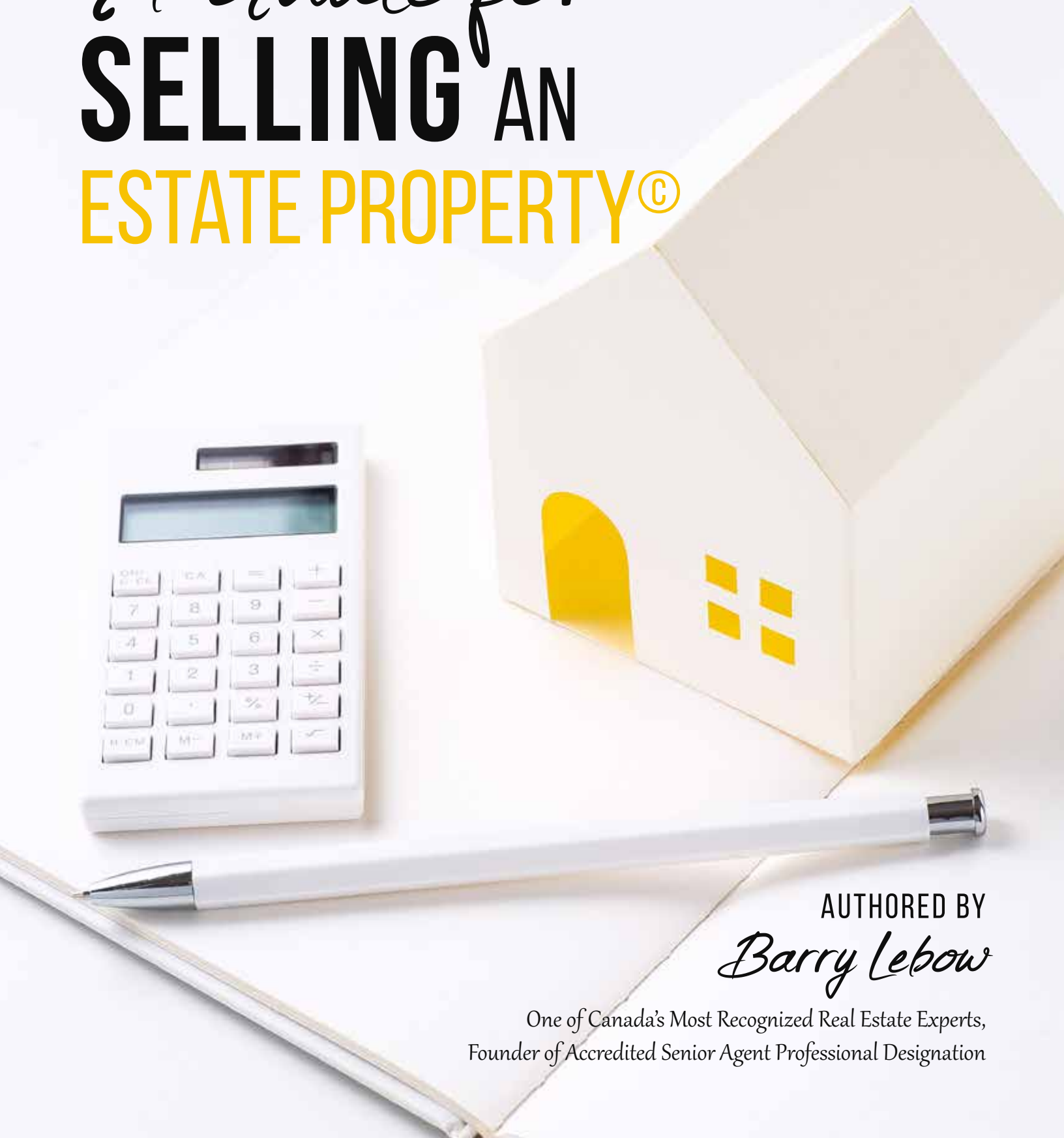
Estates and REALTOR© Selection

A Guide for SELLING AN ESTATE PROPERTY©



AUTHORED BY

Barry Lebow

One of Canada's Most Recognized Real Estate Experts,
Founder of Accredited Senior Agent Professional Designation

“IN A NUTSHELL,

every day a Master-ASA does things you will likely have to do only once in a lifetime. For the Master-ASA, it is a familiar process; for you and your family, it will likely be a confusing, guilt-ridden, stressful and intimidating process.”

Chris Newell, FOUNDER, MASTER-ASA

Introduction | WHY DID I WRITE THIS GUIDE?

Why was this book written, because few people have experience as an Estate Trustee, save for professionals. For most people it can be a daunting undertaking.

