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FOR RALEIGH & CARY HOMEOWNERS

What I Wish Every Seller Knew Before They Called Me

Six expensive assumptions, how pricing actually works, and the preparation that decides your outcome before a buyer ever walks through the door.

Jennifer Cain

Listing Specialist · Raleigh, Cary, and the Triangle

REALTOR® · NC License #317628 · LPT Realty

BEFORE YOU START

A note from Jennifer

If you are reading this, you are probably somewhere between "we should think about selling at some point" and "we need to make a decision." That gap is where most of the expensive mistakes happen.

Not because sellers are careless. Because unless you sell homes for a living, there is genuinely no reason you would know most of what is in this guide. The things that cost people money are almost never obvious. They look like reasonable assumptions right up until the market disagrees with them.

I work with a specific kind of seller. Owners of homes in the upper brackets across Raleigh and Cary who are selling during something bigger than a move. Downsizing. Retirement. A move closer to family. An inherited property nobody planned on managing. Moving forward after losing a spouse.

That kind of sale is rarely just a transaction, and I do not think it should be handled like one.

So this guide is not a pitch. It is the same material I walk sellers through before they ever sign anything, written down so you can read it on your own time and decide what you want to do with it.

> *My sellers don't have to manage the process, but they should always know what's going on.*

Read it in any order. Use what is useful. If you have questions, call me. There is no obligation attached to a conversation, and I would rather answer a question now than fix a problem later.

PART ONE

1. Six things sellers get wrong

None of these are things you should have known. But every one of them costs sellers money, so they are worth understanding before you make a decision.

1. "Most agents basically do the same thing, so commission is the easiest way to compare them."

This is probably the biggest one.

If you believe every Realtor is going to put your home in the MLS, put a sign in the yard, take some photographs, hold an open house, and wait for a buyer, then it makes complete sense to hire whoever charges the least. That assumes the service, and more importantly the outcome, will be the same.

They are not.

There is an enormous difference between putting a home on the market and creating and managing a strategy to sell it. The work that determines your result happens before your property ever goes live: analyzing the market, deciding what should and should not be done to the house, coordinating resources, developing pricing and positioning, paying for professional marketing, monitoring buyer response, and negotiating when offers arrive.

> **The better question**
>
> Not "what commission do you charge." Ask: **"What are you actually going to do to put me in the strongest position to get the outcome I want?"**
>
> The least expensive agent becomes very expensive if the home sells for less than it could have, sits on the market unnecessarily, or a transaction falls apart because something was not handled properly.

2. "The online estimate already told me what my home is worth."

An online estimate is a starting point. It is not a pricing strategy.

An algorithm can see square footage, bedrooms, bathrooms, tax records, and previous sales. Those are real inputs and they get it in the neighborhood. What it cannot do is walk through your home and compare what a buyer will actually experience there against what buyers saw in the other homes that recently sold.

It does not know the quality of your renovations. It does not know whether your kitchen reads current or dated, how the light moves through the house at four in the afternoon, or how your lot sits relative to the one that sold two streets over for considerably more.

Two homes can look very similar on paper and be very different in the eyes of a buyer.

3. "We spent $80,000 on improvements, so the house is worth $80,000 more."

This one is difficult, because homeowners remember exactly what they spent.

Maybe you invested heavily in landscaping and hardscaping. Expensive door hardware. Custom window treatments. Specialty finishes. Improvements you really value.

Those things can absolutely make a home more desirable. They may improve the presentation, help it sell more quickly, or contribute to overall value. That does not necessarily mean a buyer will reimburse you dollar for dollar for what you spent.

> *There is a difference between cost and market value.*

Part of the work is looking at your home through the eyes of today's buyer rather than through the receipt for what you paid.

4. "The house down the street sold for $1.2 million and ours is better."

Maybe it is. Before we assume it, I want to know a lot more.

When did that home sell. What did the interior look like. Was it completely renovated. How large was the lot. Where exactly was it located within the neighborhood. How long was it on the market. Did the seller make concessions. What was the original asking price compared with the closing price. What were market conditions at the time.

There are reasons buyers paid what they paid.

That is why I actually show my sellers the comparable homes and walk through the differences. I do not want you simply taking my word for it. I want you to see the information I am seeing, so the pricing decision is based on evidence.

5. "The buyer can just take care of that after they move in."

This is probably the most expensive assumption.

The buyers can paint. They can replace the carpet. They can fix that. They will probably renovate the kitchen anyway.

Technically all of that may be true. But the buyer is mentally subtracting for those things while they are deciding what your home is worth. And buyers do not subtract the actual cost. They subtract the cost, the inconvenience, the uncertainty, and the fact that they did not want another project.

> If the objective is simply to sell the house eventually and you do not particularly care about price or timing, preparation matters less. That is rarely the objective my clients give me. Usually they want to sell within a reasonable timeframe and maximize what they walk away with. **If that is the goal, preparation matters.**

6. "It is still our home."

