really is no waiting until tomorrow

If a consumer contacts them about a property, they respond. If other agents contact them to ask questions about their listing or want to show one of their properties, they get back to them.

If they receive an offer, they work on it regardless of the day, place and time. There is no stop-and-start in this business.

Despite what people might say, it is nearly impossible to shut off the communication, ever. The workplace is anywhere an agent is and that doesn't mean agents have to go to an office for the day to start — work happens at home, in the car, during vacations and on the go.

The job often begins early in the morning or the night before managing emails and follow-up communications — phone calls and texts about any number of things from showing feedback on listings, following-up on in-progress transactions and creating to-do lists for assistants and staff.

Reviewing MLS activity

Agents review MLS activity for any pertinent listings and updates on properties of interest to their buyers and sellers (competitive listings, price changes, under contracts, back on the markets, off the markets or solds, etc.) and notify their clients of relevant information.

Keeping up a database

Agents must continually update their contact databases with new customer information, updates to existing customer contact information, birthdays and new-home anniversaries, and more.

Scheduling showings

Agents put together property itineraries for clients who are planning a house hunting trip, which could involve numerous showings in a short period of time.

Scheduling these tours requires a delicate dance that takes into consideration geography and logistics against the backdrop of unknown time constraints that sellers may impose. (“Can you come at 2 p.m. instead of 10 a.m.?” or “Today’s not good, but how about Friday?”)

These impromptu changes in plans wouldn’t be a problem if agents didn’t have anything else to do, buyers had the luxury of time and they were local — but rarely are agents working with that kind of flexibility.

And Murphy’s Law says the property that’s causing the scheduling difficulties will be the one at the top of buyers’ wish list. Agents have to find a way to make it happen.

Making contact

Agents reach out to establish initial contact, discuss real estate needs and provide advice on the market to customers who have just been referred to them.

They conduct in-depth research on possible options for buyers and dive into market comparables to get an idea of what sellers’ homes can realistically sell for.

Setting and attending appointments

Then there are the appointments — meeting buyers and sellers for initial discussions, previewing and touring properties, meeting inspectors, appraisers and a plethora of specialists, contractors, stagers, photographers and repair professionals.

While out on these meetings, business carries on and the emails, calls and texts flood in.

Oftentimes agents will be juggling these meetings with the sellers from six months ago who call and want to meet immediately — or the inactive buyer couple who suddenly found the perfect home that they need to see right this minute.

Negotiating offers and managing the sale

Negotiating offers may go on for days or weeks. Once an offer gets worked out and a property goes under contract, that is just the beginning. There’s no jumping up and down, high-fiving and laughing all the way to the bank. Quite the contrary, this is where it can all go wrong.

At this point, agents have to make sure that everyone involved in this process does their job. From whatever side of the transaction they represent — buyer or seller — agents need to make sure everyone is fulfilling their obligations of the transaction in a timely manner.

If a lender is involved, active and frequent communication is a must to ensure the loan process is on track.

Agents check in with the title company or attorney's office to make sure the file is being handled and all details and nuances are being attended to. They also address anything unexpected that may arise — a closing that needs to be a mail-away to the seller, or a situation in which a power of attorney needs to be present because one of the buyers will not be.

There are an endless number of tasks that agents must ensure get done from contract to close, from reminding clients about utility transfers to ensuring the seller has everything moved out on the day the buyer legally takes possession.

Problem-solving

Problem-solving and crisis management happens at every turn. This entails educating clients about the realities of what they are trying to accomplish; running down information about a community, association or property; or troubleshooting umpteen potential issues that could derail a property search, transaction or closing.

Unlike many jobs, no two days are the same. One week could be plagued by multiple snags (a buyer's financing falls apart, home inspection issues, etc.), and on another day, it may all come together in an eerily smooth manner. But never fear; in this business, the other shoe is always about to drop.

Speaking of the other shoe dropping, there is no guarantee that the time spent and the hours put in will result in a paycheck.

Agents can't bill for the time and effort they've expended giving advice and information, showing properties, attending showings, creating and hosting broker and consumer open house events and more.

The buyer may never buy; the seller may never sell, and the agent's paycheck is affected by other people's circumstances and decisions.

The enthused buyer could have job transfer fall through. An unexpected medical situation could put a house hunt on hold for someone else. Or a couple of sellers could suddenly decide they love their house more than they did before.

The agent — if he or she is lucky in these cases — will get a "thank you."

Marketing

Then there is the marketing and business development agents pour into their brand, knowledge and expertise. That website, newsletter, postcard, video or other marketing pieces (social media posts, custom property ads) didn't appear out of thin air.

Agents devote thought and resources to each marketing piece with an eye toward implementation, execution and tracking results at every turn.

In short, real estate is a profession full of follow-up, follow-up, follow-up; multi-tasking; prioritizing, re-prioritizing; juggling; figuring out how to be in three places at once; evaluating, advising and coaching; hand-holding; researching and problem-solving; and responding.

Despite what reality television portrays, agents don't simply ride around in expensive cars or have their private driver take them to unlock a door. They don't show up in designer clothes at some swanky place to negotiate a deal over trendy cocktails.

It might appear glamorous and easy but showing a customer properties or putting a home on the market happens sometime in the middle of a very involved process.

Marketing, branding and creating top-of-mind presence usually comes first, and those are the things that motivate customers to choose an agent.

Agents are the catalyst for the entire process of buying, selling or renting a property; and, from that perspective, they help keep the economy moving in every sense of the word.