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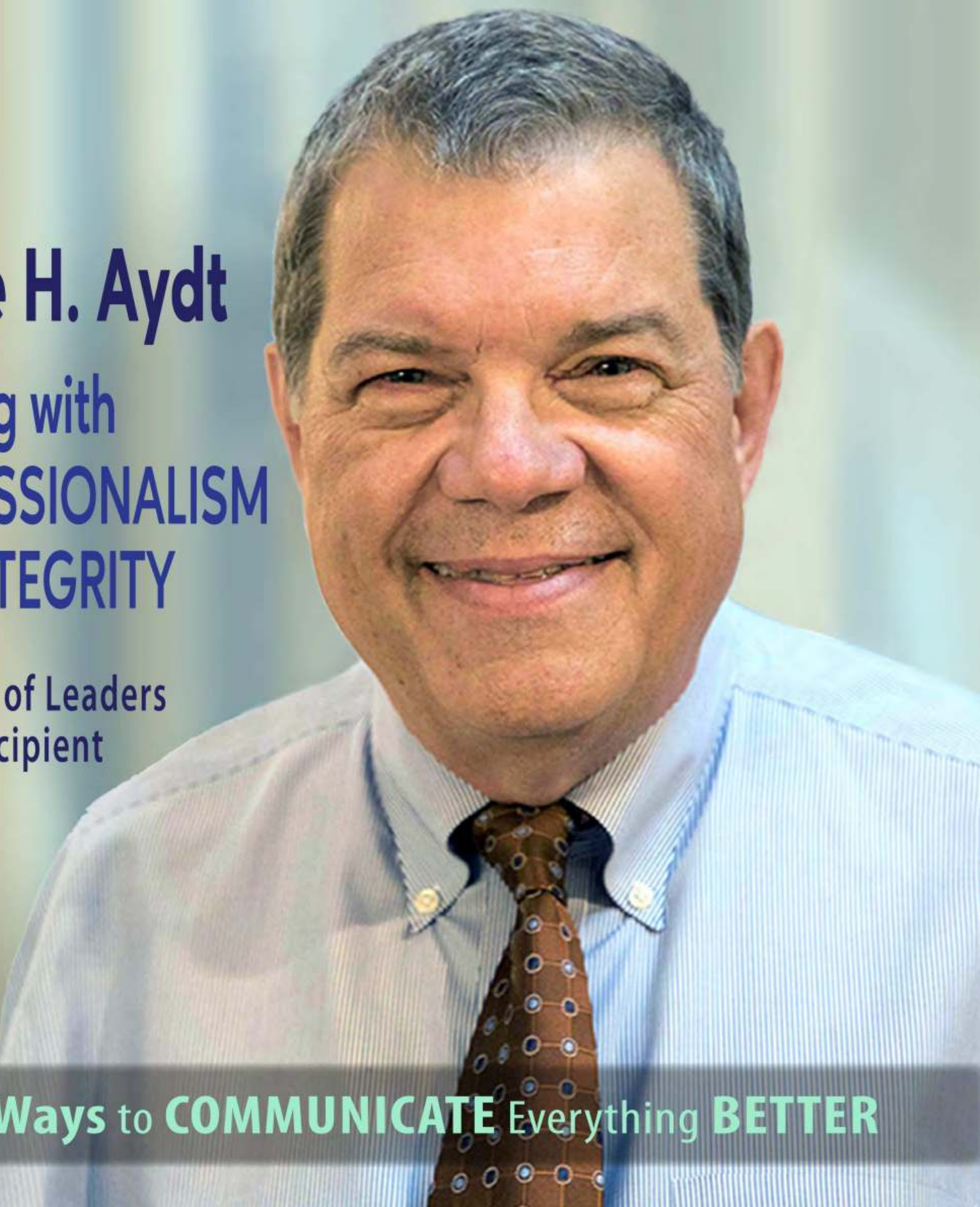
RealEstate Business

For Real Estate Professionals



Bruce H. Aydt

Leading with PROFESSIONALISM and INTEGRITY

2021 Hall of Leaders
Award Recipient

Plus 5 Ways to COMMUNICATE Everything BETTER

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President's Message

Candace Cooke
ABR, BPOR, CIPS, CRB, C-RETS, e-PRO, GAA, GREEN, GRI, MRP, PSA, RENE, RSPS, SFR, SRES, SRS

What Do You Want to Create in 2022?

With the dawning of a new year at our heels, we're sure to hear the same cliche resolutions over and over again: Often, these resolutions don't stick, because they either require a lifestyle overhaul or are simply too cumbersome.

An unknown author once wrote, "Many people look forward to the new year for a new start on old habits." As you begin your new year, think about starting small and resolving to change those old habits for good. Whether you're determined to create better communication channels with your agents and staff, or you're interested in exploring business opportunities in emerging markets, the key to successful change is to start small but think big.

Many of you have recalibrated your brokerages into more efficiently run organizations. You have reduced square footage in favor of the "virtual office" concept and increased technological capabilities to ensure mobility and functionality for agents. Other brokerages have taken the "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" approach and explored mergers and acquisitions among competitors. Economies of scale win every time, but especially in this environment.

Likewise, REBI has been fortunate to have outstanding leaders throughout its history. But leadership in today's world -- both for us here at REBI and for you in your brokerage -- couldn't be more challenging. Leadership expert Warren Bennis says that today's leaders "must encourage their organizations to dance to forms of music yet to be heard."

As leaders, we must anticipate what our clients or members want and need. Excelling at the fundamentals rarely gets the same attention as break-through innovation. It troubles me that many have come to associate innovation only with breakthrough thinking and ideas that will rock your world. Small and subtle innovations yield value and increase relevance too.

Warren Bennis also aptly captured the distinction many people make between management and leadership when he said, "Management is about doing things right. Leadership is about doing the right things." Our relevance is inextricably tied to identifying the right thing to do and then doing it right.

What do you want to create in 2022? What are you looking, planning and hoping for? As in any life experience, coincidence or fairy tale prose there is a lesson or moral to be learned. Be careful of what you wish for.

Cheers to you, both now and in the future!

Sincerely,

Candace K Cooke

Candy Cooke

Volume 110

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Kevin Sears speaking about
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2021 Inaugural & Awards Reception

2022 President, Jody O'Brien installed by Kevin Sears

Kevin Sears & 2022 President, Jody O'Brien

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A legacy of leadership – Candy Cooke (2021 President); Jody O'Brien (2022 President); and Jim Helsel (2020 President)

Candy Cooke (2021 President) installs our 2022 officers: Sue Miller (First Vice President) and Steven Pagan (President-Elect)

2022 Officers installed: Sue Miller as First Vice President & Steven Pagan as President-Elect

2021 Inaugural & Awards Reception

Adorna Carroll, DSA & Steve Casper, DSA speaking about our 2021 Hall of Leaders Award recipient, Bruce Aydt, DSA.

Bruce Aydt's virtual acceptance of the 2021 Hall of Leaders Award.

