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Appraisal Tips

- 1.** Be sure to have any safety equipment installed and working properly. These include smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, and home security alarms, among other things.
- 2.** Walk around your home before the appraisal with a critical eye. Look for any damage that could decrease your home's value. Are there loose floor boards? Does the roof leak? Do the gutters work properly? These things don't just help the home look better—they also show that the owner has up kept the house properly.
- 3.** Inform your home appraiser of any home improvements you have done on your home. Be sure to provide the appraiser a list of any improvements you've made in your home. New additions, replaced HVAC units, siding, gutters, a new roof, remodeled kitchens and updated bathrooms will all positively reflect on your appraisal.
- 4.** Do some sprucing up. Repaint the walls and hang new curtains. Install shiny new doorknobs or faucets. Small things don't do a lot in an appraisal, but they add up— and they also give the entire home the appearance of being modern and updated. Outdated décor can have a negative impact on an appraisal, while a more modern appearance can have a positive impact.
- 5.** Do some research on other homes in the neighborhood. What is the value of homes similar to yours in your neighborhood? What about the sales prices of homes sold in your area in recent months? What problems may have been encountered during their appraisals? Many of these items are public record, but if you're comfortable, feel free to speak with your neighbors about it. They may be able to help you hit some common problems off at the pass if they've recently undergone an appraisal.
- 6.** Clean your heart out. Wash down the walls and shampoo the carpet. Clear out the clutter. Power wash decks, driveways and the exterior of your home. A clean home looks newer and more attractive to appraisers and buyers alike.
- 7.** Pay attention to your yard. Mow your grass and trim your trees and shrubbery. Consider having dead trees removed, if possible, before your appraisal. Add some color with flowers, and in the winter, be sure to clear all ice and snow from walkways and driveways. Remove clutter from both the front and backyards, including stray toys, bicycles, and lawn furniture. Be sure to thoroughly weed flowerbeds and add mulch where applicable. Houses with high curb appeal receive better appraisals, hands down.
- 8.** Update the materials in your home. Update old countertops, paint cupboards or reface them and replace old flooring, if you can. Outdated prints and linoleum flooring look dated. You'd be surprised how inexpensive flooring can be to replace, specially if you do it yourself. Laminate flooring and tile will refresh a room, as will updating countertops, even if you simply add in laminate counters. Keep the looks neutral and adaptable, yet modern. Classic is always a great bet, as it is timeless.
- 9.** Mind the \$500 rule. Things that need to be corrected or are out of date—things like damaged tile floors, old wallpaper, a broken door, or an outdated bathroom vanity— usually take hits in \$500 increments. As a general rule, it is safe to assume that small issues will take \$500 hits in the total home value. If the appraiser finds several of these problem issues, the result can be thousands in lost home value. As a rule of thumb, fix problems immediately that would cost less than \$500 to fix. This way you will recover that cost in your appraisal.
- 10.** Look beyond your house to the surrounding area. Are there new schools, parks, highway ramps, stores or other public amenities that have been added since you bought the house? Point these out to your appraiser. They may not be totally familiar with the area, and amenities such as these can add even more value to your home. Be sure to tell the appraiser about them.

SELLING TIPS

Selling Secret #1: The first impression is the only impression. No matter how good the interior of your home looks, buyers have already judged your home before they walk through the door. You never have a second chance to make a first impression. It's important to make people feel warm, welcome and safe as they approach the house. Spruce up your home's exterior with inexpensive shrubs and brightly colored flowers. You can typically get a 100-percent return on the money you put into your home's curb appeal. Entryways are also important. You use it as a utility space for your coat and keys. But, when you're selling, make it welcoming by putting in a small bench, a vase of fresh-cut flowers or even some cookies.

Selling Secret #2: Always be ready to show. Your house needs to be "show-ready" at all times – you never know when your buyer is going to walk through the door. You have to be available whenever they want to come see the place and it has to be in tip-top shape. Don't leave dishes in the sink, keep the dishwasher cleaned out, the bathrooms sparkling and make sure there are no dust bunnies in the corners. It's a little inconvenient, but it will get your house sold.

Selling Secret #3: The kitchen comes first. You're not actually selling your house, you're selling your kitchen – that's how important it is. The benefits of remodeling your kitchen are endless, and the best part of it is that you'll probably get 85% of your money back. It may be a few thousand dollars to replace countertops where a buyer may knock \$10,000 off the asking price if your kitchen looks dated. The fastest, most inexpensive kitchen updates include painting and new cabinet hardware. Use a neutral-color paint so you can present buyers with a blank canvas where they can start envisioning their own style. If you have a little money to spend, buy one fancy stainless steel appliance. Why one? Because when people see one high-end appliance they think all the rest are expensive too and it updates the kitchen.

Selling Secret #4: Take the home out of your house. One of the most important things to do when selling your house is to depersonalize it. The more personal stuff in your house, the less potential buyers can imagine themselves living there. Get rid of a third of your stuff – put it in storage. This includes family photos, memorabilia collections and personal keepsakes. Consider hiring a home stager to maximize the full potential of your home. Staging simply means arranging your furniture to best showcase the floor plan and maximize the use of space.

Selling Secret #5: Don't over-upgrade. Quick fixes before selling always pay off. Mammoth makeovers, not so much. You probably won't get your money back if you do a huge improvement project before you put your house on the market. Instead, do updates that will pay off and get you top dollar. Get a new fresh coat of paint on the walls. Clean the curtains or go buy some inexpensive new ones. Replace door handles, cabinet hardware, make sure closet doors are on track, fix leaky faucets and clean the grout.

Selling Secret #6: Conceal the critters. You might think a cuddly dog would warm the hearts of potential buyers, but you'd be wrong. Not everybody is a dog- or cat-lover. Buyers don't want to walk in your home and see a bowl full of dog food, smell the kitty litter box or have tufts of pet hair stuck to their clothes. It will give buyers the impression that your house is not clean. If you're planning an open house, send the critters to a pet hotel for the day.

Selling Secret #7: Play the agent field. A secret sale killer is hiring the wrong broker. Make sure you have a broker who is totally informed. They must constantly monitor the multiple listing service (MLS), know what properties are going on the market and know the comps in your neighborhood. Find a broker who embraces technology – a tech-savvy one has many tools to get your house sold.

Selling Secret #8: Light it up. Maximize the light in your home. After location, good light is the one thing that every buyer cites that they want in a home. Take down the drapes, clean the windows, change the lampshades, increase the wattage of your light bulbs and cut the bushes outside to let in sunshine. Do what you have to do to make your house bright and cheery – it will make it more sellable.

Selling Secret #9: Half-empty closets. Storage is something every buyer is looking for and can never have enough of. Take half the stuff out of your closets then neatly organize what's left in there. Buyers will snoop, so be sure to keep all your closets and cabinets clean and tidy.

Selling Secret #10: Pricing it right. Find out what your home is worth, then shave 15 to 20 percent off the price. You'll be stampeded by buyers with multiple bids – even in the worst markets – and they'll bid up the price over what it's worth. It takes real courage and most sellers just don't want to risk it, but it's the single best strategy to sell a home in today's market.