This is the hardest one, especially after many years in a house.

You chose the colors. You arranged the furniture the way you like it. You made improvements based on how you live. There are memories attached to the rooms and to the things in them. I respect that.

But once we decide to sell, we also have to begin looking at the house as a product we are positioning for the next buyer. That buyer may be considerably younger. Their expectations, taste, and priorities may be very different from what mattered when you purchased the home. That does not mean they are right and you are wrong. It means they are the buyer.

> *We are no longer decorating the home for the people who live there. We are preparing it for the people we want to buy it.*

Our job is to understand what today's buyers are responding to and remove as many reasons as reasonably possible for them to say no.

PART TWO

2. How your price actually gets decided

Here is how I price a home. Not the summary version. The actual sequence.

Step one: the right comparables, not the closest ones

I start with what a serious buyer and, eventually, an appraiser are likely to consider. Homes similar in style, age, square footage, bedrooms and bathrooms, lot size, and location. Ideally sales within about a one-mile radius and within the last 90 days.

If there are not enough relevant sales, I may go back six months or widen the area depending on the property. And I tell you that I did, because it changes how much weight the analysis carries.

Step two: the photographs, not just the data

I look at the actual photographs of every comparable sale. What did the interiors look like. What about the exterior. Was the home renovated and updated, or did it need work. How does it compare to yours.

Step three: what the market actually did

How long was it on the market. What was the original list price. Were there reductions. What did it actually close for. Were there seller concessions that changed the real economics of the sale.

Step four: where your home sits between them

Then I walk you through those homes visually, because I want you to see what buyers were seeing.

You may look at one home that sold in a week and realize it had been completely renovated and showed beautifully. Then look at another that took 120 days and see that it needed considerable updating. Then we look at where your home sits between them.

That makes pricing an objective conversation instead of an emotional one.

> **Who decides**
>
> You do. Ultimately you decide what price goes on your home. My responsibility is to give you the information and my professional judgment so you can make an informed decision.
>
> If I believe the price is too high, or too low, I am going to tell you. And if you want to list substantially above what I believe the market can support, I may not be the right agent for that listing. We need to be on the same page about what we are trying to accomplish.

What we can control, and what we cannot

I want to have this conversation before your home ever goes on the market.

I cannot control	I can control
The market	How we prepare the home
Interest rates	How we position and price it
Whether a buyer walks through the door	How it is presented and marketed
How a buyer responds to a property	The exposure we create
	My communication and negotiation
	How closely I manage the transaction

You have a role too. We need the home reasonably available for showings, and we need to maintain the presentation we worked hard to create.

If we both understand our roles from the beginning, we can respond intelligently to what the market tells us instead of reacting emotionally to it.

PART THREE

3. The preparation that pays

This is where I put a large share of my time and resources, because this is where most of your outcome gets decided.

I do not believe in photographing a home as-is, putting it in the MLS, and hoping. I want to get ahead of as many problems as possible before a buyer ever walks through the door.

Consider an inspection before you list

I encourage sellers to consider a home inspection before we go on the market.

> *I would much rather discover a material issue ourselves and decide how we want to handle it than have a buyer discover it after we are under contract and use it to renegotiate.*

If something needs repair, we can address it. If we decide not to repair it, we can disclose it properly and account for it in our pricing and strategy. Either way we are making that decision from knowledge instead of being surprised later.

Staging, room by room

Once we understand the condition of the property, I bring in a professional stager and we look at the home from a buyer's perspective. This sometimes takes a mindset shift, especially if you have lived there many years.

The goal is to appeal to the largest number of qualified buyers possible. Sometimes that means depersonalizing. It may mean moving furniture, removing certain things, changing how a room is being used, painting, making minor updates, or simply editing what is already there.

On cost. I make those recommendations tactfully and with an understanding of what things cost. I am not interested in having sellers spend money for the sake of spending money. We go through the recommendations together and decide what makes sense, what you are comfortable doing, and where an investment is likely to improve the outcome.

I will also tell you what I would **not** spend money on. That conversation matters as much as the other one.

The exterior gets the same attention as the interior

Sellers sometimes focus so much on the inside that they forget the buyer started forming an opinion before they ever reached the front door.

The exterior is the first impression. Landscaping, the driveway, the walkways, the front entry, exterior maintenance, and anything else a buyer sees on arrival.

Photography and marketing assets

I use professional photography. Depending on the property I may also bring in professional video, drone photography or footage, floor plans, and other assets that help communicate the home effectively.

That first online impression matters enormously. Buyers make very fast decisions about which homes they are going to see in person. We get one opportunity to make it.

The story of the property

I do not want the marketing to be a list of features. I want buyers to understand what is special about this particular property, how someone would live in it, and why it deserves their attention.