2021 Inaugural & Awards Reception

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The 2022 REBI Leadership Team:
Candy Cooke (2021 President);
Steven Pagan (2022 President-Elect);
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and Sue Miller (2022 First Vice President)

The 2021 REBI Leadership Team:
Candy Cooke (President);
Steven Pagan (First Vice President);
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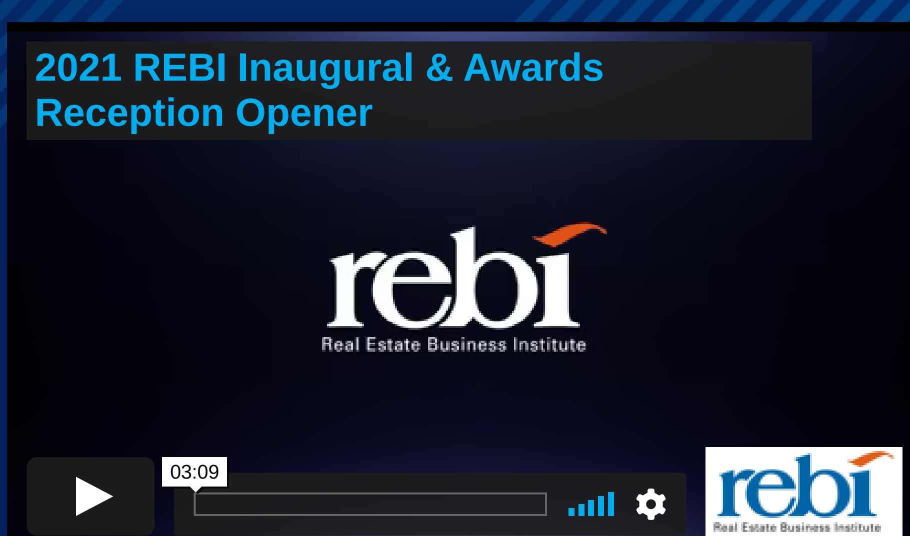
IF YOU MISSED OUR INAUGURAL & AWARDS RECEPTION, CHECK OUT THE VIDEO OF THIS SPECIAL EVENING CELEBRATING LEADERS!



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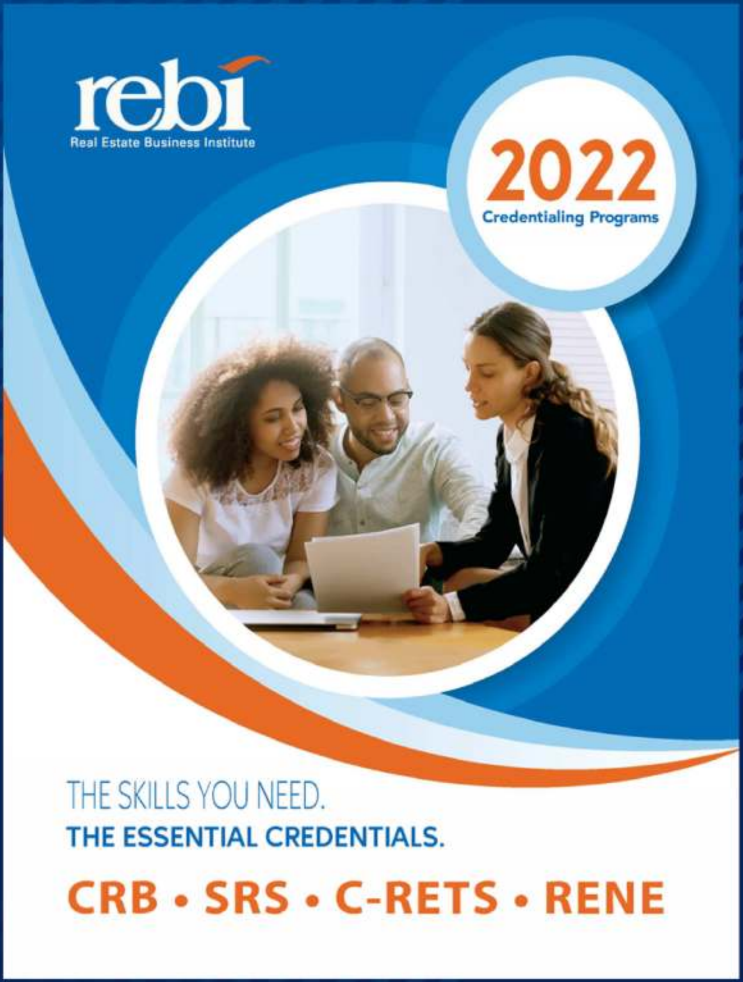
PREVIEW THE NEW REBI BROCHURE

CRB & SRS designees -- be sure to check out the new member benefits and resources and make the most of your membership!

CLICK THE IMAGE BELOW



Bruce H. Aydt

Leading with Professionalism and Integrity

A preeminent expert on real estate business operations and ethics is this year's inductee for the Hall of Leaders.

By G. M. Filisko

BRUCE AYDT

With Bruce H. Aydt, what you see is what you get — and that's a very good thing.

Aydt is one of those rare but crucial people in the most successful organizations who operates quietly, behind the scenes, to provide strong, clear guidance on running the ship profitably and with unwavering integrity.

"Bruce is no nonsense with business," explains Adorna O. Carroll, DSA, ABR, CRB, C-RETS, ePRO, GRI, RENE, SFR, SRES, SRS, president of Dynamic Directions Inc. and a business partner of Aydt's since 2005. "I suspect that comes from being an attorney and being so involved in NAR professional standards over the years. He has standards that he holds himself and others to, and if you break the rules or push the edges when it comes to ethics, you don't get a second chance."

In fact, in the real estate profession, Aydt is recognized as one of the leading experts—if not the expert—on NAR's Code of Ethics and professional standards. That's just one of the many reasons Aydt is being inducted into REBI's Hall of Leaders this month at the REALTORS® Conference & Expo.

"There's no question the Code of Ethics has been important throughout my career," says Aydt, DSA, ABR, CRB, GREEN, GRN, SFR, SRS, who's a lawyer and the owner of Real Estate Education Resources LLC in St. Louis.

"I really truly do believe that—in the last 25 years, anyway—there's been a growing awareess that adherence to the Code of Ethics and developing your business around the code is a successful business strategy," he explains. "There's a real understanding overall by those committed to the business as a long-term career that the code and professionalism based on the code isn't just the right thing to follow but that it's also very good for business."

A second-gen REALTOR®

Technically, Aydt is a Michigander, born in Battle Creek while his dad was in the service during the Korean War. But his parents were both from the St. Louis area, and they moved back to the Show Me state when Aydt was young. It's been his home base ever since.

Aydt was just 16 when he entered real estate, beginning a career of working backstage to make sure every T was crossed and every I was dotted. "My dad was a REALTOR®, and I started as a clerk," he recalls. "I was assembling files and writing correspondence in the closing department of the large residential brokerage my dad worked for. I was doing really basic work and learning real estate from the ground up."

That continued during summer breaks as Aydt made his way through high school and college, where he earned a degree in business administration with an emphasis in real estate and finance. He earned his Missouri real estate broker's license in 1974 and became a second-generation REALTOR® in 1976. Even after he began law school, Aydt continued to work part time in real estate.

"I've always been interested in the law, particularly real estate law," he recalls. "I wasn't sure of my career path at that time, but I was very attracted to the idea of delving into the method of analysis the law provides. Law school really teaches you how to think, and I was reaching for that challenge."

Aydt was logging about 25 hours a week at the brokerage while in law school, which any lawyer will tell you is quite a workload on top of the grueling pace of law school. "I was never a full-time agent, but I got my background in a little bit of sales while doing back-office work and accounting for the firm," he says. "By then, I was pretty committed to the industry, and a couple of months after I got out of law school in 1978, I was invited to open a branch office."

In 1980, Aydt teamed up with his father and sister to open their own brokerage, with his role again overseeing the company's infrastructure and legal issues. By the mid-1990s, Aydt was acting as the company's general counsel. "I was handling all the claims that came in and doing everything but the litigation," he explains. "If we were served with a lawsuit, I'd hand it over to the insurance company. But I remained the liaison with the agents and helped prepare the case. I also handled all regulatory complaints, including any kind of real estate association complaint."

From student to educator

Not long after Aydt finished his own education, he began teaching others. In 1984, he was invited to begin teaching in the Missouri GRI program. "My dad would teach the REALTOR® Code of Ethics course, and there were a couple of legally based courses in the GRI program that I taught," he explains. "Then the lawyer who was teaching other legal courses for the state association stepped aside, and I started teaching those, too."

As he helped others expand their education, Aydt was doing the same. In the mid-1980s, he earned his CRB designation. By the early 1990s, Aydt was recognized as a leader in the real estate education business. He taught a series of risk management courses for Missouri REALTORS®, a gig that blossomed into teaching in other states. Today, Aydt teaches mediation and professional standards and does other risk-management training for REALTORS® for various associations across the country.