Few REALTORS® have the necessary experience to work with an estate. Any REALTOR® can list and sell, but for an estate sale a highly trained specialist is required.

As a Master-Accredited Senior Agent and the founder of the ASA professional designation program for Canadian Realtors, I wrote the training manuals for this aspect of real estate and have trained hundreds of Realtors across Canada.

For an estate, before listing and working with the Estate trustee, as a Master-ASA, I will undertake the following:

- Undertake a written market valuation;
- Bring in his downsizing professionals who will sort the contents: what is sentimental and will remain with the family but may have to be shipped, what has value and should be sold, what can be donated and what charities will take what, and last, bring in service people to clean out the remainder to be discarded;
- I will show better ways than the backbreaking work and nickel and dime proceeds of garage sales;
- The goods are not just to be donated but I must ensure charitable receipts are received;
- Once a house is cleared, repairs or renovations usually have to be made; I will guide the Estate trustee in deciding what repairs are necessary and which renovations are worthwhile, all with a 'dollar spent to dollars back' approach;
- You can draw on my list of professional appraisers whose expertise ranges from real estate to antiques;
- There are lawyers who are knowledgeable about estates, and are recommended;
- Some estates are complicated and accountants who understand the complexities are needed;
- Where families are at odds, as they often are in estate cases, I work with difficult family situations or Family Wars and have professionals who offer family mediation for difficult circumstances;
- Where families are at odds, as is often the case with estates, I work with these difficult situations, or Family Wars, and have professionals who offer family mediation, if necessary;
- Selling an estate is not easy but as a highly trained and dedicated Master-ASA I bring ease to the process and have for hundreds of families over my career.

Thank you for requesting A Guide for Selling an Estate Property. Feel free to contact me about any questions and always - **there is no obligation, no one will call you unless you ask!**

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Step One | A PROPER WRITTEN APPRAISAL

Price is the first step. What is it worth? Before the treasures are cleared, and the junk discarded, value has to be established. Given that many estates have bickering heirs, a proper valuation is the essential first step in the process of listing an estate property. It sets the stage, and offers everyone a single goal or focus: to achieve that sale price! And you want to be sure it's an independent appraisal from a divested and designated professional. A proper appraisal protects the Estate Trustee as well.

Yes, Realtors can price the house, but many are not equipped to properly estimate value or they come in at a price that is not realistic in order to get the listing. An appraiser has no other service to offer. They are not involved in the result: they are neutral. Too often we hear about beneficiaries who complain that the family home was undersold or listed too high and therefore on the market too long. That is why an independent appraiser is necessary for the process. In Canada, appraisers should be designated, either through the Appraisal Institute of Canada or the Canadian National Association of Real Estate Appraisers. Interesting fact, Ontario does not have licensing for appraisers.

A proper valuation must be carefully researched, analysed and written in a manner that allows the layman or professional to understand the conclusion. Unfortunately, few residential appraisers have the skills for a true market evaluation. Most residential appraisers are busy filling in forms for mortgage companies and rely on volume. Mortgage valuation is not accurate valuation.

Volume appraisers do not take the time or the necessary steps to undertake a quality appraisal. Not only is the report to be tested, so is the appraiser. It is too common for appraisers to state that they will not testify in court. You may think that your situation will never end in court, but unfortunately the courts are filled with people who thought the same way. Ensure

that when interviewing an appraiser that they have court experience, so your report is written with the right level of quality. Avoid mortgage appraisers, where possible.

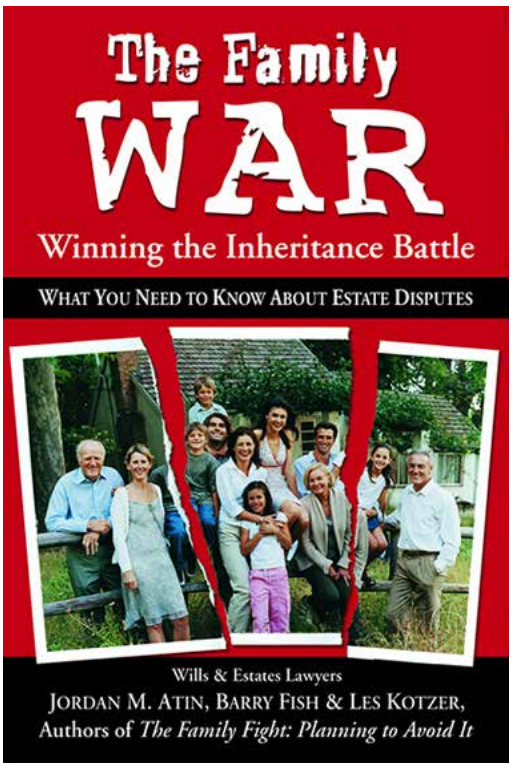
Finding the right appraiser in each city or town is not always easy. In large cities such as Toronto, a handful of residential appraisers have the necessary skills to value an estate and to testify in court, if that arises. In smaller centres, there may only be a single appraiser but usually in smaller centres appraisers have more varied experience.