I also structure the property information with today's search technology and AI-driven tools in mind. Buyer discovery is changing, and I want the information about your home detailed, accurate, and structured so it has the best chance of being surfaced through both traditional search and newer AI search tools.

> **You do not have to assemble the team**
> Contractors, painters, landscapers, cleaners, organizers, handymen, stagers, and senior transition professionals. I have an established network I bring in and coordinate. You are not calling around for quotes while you are also trying to sort through a house.

PART FOUR

4. What happens once you list

A deliberate launch

I generally like to bring a property active around Wednesday or Thursday, so attention builds heading into the weekend.

If it makes sense for the property and you are comfortable with it, I may hold an open house during that first weekend for a concentrated window of time. Rather than having people wander through one at a time over a long stretch, having multiple prospective buyers at the property during a shorter window reinforces that other people are interested.

I would much rather have several interested buyers putting you in a strong negotiating position than one buyer, or no buyer, controlling the negotiation.

Reading what buyers tell us

Once showings begin, we monitor activity and feedback. I am not going to recommend changing our entire strategy because one buyer did not like a paint color. What I am watching for is patterns.

- A lot of online activity but not enough showings
- Showings but no second showings and no offers
- The same concern coming up repeatedly
- Buyers responding to the price, or to the condition

> *Once a listing is active, the market starts keeping score.*

Days on market accumulate. Buyers notice price reductions. They notice when a property has been sitting, and they start wondering why nobody else has bought it. That is exactly why I put so much emphasis on getting it right before we launch.

Offers

If I receive an offer, you know about it. I do not believe in holding offers and keeping my seller in the dark.

Then we go through it together in detail. Not just purchase price. Financing. Proof of funds where appropriate. Due diligence money. Earnest money. Closing date. Seller concessions. Contingencies. Every term that affects how strong that offer really is.

The highest price is not always the best offer.

With multiple offers we look at each one individually and then compare. Which gets you closest to the outcome you want. Which has the strongest terms. Which carries more risk. Which buyer is most likely to actually get us to closing.

Due diligence, in North Carolina

I pay very close attention to the due diligence portion of an offer, because it tells me how much financial commitment the buyer has actually made. You have already invested significant work inspecting, preparing, positioning, and marketing the home. The stronger the buyer's overall commitment, the more confidence you can have in taking your home off the market for that buyer.

All the way to closing

I do not assume everything is fine just because nobody has called me with a problem.

Once we are under contract, either I or my assistant is following the transaction. Has the buyer given the lender what they need. Is financing progressing. Has the appraisal been ordered. Is underwriting moving. Does the closing attorney have what they need. Are the contractual deadlines being met.

I do not want to find out three days before closing that something that should have happened three weeks ago never happened.

PART FIVE

5. Questions to ask any agent you interview

Including me. If an agent cannot answer these specifically, that tells you something useful.

Ask this	What you are listening for
What will you actually do before my home goes on the market?	A specific sequence, not a general promise. Preparation is where your outcome gets decided.
Will you show me the comparable sales, including the photographs?	Whether pricing is a conversation based on evidence, or a number you are asked to accept.
What would you recommend I *not* spend money on?	Whether they are thinking about your return or just about getting the listing.
Who will I actually be working with day to day?	Whether you get the person you hired or get handed to a coordinator.
What do you pay for, and what do I pay for?	Photography, staging consultation, marketing, and advertising vary widely between agents.
How and how often will you communicate with me?	Whether there is an actual plan, or whether you will be chasing updates.
What happens if we are not getting showings?	Whether they have a process for reading market feedback, or just a plan to reduce price.
What would make you tell me not to sell right now?	Whether they will ever tell you something you do not want to hear.

One more, and it is the most revealing

Ask what they think your home is worth, and then ask them to explain how they got there. Anyone can produce a number. The reasoning behind it is the part that determines whether you can trust it.

Who I am not a fit for

Naming this is more useful than another page about why you should hire me.

I am probably not the right agent if you are primarily shopping for the lowest commission, if you want a sign in the yard and an MLS entry and nothing more, if speed matters more to you than what you walk away with, or if you want to list substantially above what the market will support and are not open to the analysis.

There are excellent agents in this market. I am not the right one for every seller and I am not interested in pretending otherwise. If we are not the right match, I would genuinely rather both of us know that in the first conversation than in month three.

WHAT'S NEXT

Start with a conversation, not a listing agreement.

I am not going to try to get you to sign something at your kitchen table. The first conversation is about what you are trying to accomplish, whether selling makes sense at all right now, what your home is realistically worth, and what it would take to get you the outcome you want.

If that turns into working together, good. If it does not, you still walk away knowing more than you did.

Jennifer Cain

(860) 794-6099

Jennifer.Cain@lptrealty.com

jennifercainrealty.com

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