Admittedly, Aydt didn't start out as the skilled instructor he is today. "I'd observed the lawyer who'd done the legal classes I was going to teach, and for the first couple of years, I took a pretty standard, lawyerlike approach," he states. "But I got one evaluation early on that said I was knowledgeable but boring.

"That was kind of a clue that, while I really enjoyed doing it, I'd better learn more about teaching," says Aydt. "I took an initial instructor development workshop through what was a predecessor of the Real Estate Business Institute, and it changed everything about the way I taught. It helped me really understand and learn how teaching adults is different from teaching younger students. Since then, I've taken several other instructor development workshops, but I've used the concepts of teaching adults I learned in that course throughout my career."

In 2005, Aydt teamed up with Carroll and Stephen Casper, DSA, ABR, AHWD, CRB, SRS, partner at Kopf, Hunter & Haas REALTORS®, to create a designation focused on representing sellers ethically and professionally. They developed the coursework for what became the Seller Representative Specialist℠ designation, which they administered until it became an REBI designation in 2014. "REBI has taken the SRS designation and grown it exponentially," says Aydt.

Eventually, Aydt's double work life serving as the GC of a real estate brokerage while traveling the country as a real estate instructor caught up to him. "My mom passed away in 2017, and I more or less had a light bulb moment about work-life balance," he notes. "I decided I had to make a decision about these two jobs."

That led to Aydt stepping away from his general counsel role at Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Alliance Real Estate and shifting to focus exclusively on teaching. "I was essentially doing two full-time jobs," he recalls. "Even though I had an arrangement with the firm that I could take time off for teaching, I was available to the firm pretty much all the time."

He, Casper, and Carroll have continued their business relationship. But today, Aydt devotes his time to teaching, including serving as a consultant, instructor, and faculty member for Carroll's education company, Dynamic Directions.

Education plus connections

It's no coincidence that Aydt earned his CRB designation while he was knee deep in the daily operations of a real estate brokerage. "Until I became strictly a GC, I was always very much involved in the day-to-day management of a real estate company, and that's what the CRB designation does for you," he notes. "It really gives you very practical operational and management ideas for running a real estate company, whether you're in a sales management position or a company-wide operational position, as I was."

The CRB designation wasn't just a source of information for Aydt. It was the place he met real estate professionals he still turns to today for business advice and friendship. "So many people who have this CRB designation develop life-long relationships," he notes. "One of the best examples is Jim Helsel."

Helsel is president of Helsel Inc., REALTORS® and broker of record for Turn Key Realty Group, both in Camp Hill, Pa.

"We go back to the early 1990s when we met on an NAR task force and realized our backgrounds were so similar," says Aydt. "We've had that relationship because of the work we've done in real estate associations, including REBI. Adorna and I are the same way, as are Steve Casper and I. When you start this work, whether it's through REBI or NAR, the people you really connect with are people who have designations like the CRB because they look at things the same way you do in terms of professionalism, education, and wanting to have this knowledge.

"The connections I've made through REBI have made a huge difference in my career," he adds. "It's a phenomenal network to have, and there's business associated with it. The network also gives you an overview of the industry and allows you to say, 'Here's what I hear about what's going on in the East Coast…' That's valuable, and it gives you a much different perspective of the profession than you'd get by focusing only on your market."

The stature of the professionals Aydt has connected with through REBI make his induction into the Hall of Leaders even more meaningful. "It was certainly a surprise and honor," he states. "I look at the previous recipients, and I'm just awed to be in their company. Without a doubt, it's one of the most important and humbling honors I've received in my career."

The Hall of Leaders induction comes nearly a decade after Aydt received NAR's Distinguished Service Award, an honor conferred on only two REALTORS® each year in recognition of their contributions to and service in the industry. "Both honors are a caliber of recognition by your peers," he says. "I'm so humbled when I see the other people who've gotten this Hall of Leaders award and the DSA, too. It's like, 'Wow, I'm considered to be on a par with them? Holy mackerel.'"

Still work to do

Aydt has gotten better at that work-life balancing act he committed to working on a few years back. He and his wife, Lisa, have been married for 40 years, and they have two grown daughters, Erin and Jamie. Aydt is carving out more time to enjoy them, along with his three grandchildren.

"If you asked my greatest accomplishment, it's being able to have a family like I do," he says. "I'm conservative in business. Or maybe you'd classify me as risk averse. Sure, I'm risk averse. What drives me is taking care of my family and making sure everybody's OK."

Aydt is also committed to seeing the world with family and friends. In fact, he's working on bucket-list travel for the coming year, hoping pandemic conditions will allow him to enjoy a Rhine River cruise and visit London and Paris for the first time. "We also like driving trips to see the United States," he adds. "It's gives us a wonderful opportunity to enjoy things together."

He's also remains committed to teaching real estate pros, a job he says is becoming much more valued nationwide. "I think as an industry, we're growing to be more understanding of the risks involved

I'm conservative in business. Or maybe you'd classify me as risk averse. Sure, I'm risk averse. What drives me is taking care of my family and making sure everybody's OK.

in real estate," he says. "Organizations like REBI are very focused on helping members develop companies that have that edge, whether it's in business, risk management, or strategic planning—all those areas where designations will be the mark of successful real estate companies in the future."

G.M. Filisko is a lawyer and freelance writer who specializes in real estate, legal, business, and personal finance topics.

HALL OF LEADERS AWARD

Bruce H. Aydt:

Integrity First

The people who know Bruce Aydt admire his intelligence, of course, but also his decency.

A man with a plan

I've known Bruce and his wife, Lisa, personally for more than 20 years. Bruce is a wonderful man—kind, generous, and sincere. He's devoted to Lisa and their family. Up until now, he was surrounded by only women in his life until his grandson Ian showed up!

Bruce and Lisa love to travel. He's a methodical planner, so he handles all the itineraries and trip logistics. We never have anything to worry about there! He also loves photography and has an extensive collection of amazing photos. When we travel, he and I always lag behind comparing shots and visual angles. Lisa and my husband Jack were always patient with us—up to a point, of course.

In addition to being a foodie, Bruce is a lover of fine wines and enjoys collecting a wide variety. One trip we took together was to Sonoma, where we had a fabulous time hitting the wineries and ordering some of the best wines on offer. I believe cases were shipped to the Aydts' house that year!

Our time together has always been filled with deep conversations and lots of laughs. He binge-watched all 10 seasons of Stargate SG-1 and got hooked on Harry Potter. We'll be traveling to London next year, and one of the top stops for him is Leavesden Studios, where the movies were filmed. I'm willing to bet he'll take hundreds of photos there!

Professionally, Bruce is a powerhouse of knowledge and considered the expert when it comes to professional standards. Being a night owl, it's not uncommon for him to be answering detailed and comprehensive emails very late at night and well into the wee hours of the morning. Bruce has been a dynamic national trainer throughout his career, and he's great to team-teach with. He's done that with many of the top-tier trainers in the industry.

I can go on and on about Bruce—he's a true gentle man, fierce friend, and amazing team player. He's a valued addition to the Hall of Leaders.—*Adorna O. Carroll, DSA, ABR, CRB, C-RETS, ePRO, GRI, RENE, SFR, SRES, SRS, president, Dynamic Directions Inc.*

A fixer in the best possible sense

I've known Bruce Aydt since 1992 when we served on the NAR agency presidential advisory group together. He knew the issues at hand, worked with those of us who'd worked in the real estate market, and was always willing to listen, help, and correct our collective ineptness.

To this day, that *is* Bruce Aydt. He listens, helps, fixes, and contributes everywhere he's found. He has a way of slicing to the heart of the issue with no malice or lack of kindness and still always has a way of resolving a problem or providing great direction where needed.

I want to say that Bruce is a friend that I'm honored to know, but I'm not sure that truly says how much knowing Bruce has enriched my life. He lives a great distance from me but, frankly, I know I can always reach out to him. That makes him seem like he's in the office next door.