How then, can you find a good appraiser? First ask your lawyer. Or ask me. Having criss-crossed North America for many years on behalf of my clients, I have worked with many fine real estate professionals in various centres. I have retained local appraisers from Texas to Northern Ontario. I can provide a short list of the best qualified appraisers for any property in Ontario, from a single family to an entire portfolio. For other provinces and states, I have many professional contacts.

Step Two | FAMILY RELATIONS

If you are a sole heir, you are envied. What So many estates create tension with families, not over the process but old wounds resurface and complicate things. Old slights and family dynamics cloud reasonable thinking.

A top Realtor must have some experience in family mediation. In a simple perspective, the process should always start with a the end-goal in mind. The questions are basic, "Do you want the property sold? When do you want it sold and roughly how much do you get from your share?" Sitting down with the parties, even warring parties, and asking those hard questions can lead the Realtor to state: "Then let's work to the result! You don't like your (fill in: sibling, cousin, aunt, former partner, etc.) then let's make it simple. The longer we have to deal with the property, the longer you have to deal with each other. The longer you keep the property, the higher the costs. Therefore, let's work together on the objective, which is the property and not on the old wounds. Let's make this happen so you can have closure, to move on and to make you the most money in the shortest time possible. You can go back to not disliking each other when this is over." Yep, tough love in real estate!



Sometimes, a tough mediator is needed. When your Realtor is not equipped with the right skills and experience, an outside mediator can be brought in. However, keep the lawyers at bay. When family members retain their own lawyers, costs escalate at the expense of each party.

Remember, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. You can make that end come quickly and easily or you can allow emotions to dominate the conversations, but then everyone will lose.

As a university-trained Arbitrator and Mediator it bothers me when a simple process becomes about the parties and their dislike of each other. It dominates the process and bad decisions prevail. Sometimes, an outside professional has to take a rather strong role in the process.

After all, it is your inheritance - **your money.**

For more on this subject, no better book exists in Canada than:

The Family War: Winning the Inheritance Battle by Jordan M. Atin, Barry Fish, Les Kotzer

Step Three | REALTOR SELECTION

For an Estate, a qualified, trained Realtor can guide you through the entire process, bring in top experts and service providers and make a complicated situation easy.

Having a Realtor with the Master-ASA designation is a sure-fire way to know that you are in good hands. But how do you find and ultimately choose the best Realtor for you and your family?

2 **ASA or Master-ASA Designation**

Most Realtors list and sell - that is it. Few offer full services. ASA members are people with experience, a strong network of people to help you make the right decisions for the right reasons, and the ability to help several generations make it through in one piece! See more of this in Step 8!

Choosing the wrong Realtor will drag out the process, possibly resulting in the value of the property being less than a more experienced or focussed Realtor could obtain. So beyond the designation, there are things you can look for that will help you ensure that you are entrusting the right person, for all the right reasons.

HOW TO FIND YOUR REALTOR

1 **Know Your Goals; Never Waiver**

Start with perceiving the completion of the sale and you'll have a much better chance of achieving it. Not having goals can allow for much more emotional decision-making, and that can be disastrous. Take the time to sit down with everyone who will be involved in the process, and ask each one what "success" means, then compile a full list. Most often you will find that there are few conflicts, because at the end of the day, you're all shooting for the same thing: good value delivered on time and with additional help on the more emotional side of moving a senior, or dealing with an estate.

3 **Is Real Estate Their Only Career?**

Many people will have real estate as a second, or even third career. You'd have to ask yourself if you would truly be the focus for them, or if they could become distracted and leave you by the wayside. Picking a full time, focussed, experienced and dedicated Realtor ensures that you are their centre of attention.

4 Listing Machines

Be careful of Realtors who take abundant listings and then have junior team members to handle your needs.

5 Testimonials And Internet Research

Check the Realtor's website or social media channels. Do they have many recommendations or positive testimonials? Look at the reasons people offer as reasons for their words of praise. Do they mirror your "hot buttons?" Your concerns and needs are paramount, and if the testimonials don't add up to the Realtor's own descriptions of themselves, then perhaps they're not as authentic as you need them to be! Do not forget to Google search the Realtor as well.

