

WRITTEN BY: Bartlett Communications

Hi there,

Your choice of real estate agent matters a lot more than many people think it does, and it's therefore essential to appoint the right agent. And it's not only a matter of appointing the 'best' agent, it's also very important to find one who is the right fit for you.

Cobus Odendaal, CEO for Lew Geffen Sotheby's International Realty in Johannesburg and Randburg believes that the best approach to appointing an agent is to treat it much like a job interview - and to do your homework.

Below he explains his reasoning and also shares a list of important questions that will draw out what you need to know to make the right decision.

Caption: THE RIGHT FIT: It's vitally important to not only appoint a experienced agent who understands your market but also one that is the right fit for you so do your homework and interview the best agents in your area

10 Important questions to ask your estate agent

Property transactions are far from quick and simple so it's with very good reason that most people appoint agents to assist them with what is probably their single largest investment, but one of the mistakes very often made is to appoint the very first agent you meet.

"Your choice of real estate agent matters more than you think," says Cobus Odendaal, CEO for Lew Geffen Sotheby's International Realty in Johannesburg and Randburg, adding that it's not only a matter of appointing the 'best' agent, it's also very important to find one who is the right fit for you.

"There is no 'one size fits all' and not all agents are the same in that their training, knowledge, experience, areas of expertise and track records can differ considerably and it's important to make the right choice at the get-go."

Odendaal says that the best approach to appointing an agent is to treat it much like a job interview - and to do your homework.

"Check out the agencies to determine how active they are in your area, their national (and international) reach, what type of properties they handle etc and then interview the agents who most stood out for you before making a final selection."

Odendaal says that there are a number of questions you can ask that will draw out what you need to know to make the right decision:

1. How many transactions have you done in the past 12 months?

Obviously, this depends on where you live and factors like whether it's a small town or big city, but generally speaking if an agent has done fewer than 8 - 12 transactions in the past 12 months, it could mean they're not successful or are only working part-time. Either way, it's very likely an indication that the agent is inexperienced or out of touch with what's going on in your local property market and it's probably best to look for another one who is closing more deals.

2. Do you have referrals from past clients?

An agent with experience in the field should be able to refer you to at least a couple of previous clients and contacting one or more who will be able to give you an idea of the agent's strengths and potential weaknesses.

For a more unfiltered view, you can also look online before you meet them to see if the agent has received any reviews.

3. What's your availability like?

Successful agents will obviously be busy, but it's still preferable to work with someone who has time to answer your questions as and when they arise, show you houses without too much delay, communicate with the other parties in the transaction and also timeously review paperwork.

If you're selling, you need an agent who can actively market your home and it takes time to host open houses, promote on social media and property portals, respond quickly to enquiries and walk you through each step of the sale.

4. How will you communicate with me and how often?

You need an agent who will communicate regularly with updates and to respond quickly to your questions as they arise so ask agents what methods they'll use to communicate with you (phone, text or email) and how frequently you can expect to hear from them.

If you're selling, frequent communication is important because you want a proactive agent who'll notify you as soon as there's news — whether it's good or bad.

If you're buying, a communicative agent can help you by notifying you of new listings as soon as they come onto the market and also sharing responses from sellers regarding offers.

5. What's your marketing strategy?

An experienced agent will already have a marketing plan in mind when they come for the interview. This should include a wide range of platforms, from existing buyer lists to social media and all the main online listing portals.

They will also have professional photographers and videographers on hand and will be able to offer a virtual tour. An experienced agent should be able to walk you through their process with ease.

6. What are the selling features of my home?

Whether it's a modern masterpiece or an older fixer-upper, every home has positive features and an agent worth their salt will recognise them and will highlight them when marketing the property.

7. Do you have recommendations for increasing the selling price?

It's always advisable to make sure your house is in tip top condition and to carry out a few necessary repairs before you put your home on the market, but be wary of anyone who suggests major work such as a complete kitchen revamp because it's very easy to over-capitalise.

An experienced agent will suggest things like a fresh coat of paint, tidying up the garden and fixing anything obviously broken like a leaking tap or wonky window latch.

8. How did you arrive at the listing price?

Every home owner obviously wants the best possible return on their investment, but the highest valuation is not necessarily the right valuation and over-valuing a home to secure a mandate is not an uncommon practice.

A good agent understands how to build a competitive pricing strategy, can clearly explain how they got to the number and isn't afraid to push back and tell you the truth.

9. What's your cancellation policy?

Unfortunately, you might need to part ways with your agent for any number of reasons so it's best to know what your options for cancelling a contract are before you sign one. Technically, a listing agent doesn't have to cancel an agreement if they haven't violated any of its terms, but most agents would rather protect their reputations than force a client to remain locked in an agreement.

A listing agent might charge a cancellation fee in order to recoup some of their upfront marketing costs and if there is such a fee, it will be noted in your agreement.

10. What sets you apart from other agents?

Any real estate agent might claim to be the best local agent, and that may be the case but a good agent should have at least one good reason and these include:

- The fact they live in the neighbourhood;
- Have sold more properties than any other agents in the area;
- And have more than a just few previous client referrals to share with you.

If an agent can't give you a good reason to work with them, there probably isn't one! "Selecting the right agent is critical," concludes Odendaal, "because not only are you likely to sell your home faster and at the best possible sale price, agents can also guide you along the way and make the selling process much less stressful.

"And by asking these questions when interviewing prospective estate agents, you'll put yourself in the absolute best position to ensure you're choosing the right person to sell your home and someone who is the right fit for you.

"Remember, it's not just about knowing which questions to ask - it's about getting the right answers."

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