I'm so pleased Bruce is being recognized in this manner. No one deserves it more, and REBI has benefited from Bruce's knowledge and counsel more than any of us will be able to remember. Nor can we thank him enough for all he's done.*—Jim Helsel, AHWD, CCIM, CPM, CRB, CRE, GRI, SIOR, president, Helsel Inc., REALTORS®/ managing director, KW Commercial-The Helsel Group, both in Camp Hill, Pa.*

Both business and personal ethics

My first encounter with an Aydt was not with Bruce but his dad, Henry, on NAR's Professional Standards subcommittee when I was much younger. He took me under his wing, guiding me through the ins and outs of issues as well as the strong personalities who'd been on the committee for a long time. Through Henry, I was introduced to Bruce, which turned out to be fortuitous over time.

Although we're always cautioned that no one person can be considered an expert in the Code of Ethics, Bruce may be the rare exception. He can recite chapter and verse. Better yet, he really understands each article and standard of practice.

During our long committee discussions, Bruce had the marked ability to help us through the issue and to propose a solution the majority of the time. He combined his REALTOR® hat with his legal background as an attorney.

Bruce, Adorna Carroll, and I have been business partners for more than 15 years. Many people will say a business should never have three partners; it'll turn out too often to be two against one. Well, since 2004, we've never had an argument and never took a vote while we created what has proved to be a worthwhile curriculum for listing agents in the Seller Representative Specialist℠ designation.

However, on more than one occasion during our partnership, when we'd discuss legal issues facing our partnership, Bruce would say, "I'm an attorney but not your attorney!" And then we'd continue the discussion. To this day, we laugh each time Bruce says that to us. Not only are we business partners, but we're also dear friends. Bruce is one special person."
—Stephen Casper, DSA, ABR, AHWD, CRB, SRS, partner,
Kopf, Hunter & Haas REALTORS®

5 Ways to Communicate Everything Better

You do presentations every day, even if each one isn't as formal as speaking before a huge group. Here's how to up your game.

By G. M. Filisko

There's an argument to be made that you're a communicator. You're not in sales. You're not in marketing. You're not in real estate. Instead, your job is listening, processing information, and conveying information to an array of people who touch real estate transactions.

Jessica Doyle

Vocal coach and Professor

East Carolina University

Greenville, N.C.

And take it from Jessica Doyle, giving better presentations is a skill you should develop just as you've developed the skill of accurately pricing properties. "Sometimes we think, 'I'm good in front of people' or, 'I'm not good in front of people,'" says the vocal coach and professor at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C. "Just like anything else, it's a skill that can be taught and practiced—and it should be practiced.

"When you go to present information, do you spend time preparing and, if so, what do you do to prepare?" she asks. "Do you prepare alone or with a partner? Do you videotape yourself? You don't know how to improve until you know where you're starting from. And those are things you should be doing to improve your presentation skills."

Here, Doyle and real estate pros offer suggestions to help you to evaluate and strengthen your communication skills, particularly in situations you encounter in your real estate business each day.

Communicate Everything Better

Already good? Maybe, maybe not

You may be thinking that you've got this communication thing down and that you can move onto the next article in the magazine. Slow your roll, as the kids say.

Even Doyle, who teaches this skill, has been surprised when she thought she was crushing a presentation. She suggests recording yourself and then reviewing the recording to see how you're *actually* coming across instead of how you *think* you're coming across.

"You don't have a clear picture of what you truly sound like unless you record and see for yourself," she says. "The same is true of your physicality. Often, we get into habits, postures, or alignments that we're not aware we have.

"One of the very first talks I gave, I felt like I was doing great," she recalls. "I had rehearsed and was ready. But when I watched myself on the recording, I saw that I was making a noise by sticking my tongue to the roof of my mouth, and I had no idea I was doing it. I was trying not to say 'um' and ended up making that noise instead. We all have things like that that we're not aware of unless we see it for ourselves."

You could also be weakening your communication style in other ways because you've become too practiced in what you convey. "When we're really excited or confident, we often speak too fast," she says. "Or we often give way too much information; it's important to give the necessary information but not to overwhelm people with facts and figures. Other times, we can shove our successes—'here are the things I've done' or 'the numbers I've achieved'—in front of people in a way that they tune it out."

These five tactics will help you convey all kinds of information better:

1. Address your audience's concerns.

Khari Washington

Broker

1st United Realty & Mortgage

Riverside, Calif.

"People want to know what you can you do for them and how you can solve the problem they have," says Doyle. "When you focus on connecting with your audience—making eye contact, moving naturally, and using a joke or a story that's emotional and positive, that goes a lot further in getting them to pay attention to you."

How do you know what your audience wants? Khari Washington, broker of 1st United Realty & Mortgage in Riverside, Calif., just asks. "Presentations should start with questions for the buyer or seller," he says. "A good presentation highlights what the client needs, and you can only do that by asking questions and then spending more time on what matters to the client."

"Starting with questions is two-fold," he adds. "It shows I care. People do want to be heard, which is extremely important. But on top of that, how do you know what to present to someone without knowing what they want? Of course, you can have a set way to present things, but you can go more quickly over things that aren't as important to clients, and you can emphasize things that are important to them."

Washington uses the first few minutes of informal greetings, perhaps walking around a house, perhaps chit chatting, to put clients at ease and simply ask, 'What are some of the things that are important to you?" That's a more comfortable approach for Washington than waiting until he's officially "started" a presentation. "I've been in presentations where it's very formal and you start asking questions, and that doesn't work for me," he says.

2. Work with a partner

Doyle coaches people on their presentation skills, but you don't necessarily need a pro to offer feedback. "A lot of times, for people who are anxious about public speaking or presentations, the anxiety comes from the unknown," she says. "They think things like: 'What if someone asks me a question I can't answer?' The way to handle that situation is to prepare for it.

"I have clients I tell, 'You're going to give your talk, and I'm going to get up and leave the room or ask you a question in the middle of your sentence. That way, you can practice what to do when that happens,'" she explains.

3. When presenting challenging information, find the approach that works for you.

For David North, designated broker/owner at Realtrua in Redmond, Wash., leading with not-so-great news has worked well to build client trust that has resulted in referrals.

"About six years ago, a colleague of mine had an opportunity to talk to sellers about a listing in an area she hadn't worked in, and she asked me to help her and share the listing if we got it," he recalls. "We talked to the sellers, looked at their home, and discussed their goals, including how much money they needed to get for the home.

"Then we did a market analysis, and it became clear they couldn't sell their home for the amount they needed," explains North. "We sat down at their kitchen table, and the first words I said were, 'We did a market analysis, and we absolutely can't sell your house for the price you want.'

"It feels a little awkward to start out like that, but it turned out that was news they sort of expected," he adds. "They called my colleague in the first place because they wanted a second opinion—another agent had told them he'd be happy to list for the price they wanted, but they weren't comfortable he could actually sell it for that price. From then on, we spent our time constructively working toward what it would take to get the couple's property ready to reach their sales goal."

The couple never listed their property, but they then trusted North and his colleague so much that they've closed six transactions with the family members the couple's referred to them.

The opposite approach works for Melanie Dawkins, an agent at Red Door Realty in Lincoln, Neb. "If it's difficult news, I try to give positive news first," she says. "I like to build up enthusiasm, excitement, and positivity, and I want clients to feel like we can handle anything that comes their way. Then, after giving the bad news, I offer a what-comes-next step that shows I'm going to help them overcome this challenge."

Here's how Dawkins might present an offer requesting a number of home fixes: "Hey, we've been on the market for only a week, and we have our first solid offer! The buyers are well-qualified, and they really love the house. But they've got some updating they'd like you to do. Here's how we can work with their requests."

Dawkins might address a lowball offer like this: "Hey, we've been on the market for only a week, and we have our first solid offer. The buyers are well-qualified, and they really love the house, but the home is just out of their reach. Here's how we can work with their offer."

Whatever works for you, be sure to deliver challenging news as soon as possible—which doesn't always mean immediately.