6 Look Beyond the Presentation

Many people will say anything just to get in the door, so don't let your emotions get in the way. Make a logical and rational decision. Make sure the Realtor you choose has every aspect necessary to make the process run smoothly - and that includes more than just smooth talk, pretty pictures and lovely graphs.

7 Don't Just Go with "My Friend/ brother/cousin"

We love our family and friends, but that doesn't mean it's the best choice. Approach their offers to work with you with kindness, but let them know that you're about to embark on a serious mission, with lots at stake. Emotional decisions are easy to make here, because it's tough to say "no" to someone close to us.

Review their presentation and background and only select them if they truly are the best option.

8 Lowest Commission Loses

Commissions are a reality to the process, but look past the number at the value you should be getting. The lowest commission Realtor could treat you like a transaction as they have to do volume. You may save on commission, but you could lose in the end as a professional could have possibly made you more on the sale.

9 Number Envy

Some Realtors will tout the sheer number of sales they have made. While impressive, again, it doesn't mean that they dealt in your area of need: moving seniors or dealing with an estate sale. There is much more going on in these situations, and you need to account for the emotional toll that it will take. And then ask yourself: if I'm treated like a transaction, will that be okay, or because

of the people involved, and all that must be done, should I shoot for someone with a bit more empathy?

10 **Marketing and Advertising Plan**
No property sells itself. Today, a Realtor must design a custom program with strong internet presence. Print is almost dead today. Today's buyers are tech savvy and you require a dedicated website, SEO, and other internet marketing.

SOME TIPS ON REALTOR SELECTION

What the public does not know about top Realtors is the extent of their education. A good Realtor takes seminars and education courses on a continuing basis. It is proven (National Association of Realtors survey) that Realtors with professional designations earn from two to three times the income of a non designated Realtor. It's not about income: it's about professionalism, the knowledge that one has to absorb and the dedication that sets a designated Realtor to be one of the real estate elite. It is estimated that about 6-7% of all of the 53,000± Realtor members of the Toronto Real Estate Board dominate in sales. A large percentage never had a sale in the past twelve months! Worse, the majority of agents sell less than 6 houses a year!

So, Realtor selection can ensure that the process goes smoothly. A professional who knows what they are doing and can not only list the house but negotiate the offer to help you achieve

maximum value. Low commissions should not dominate your thinking because you truly get what you pay for.

A Master-ASA Realtor is dedicated to the career of real estate. They have longevity, education, experience, contribution, an established Network of Exceptional Specialists and much more.

It is not easy to be a designated Realtor as many associations have ongoing, mandatory continuing education. A designated Realtor is on top of the most recent changes in real estate from law to forms. As well, software and new applications seem to be coming to market every few days.

Keeping abreast of the constant changes in computerization, the internet and software is part of what it takes today to be a professional Realtor.

Further, check if the Realtor is active in professional associations. A dedicated professional gives back to their industry, they contribute. Have they received recognition for their contributions to professional real estate?

Step Four | OUTSIDE SERVICES

There is an old real estate cliche, "Do you want your property on the market, in the market or ahead of the market?" Being "on the market" is what so many Realtors do: they just take the listing, put it on MLS and hope that someone comes along with a buyer. That is why a great percentage of properties expire each month because they were merely "on the market."

A top professional Realtor does not just list a property, they market it. They work hard to find a buyer. It is their objective to be both the listing and selling broker. For an estate though, an experience Realtor has to offer more services and advice. Master-ASA designated members have the backing of Exceptional Experts.

Some of the services that the *Exceptional Experts* can provide through their Master-ASA co-ordinator include:

- Appraisers for art, object of art, antiques, automobiles
- Auction services to sell possessions you want to turn into cash
- Bed bug removal
- Certified real estate appraisal services
- Charities, which ones take what goods
- Family dispute resolution
- Financial advisors who are neutral and do not sell products
- Handyman services
- Home Inspection
- Housekeeping services
- Mortgage brokerage services for the buyers
- Mould remediation
- Packing and unpacking services
- Quality movers
- Relocation - network with Realtors across Canada, United States, and other parts of the world
- Smell - too many old houses smell like old houses.
- They have to be neutralized for first impressions
- Staging to make the home achieve the highest price
- Which consignment shops are best for unwanted items
- Insurance services - few insurers allow a house to remain vacant

Before any services are offered, the Realtor must inspect the premises, submit a written report and recommendations to the Estate Trustee. Sometimes, small things, like minor sprucing of the exterior, which adds to the curb appeal, or the removal of old broadloom to expose long covered hardwood can bring in a much higher price.