Melanie Dawkins

Agent

Red Door Realty

Lincoln, Neb.

"Don't stall, don't delay," advises Washington. "Agents have a fiduciary responsibility to tell their clients about issues that arise. But that doesn't mean you pick up the phone immediately. I'll sometimes let information sit so I can process the problem, come up with some solutions, and present that all quicky. Bad news is easier to digest when there are options for the next steps."

One more thing: Washington suggests focusing on just the facts and ditching the emotion. "It's a matter-of-fact, sometimes even light-hearted approach that works for me," he says. "It's essentially, 'I have something we have to work on, and let's figure this out.' Not being stressed or beating around the bush helps. I focus on that can-do attitude."

4. Be careful about being overly scripted.

"That's a skill as well," says Doyle. "That goes with the idea that you should be conversational and authentic. The big thing with that is breathing. When we're reading a script or saying something we've memorized, breathing becomes very mechanical instead of natural.

"But breathing energizes the voice, and it keeps the anxiety away," she adds. "It also gives us time to pause, and that's so important. It's OK to pause, to take a beat because we do that naturally in conversations, where there's an ebb and flow. The breath is an opportunity for you to collect your thoughts and regain control."

Washington agrees. "I'm not scripted in what I say, and I've even heard from people working at call centers that even they're advised to not sound scripted," he says. "For me, having bullet points to go over helps me do better."

5. Recognize that others may have suggestions that might work.

Your clients may know things that can help you look like a hero, but you have to be open to hearing their input. That's something North does: After sharing data on his market, North actually asks consumers what they know about the market.

"No matter how many houses I may have sold in their neighborhood, they know people and sometimes know details about pending sales that other agents won't share," he says. "Three months ago, I was preparing for a listing and working with the clients on setting a price. I knew there were a couple of pending sales in their neighborhood but couldn't get the details from the agents.

"My clients, however, knew one of those sellers and the pending sales price—which was significantly higher than any closed sales in that neighborhood," says North. "That was information important in setting a sales price somewhat higher than I'd have been comfortable with based only on the information I had. I needed to be open to that. It's easy for us to feel like we're the expert and know it all, but we don't."

G.M. Filisko is a lawyer and freelance writer who specializes in real estate, legal, business, and personal finance topics.

Women: How Your Body Alignment Affects Your Voice

Though it can be a touchy subject, women have a few challenges that men typically don't encounter when it comes to presentations.

"Communication is different with women and for women," says Jessica Doyle, a vocal coach and professor at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C. "Some people have preconceived notions about women that we have to overcome. And sometimes, the sound of the voice for a woman is critiqued as too soft, too breathy, or too high. That's why recording yourself can help you better understand how you come across to others."

Presentation styles for women can also be affected by what they wear. "The shoes and clothes we wear can have a huge impact on the sound of our voice," says Doyle. "There's a thing called body mapping, which includes six points of balance in the body—your head, shoulders, knees, and toes, plus your rib cage and hips. If any of those are out of alignment, it can affect your speaking voice.

"For example, when your head is balanced on the spine, your voice sounds natural," she adds. "But if you push your head forward, like you're turtling, and speak, your voice sounds different and not natural."

"Things that can affect your body's alignment include wearing high heels or shapewear or carrying a heavy bag," notes Doyle. "Those can really restrict your voice. The idea that women are supposed to suck it in and stand tall by wearing high heels or shapewear can inhibit our ability to take a breath, therefore raising our anxiety and affecting our voice."

The Scams Your Colleagues Nearly Fell For

These real estate pros are savvy, yet they admit they were a click away from being a victim of fraud or danger. Here are their stories.

The warnings are everywhere—in fact, they're so prevalent that it's easy to tune them out and assume you're safe.

We're talking about the alerts about fraudsters looking to steal your or your clients' money. And it would be a very bad idea to dismiss those cautions because real estate pros just like you nearly lost their money or their personal safety. Read on to hear their experiences.

Listen to an insider: This is real

This a great message to get out because agents are an easy target, and education is the way to improve their awareness. Humans are often the weakest link in security. I was in digital for more than 12 years prior to becoming an agent and have had online threats on my mind since my first webmaster job in 2001. (I also defended against financial crimes during anti-money laundering analyst work for IBM during 2020 for income stability as real estate went haywire.)

Our online security world is massively more complex and dangerous than those early days, and most people seem vastly unaware of the risk that surrounds us. Unfortunately, it will get worse before it gets better.

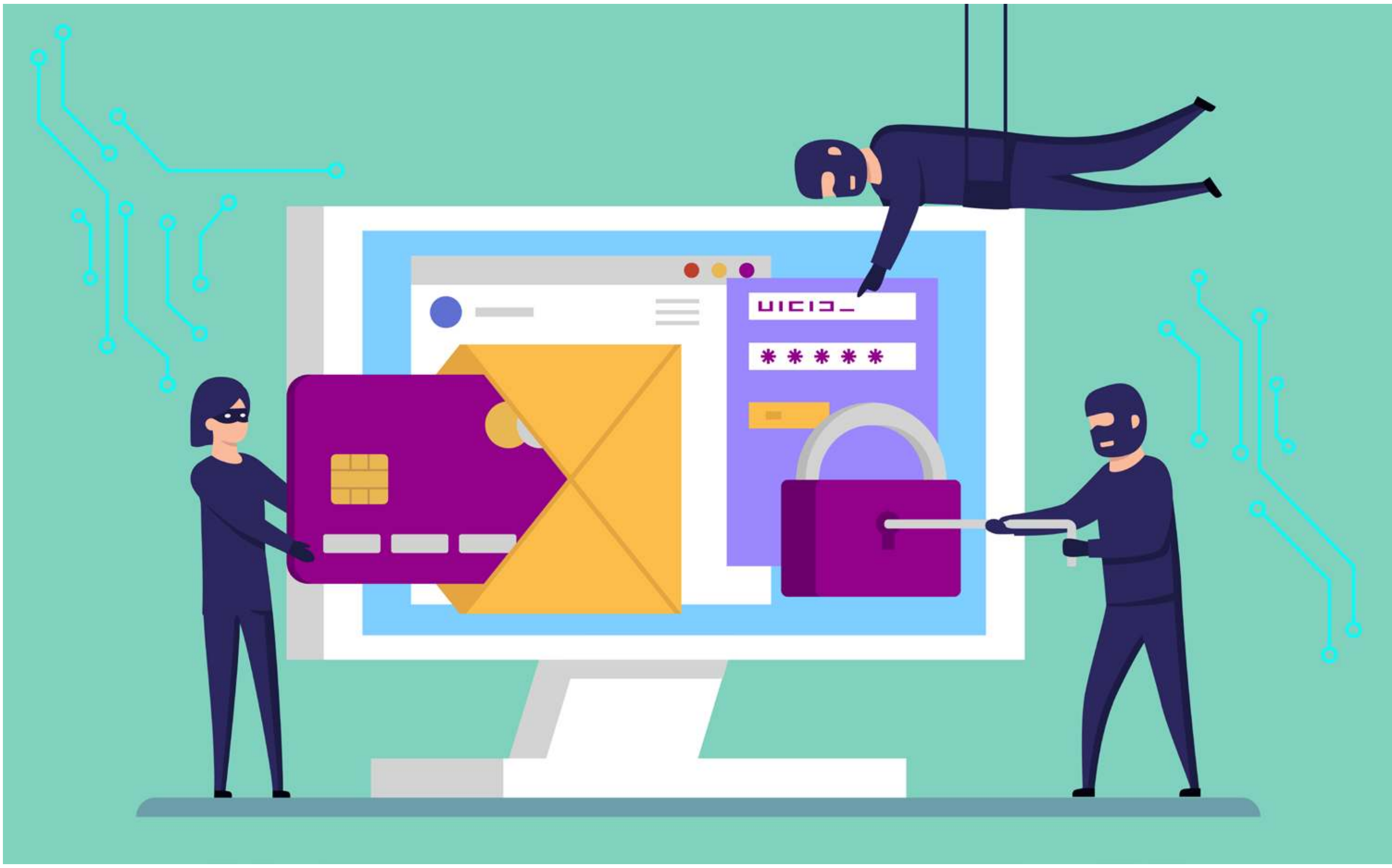
This is a common scam that catches newer agents or those unmindful to phishing scams. Given that some agents aren't tech savvy, I fear how many have been affected by this scam. It must work because it has continued for many years.

The agent receives a text message or email stating interest in a listed property followed by a link. Bingo. What agent wouldn't pay attention at this point? The problem is the communication contains a phishing link that either solicits information from the agent or leads to malware, both resulting in a potential hacked account.

The messages often contain "Facebook," "Craigslist," or some other familiar term to lower the recipient's defenses.

My anecdotal experience: In 2016, a former agent teammate of mine clicked on one of these links and ended up having her Venmo account hacked. She lost several hundred dollars.

There are many ways to defend against phishing attacks. I like Quad9.com because it's simple to set up and takes place in the background. Of course, no one defense measure will block everything, so continuing to learn how to be safe online is well worth the effort.
—Scott Rodgers, broker-associate,
The Peak Results, eXp Realty, Denver



Whatever the motive, it wasn't good

I had a gentleman send a fake pre-approval letter in an attempt to get me out to show him homes. If someone whom I don't know contacts me, I require a video consultation, which he did.

But there were so many red flags to the letter and phony bank statements, including the $1,834,021.49 ending balance. I figured out it was dangerous when he started sending terms of endearment in our text communications. Needless to say, I blocked him from further communication.
—Leslie Marie Moseley, agent, eXp Realty, Atlanta

Globalization, digitalization, plus COVID-19

I've been a real estate investor for more than a decade, and I noticed that the COVID-19 surge catapulted real estate scams. I know from experience the things to look out for in legitimate deals, but scammers are also getting more creative.

I almost fell for an international wire transfer scam. The email address belonged to a foreign real estate agent I trust, and I really thought it was authentic since the tone of its content was the same as in our last transaction.

The only red flag I noticed was the urgency of the request. In our previous deals, it would usually take months before the completion of negotiation. But the scam indicated a two-week deadline.

I phoned my foreign real estate agent and confirmed that his email account had been hacked. He'd been trying to reach out to his clients, including me, for the past few days to warn them of a possible digital scam.
—Robert Johnson, founder, Sawinery, Manchester, Conn.

Walking away saved the day

I am a broker who oversees thousands of transactions a year and am responsible for keeping hundreds of agents out of harm's way. Ironically, the closest I ever came to falling victim of a scam was on a transaction to which I was a principal.

I was purchasing an investment property in partnership with other investors. The closing agent was an attorney chosen by one of the other partners. It was the day of closing, and one of the partners emailed me the wiring instructions for his attorney's account. It was on the attorney's letterhead and looked identical to prior correspondence I'd received from that attorney.

However the name on the account was Golden Trucking. I found this very odd because the money should have been going into the attorney's trust account.

I replied to my partner and said I wasn't comfortable with this and questioned why it wasn't going to a trust account. I also pointed out that, with my attorney, that would never happen. He replied that the attorney was having a problem with his account and that this was a solution to allow us to close today. He urged me to send the payment, saying that if I didn't, we wouldn't be able to close on time, which would jeopardize all partners' down payments.

Reluctantly I logged in to my bank and began to initiate the wire, but my gut told me not to do it. I decided to drag my feet and left the office to get some lunch.

At lunch, my partner called me. I picked up the phone and apologized for being difficult and tried to explain how I was just not OK with this way of doing business. When my partner had no idea what I was talking about, I immediately realized what had happened. His email had been hacked, and the fraudster was obviously in his account, studying our deal and impersonating him.

This personal experience has helped me coach my agents on how to avoid scams like this. It's not hard to imagine how a less-experienced agent could have fallen for this. Although it seems obvious not to send money to the wrong account, when you start from a place of believing you're talking to a trusted person and seeing communication you believe is coming from an attorney, your mind isn't scrutinizing information the way it should.
—Zev Freidus, broker/president, ZFC Real Estate, Boca Raton, Fla.

Gift cards quickly, please

I've noticed a rise in real estate-targeted scams, specifically targeted at real estate agents. This week, I was texted by my "boss" asking me to pick up gift cards for clients. The most convincing part was that the scammer knew my name and said they were my boss *by name*.

Fortunately another agent texted the entire office letting us know it was a scam. Otherwise, I'd have had no idea it wasn't my boss asking for gift cards. Now I know phone calls are the best

way to see through a scam right away.
—Brittney Nichols, agent, Brittney Nichols Real Estate, Salty Mermaid Real Estate and Vacation Rentals, Anna Maria Island, Fla.

Laughable, but someone must fall for it

My sister and I were scouting for an apartment. There was a Craigslist listing for a place that was just what we were searching for at the correct price. The "landlord" was a local couple who said they couldn't get us in for a showing since they were on a mission trip in Malaysia working with sick children, but we could drive by and have a look.

For the payment, they wanted a Western Union money order transferred to a location in Nigeria. I busted out laughing and informed her it was a complete hoax.

We got into a major fight, and I had to go over everything that was wrong with the circumstance: Refusing to allow us to view the apartment prior to signing a contract, demanding a deposit without allowing us to view the unit, sending money to Nigeria through a wire transfer, and the fact that the "landlords" were performing missionary work in Malaysia but would like their funds transferred to another country.

Good thing we didn't allow ourselves to fall into that scam.*—Richard Latimer, CEO, Veritas Buyers, Huntsville, Ala.*

Your family member needs help now!

One of my brothers fell for the scam where the caller indicated he was arranging the bond for a second sibling and required $5,000 in "security." The first brother submitted his credit card number, supposing that the second brother had been victimized somehow.

He hung up and contacted a third brother (who lives close to the second brother in the same city) to find out what occurred. Brother 3 remarked, "With him, nothing occurred. I was at his place 20 minutes ago borrowing his lawnmower."

Brother 1 phoned his credit card and was informed that a charge of $4,000 had just been made to his account. Fortunately, the credit card company canceled the charges, but after Brother 1 fell for this scam once, he received calls from scammers roughly three times every week.
—Martin Boonzaayer, CEO, The Trusted Home Buyer, Phoenix

Check independently before clicking

I received an email that seemed real at first but turned out to be a scam. It contained a request to list the scammer's property, which seemed familiar to me at first glance, but I wasn't sure. The email provided a link before the beginning of the request to list his or her property with an introduction to the property. All other parts of the email were simple and plain—just like any other email from a seller requesting to list their property.

I realized the email was a scam while when I was going over the property data without clicking on the link. I found that the property was already listed recently by one of our familiar firms. Most scammers follow this strategy of using an organization or property you know or trust because it's easier for you to fall for the trap by trusting blindly.*—Jordan Scarpino, broker-owner, West Coast Real Estate Hub, Vancouver*

The urgency gave it away

I got an email asking me to list some properties, and the body of the email included some links. The email was written in professional language that seemed so real.

But I couldn't click on the links at that moment. Once I was free, I turned on my laptop and went to my inbox to recheck the mail. There, I saw that I had two more emails asking for my response. It's a sign of fraud when people are in a rush to get a reply. It was completely unprofessional and a hint that I shouldn't browse those links.
—Matt Ward, team lead,
The Matt Ward Group at Benchmark Realty, Franklin, Tenn.

Things usually handled by phone

The biggest scam that had many of us real estate professionals fooled, myself included, was receiving emails from known senders, such as attorneys, mortgage brokers, other agents, that appeared to be legitimate. Usually, the email included wiring instructions for an active transaction. Other times, the email could be asking for you to head to what was supposedly an esignature site, where you'd open with a password, and your password or signature could be compromised.

Fortunately, I spent much of the pandemic time enrolled in higher education, including completing the e-PRO certification. It provides information and skills to safeguard our online presence and secure our clients' confidential information.

The hackers may be clever. However, they usually make some small error in their spelling or facts that didn't coincide with an active transaction. The error is often a misplaced or omitted letter or poor grammar; sometimes, it's for a transaction that has already closed.

I suggest always checking with the sender through a phone call before providing any information, wiring money, or esigning. Most real estate won't ask you by email to wire money; they discuss this on a phone call, where they provide the wiring information.
—Mary Jane Taglieri, ABR, e-PRO, broker/founder/instructor, Options Real Estate Services, Marblehead, Mass.

Back to paper checks?

Unfortunately, we see scams a fair amount. Typically, we receive an email from a title company that we're not working on the "Jones" file. Since we're a small operation of less than 10 agents, it's easy for us to spot these as a scam. We know our active files and our frequent counterparties.

We did have a client who was shorted $100,000 when the title/escrow company in California was hacked. The hackers changed the wire instructions, and the escrow company didn't check to verify that information. Those clients were made whole, but I'm not sure what happened to the escrow company.

Also, it seems a fair amount lawyers, escrow companies, and other third parties are reverting to checks instead of wire transfers as a safety precaution. *— Kevin Leibowitz, founder, Grayton Mortgage, Brooklyn, N.Y.*

Is a Resume Enough (Or Even Necessary)?

Here's what brokers and team leaders say they ask job candidates to provide during the hiring process.

Resumes and cover letters are so retro! But they're also staples in the hiring process since they can, even inadvertently, say a lot about potential agents and office staff.

But in the world of LinkedIn and tons of other sites that can also reveal much about the people you're considering bringing on your team, are resumes still worth asking for from candidates? And even if you do ask for and scrutinize these documents, what else are you asking for to ensure you're bringing qualified people on board?

Here, brokers and team leaders nationwide share with us what they want from agents and office staff they're evaluating during the recruiting process, along with some unusual responses they've received (and be sure not to miss how a banana fits into recruiting!).

Show me a plan of action

I ask all potential staff for a resume, and I ask for a resume from agents as well. Then I like to take notes while asking questions about previous positions. A job can have a fancy name, but sometimes there's no meat to the position. I'm also asking to ensure that the job the candidate describes is the same as what's on the resume. I've found that people get "help" on their resumes but don't always read what the "help" wrote!

I also ask agents to submit a list of their goals and a plan of action, as well as a schedule for how they plan to work in their real estate business. It doesn't have to be a 50-page report, but I do want to know what the agent plans to put into their business. It also helps me to determine how much support they need from me and my staff.—*Kaye Thompson, CRB, RENE, principal broker, Best Real Estate Co., Memphis, Tenn.*

Underselling already

When looking for people to add to my team, I usually just require their resume and cover letter. If these sound good enough, I immediately move them through the interview process, which is where I focus most of my energy. I need to witness first-hand how my prospective team members handle conversations, so that's where I spend most of my time.

I haven't seen anything particularly quirky about the resumes or cover letters I've received, but if there's one thing I've learned from going through them, it's that people tend to undersell themselves on their written credentials. It's when I get to interview people that they really get to shine.

For example, they may have interesting stories to tell or specific skills that, at first glance, may

not necessarily be related to the job they're applying for. It's understandable, of course, that there will always be constraints on the resume and cover letter. But I've certainly learned not to rely on resumes and cover letters alone when vetting applicants. That's precisely why I tend to move applicants forward rather quickly. I don't want to make too big a deal out of their paper submissions.—*Cameron Miller, CEO, Cameron Miller Real Estate, Property.ca Inc. Brokerage, Toronto*

"Writing" beyond the resume

I do ask for a resume from both agents and staff. I ask for letters of interest only from staff members. I'm not as concerned about the letter's content as much as I am about the quality of writing and what I can discern about the candidate from it.

I also do an internet and social media search on every agent and staff member. I get more out of their "writing" and posting on those platforms than anywhere else. I'll say that many agents and staff have lost the opportunity to work with us because of their online engagement.

In one example, a potential agent had a series of posts related to life drama, including vulgar language and complaining about active clients. The post that really made me stop the bus was when she posted that she was going to get pregnant so that her current "lover" would be forced to tell his wife about them. I think those red flags represented other character qualities that would have been disruptive to our culture but also showed a lack of restraint and professionalism that could create confidentiality issues with current clients.

In another instance, an applicant for a staff position had a series of anti-Black Lives Matter posts. In those posts, the candidate made statements about how African Americans "deserved" to be treated with more hostility by police because they are more "violent." She went on to say a number of other things over a period of days that I found strongly discriminatory and untrue about African Americans.

From staff to agents, recruits would be ambassadors of our company, and the statements made online are a reflection of who we are and who we hire. People will elect to do business with our agents based on the public statements of anyone associated with the firm. If even an entry-level staff member makes questionable statements online, it could cost the agents a lot of money in lost revenue. And even if that wasn't true, racism has no place in our firm.

For agents, I use BrokerMetrics and a search of the MLS to get their production numbers. Agents tend to inflate their numbers, so I prefer independent reporting. I do ask agents to review those reports because, from time to time, agents do have production that isn't in the report for one reason or another.

I haven't thought about other things I should be asking for. I'm eager to see what I'm missing!
—Matthew Rathbun, CRB, C-RETS, RENE, SRS, executive vice president, Coldwell Banker Elite/ Four Pillars Education, Fredericksburg, Va.

A simple data request

What I ask for is a cover letter from agents that explains how long it takes them to go from getting a lead to closing. I know many people who make many sales but only after introducing many failed potential clients to the property. Spending too much time trying to make sales is more of a waste on profits than spending less time and landing more sales.
—Omer Reiner, president,
Florida Cash Home Buyers, Ft. Lauderdale

Did you notice the banana?

In our job ads, we ask applicants to include a fruit—for example, a banana—in their cover letter. This shows that they've read the instructions thoroughly and are prepared to do something they may not understand fully.

More than half of our applicants don't even mention the fruit in their cover letter. Some people understand the reason and humor, so they've included a sentence that tries to relate the fruit to the job. The humor either endears recruits to our brand or puts them off. When they respond with something intelligent or funny, it's a good signal that they're worth moving to the next stage of the hiring process.
—Paul Lisanti, agent, Legacy Real Estate Group, Keller Williams Signature Realty,
Oakville, Canada

The no-shows are epic

We ask for a resume and cover letter along with proof of success in the form of stats, completed projects, and so on. If office staff candidates get into the second round of interviews, we ask them to develop a mock project to prove their ability to achieve the roles they're applying for.

What's been off-putting in the process is people—and it's mostly agents—being late or even missing their interviews. Believe it or not, it happens a lot. After it happens, we don't hear from them again.—*Sarah Richardson, CEO/founder, Tru Realty, Scottsdale, Ariz.*

Big expectations on the commercial side

In this day and age, I ask my experienced broker recruits for their website. If a commercial agent is serious about their craft, they'll have their own website that's connected to their MLS listings and solds. And they'll have lots of contacts, both buyers and sellers. So I'll ask if they're connected to LionDesk, IDX Broker, and other CRM tools, along with how many contacts are in their wheelhouse.

They'll also have a strategic marketing campaign in place to keep in touch with their contacts on a regular basis. I ask about their marketing strategy to gauge how proactive they are.—*Marina Vaamonde, founder, Property Cashin, Houston*

No resume, just some questions

I have a group of 10 experienced agents to whom I pass leads for servicing. My recruiting process is simple and doesn't require resumes or lengthy interviews.

Agents first receive a questionnaire that asks them information about their practice and business experience. We review their answers and verify it through accessible information on the internet. In the questionnaire, we're focused on sales data and finding out their motive for wanting to join our lead-referral program.

One question is: What's your number-one goal as a real estate agent? We get a variety of responses. Some agents want to do more deals and make more money. Others want to build relationships with new people or boost their reviews. This question helps us get to know what motivates them.

We also ask: How was your experience with online leads previously? The responses we get are indicative of what you'd hear on the street from agents about online leads. About half say online leads are great; the other half say online leads are terrible. The answer is important during our process.— *Matiah Fischer, founder, Realty 360, Las Vegas*

Let's start with past clients

I ask agent recruits to submit the contact information of some of their recent clients so I can call all those clients and ask them about their experience. It helps me know about the service provided by the recruits. *—Ron Wysocarski, broker/CEO, Wyse Home Team Realty, Port Orange, Fla.*

License, please

The job of a real estate agent depends more on interpersonal skills rather than academic learning. A good resume or cover letter hardly matters in a real estate job. Instead, the first thing that should be checked is whether the new recruit has a license.—*Dino DiNenna, owner, Southern Lifestyle Properties, Hilton Head, S.C.*

John D. Mayfield
ABR®, CIPS, CRBsm, C-RETS, e-Pro, GRIsm, RENE, SRS

Creating Positive Habits

Category: Motivational/ professional development

Materials Needed: Handouts included with the meeting, flip chart, 3x5 index cards, and paper

Estimated Time: 15-20 minutes

PowerPoint Available: No

Meeting Objective: To help your team members identify new ways to create positive habits for prospecting for new business based on *Tiny Habits: The Small Changes that Change Everything* by BJ Fogg.

INTRODUCTION TO TODAY'S MEETING

Share with your group that today's meeting is based on a book by BJ Fogg titled *Tiny Habits: The Small Changes that Change Everything.*

Also share this quote from the Blinklist summary of the book:

"When you make something simple and easy to do, you're much more likely to actually do it."

Distribute the 3x5 index cards to everyone.

STEP 1

Have the group write down three business-related items they enjoy doing each day—stress that these should be *business related*—and three items they dislike working on. Allow for a few minutes to finish the exercise.

After a few moments, ask your group to share with one another the items they listed on their index cards—both positive and negative tasks they enjoy or dislike.

STEP 2

Ask your group to share what they believe is the best way they've discovered in their lives to create a habit. Ask participants to write this idea on one side of their index card. Allow a few moments for your group to write down their responses.

Ask for volunteers to share their ideas. Be sure to thank each volunteer and to allow everyone to add comments or suggestions.

STEP 3

Share that Fogg suggests that one way to create meaningful habits is to break them down into smaller habits. Why? Because most of us enjoy doing habits we enjoy and that we can do. If you know you can do something easily, you're more apt to do that task.

For example, everyone needs to prospect daily. What if your goal is to contact one or two expired listing prospects today? Is this doable for you?

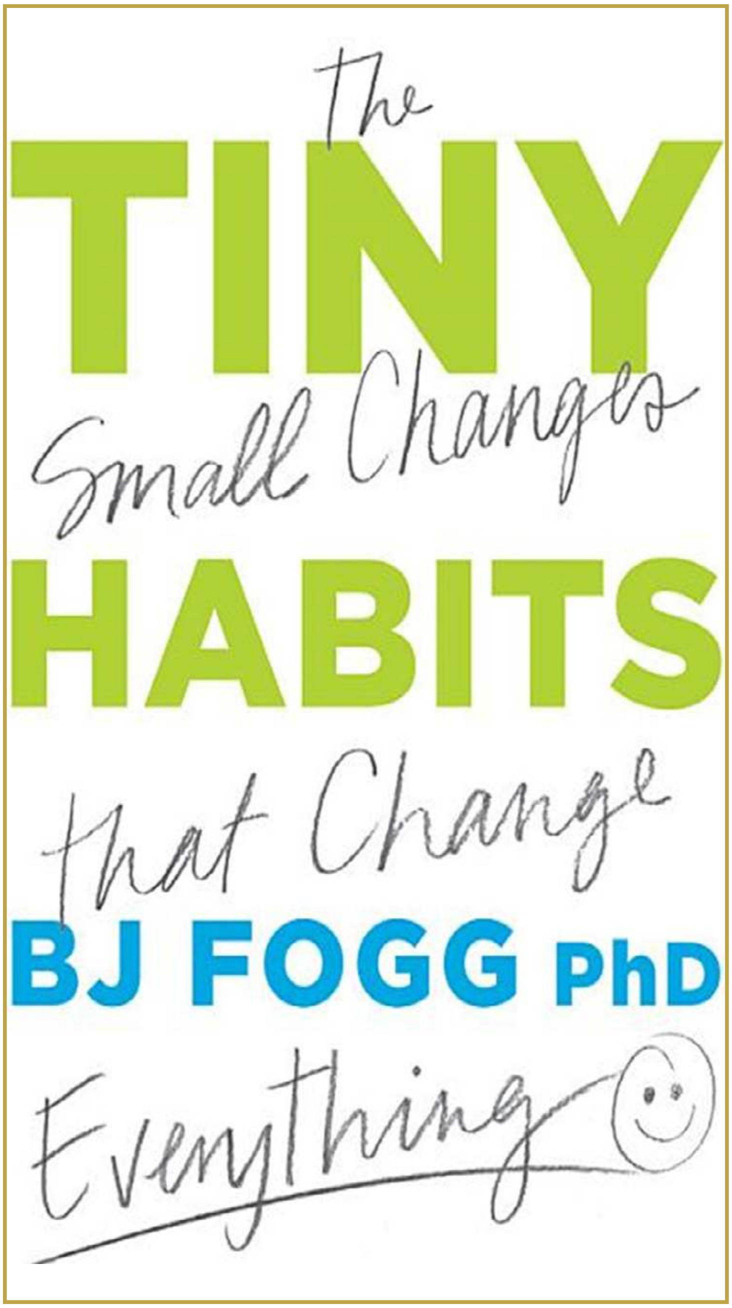
Or maybe your goal is to send one handwritten note to a past client or customer. Could you achieve this goal?

Fogg says that when you make something simple and easy to do, you're much more likely to actually do it.

Unfortunately, routine activities can consume our days, where prospecting is put on the back burner and future new business is lost.

STEP 4

On the back of each index card, have your team write down three areas they know are good ways to prospect for new business. For example, calling FSBOs, contacting expired listings, working their sphere of influence, knocking on doors, and so on.



Under each category, have your team set a simple and easy daily goal to help them accomplish this prospecting task.

Explain to your team that your aim is to help them begin to form tiny habits toward daily prospecting, helping these new habits begin to develop into consistent, routine behaviors throughout their career.

CLOSING

Explain to your group that Fogg offers the following advice:

- Begin with a starter step. For example, if your goal is to contact five new leads every day, start with something small that will allow your new habit to take root. Perhaps you begin calling only one new prospect per day.

- Make sure your new tiny habit is something that can be accomplished quickly. Yes, you can have multiple goals, but begin with a tiny habit that you can check off without a lot of effort. The key is to do this consistently. This leads to Fogg's next piece of wisdom: Sustainable change means doing the same things day in and day out.

- Remember, the easier the habit, the higher the chances you'll adopt it.

- Create prompts to trigger your desired behaviors. For example, if you find yourself beginning to check social media, tell yourself you have to send a postcard or a handwritten note or contact an expired listing first. Fogg reminds us to consider our location, frequency, and theme when creating a trigger, but use triggers to remind you that your tiny habit comes first.

> *When you make something simple and easy to do, you're much more likely to actually do it.*
>
> – Blinklist summary of *Tiny Habits: The Small Changes that Change Everything*

John Mayfield, ABR®, CIPS, CRBsm, C-RETS, e-Pro, GRIsm, RENE, SRS, received his real estate license in 1978 and has been a practicing broker since 1981. He earned his Master's degree from REALTOR® University in 2015, has been recogized as REALTOR® of the Year from his local board, and received the 2014 Richard A. Mendenhall Leadership award from Missouri REALTORS®. John has spoken to thousands of real estate professionals in over 22 countries and served as the 2010 President of the CRB Council. He also owns and operates the Global Real Estate School. For more information, visit www.globalrealestateschool.com.

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