Step Five | DEALING WITH "THE STUFF"

Nothing will hinder a sale or cause more emotional grief than dealing with the"stuff." Stuff is divided in various categories:

HEIRLOOMS AND SENTIMENTAL

objects to be distributed. A good Realtor will work with the heirs to divide the contents in a fair manner. If an heir is out of the city they will arrange packaging and delivery.

STUFF TO BE SOLD FOR INCOME

Forget garage sales. They sap a family's strength. Moving the contents outside, moving them back, weather problems and worse, bottom feeding hagglers who will give cents for valuables. There is a better and new concept: the online auction. A skilled auctioneer can bring hundreds of people into a house, via the Internet or online to attract highest bids, clear out a house and maximize prices for the heirs. Clean, easy and hassle free and with a bigger net. This is an added value service for contracted clients.

Also a specializing Realtor will recommend the best consignment shops in the city, for families who want those services.

STUFF TO DONATE

Given the bed bug infestation in North America, not all household goods can be donated. Some charities will pick up, some insist solely on drop off. A good Realtor knows about obscure charities that will take what mainstream charities will not.

STUFF TO DUMP

The last things to go and should be supervised by the Realtor if there is no family member available.

APPRAISALS

For higher end goods to be sold, arrange appraisals with different experts to get a handle on pricing. There are many variables. Simply, a good Realtor has the knowledge, the skills and the experts who can work to get the stuff out and to take as much pressure off of the executor and heirs as possible.

ADVICE

You have to get past "Do you know what we paid for that?" Times have changed and the public today wants newer, more modern furnishings. Many a fine dining room set in the end has to be given away as there are few, if any, buyers.

Master-ASA members are trained to guide you through what is desirable and what has to be given away.

Step Six | PRE-MARKETING & MARKETING

Now that the house is ready, the stuff is cleared, and necessary places touched up or repaired and the house is staged…It's still not quite ready to hit the MLS system.

A pro-active Realtor's Marketing program has to be more than just putting up a sign and uploading the listing to MLS. Marketing today may include the following, depending on the property, location and circumstances:

- Full Toronto Real Estate Board, MLS exposure to all 53,000± Realtors
- Realtor.ca exposure and webtour for the public
- RE/MAX.ca exposure, the largest brokerage site in Canada
- The use of a professional firm which provides professional photography shoots, uploading to my personal online YouTube channel; mass syndication on the internet via Search Engine Optimization (SEO) promotion to 30+ sites; AND a website exclusive for the property
- Brochures and feature sheets where needed
- Open houses (for select properties)
- For buyers, a mortgage feature sheet showing them their costs based on their downpayment
- Special open houses premarketing for the area neighbours
- Additional promotions when needed

- Automatic follow up to each agent showing one the listing with a short follow up survey
- To give synopsis each week of action, agent and buyer feedback.
- …And more

To properly market a single-family residence, many Realtors estimate their initial costs to be from $1,000 to $2,000. A top Realtor does not just take a listing: they invest in a listing. That is why they do not cut back on promotion, skimp on what is needed to market a house nor do they take overpriced listings. They cannot afford to, for both their investment and their time.

A good Realtor does not take a listing only to be heard when there is an offer. A good Realtor communicates with clients throughout the process.

Step Seven | WHY A MASTER-ACCREDITED SENIOR AGENT?

The Master-ASA is an elite progression of the ASA Seniors Real Estate program, Canada's largest real estate program and the only one that trains Realtors in the nuances of working with seniors and their families. With some 4,000+ graduates, the ASA has a significant presence in the professions that serve seniors. Graduates of the ASA program include not just Realtors but also lawyers, accountants, financial planners, retirement residence managers, mortgage professionals and more.

A Master-ASA is like a PhD in real estate with requirements of longevity, education, experience, contribution, an established Network of Exceptional Specialists and more.

> "IN A NUTSHELL,
> *every day a Master-ASA does things you will likely have to do only once in a lifetime. For the Master-ASA, it is a familiar process; for you and your family, it will likely be a confusing, guilt-ridden, stressful and intimidating process."*
>
> *Chris Newell*, FOUNDER, MASTER-ASA

So, if you are searching for a true expert - not just someone who has that word on their website or business card - then seek out a Master ASA and ensure you're in the best hands possible. Here are some reasons for you to follow this advice:

- They already have all the connections to help you through the entire process
- They have specific training on inter-generational relationships, managing the emotional side of moving a senior or dealing with an estate sale
- They have extensive experience in the real estate industry, and can help guide you through the ins and outs of the process
- Their expertise is specifically in estates, which are much more complicated and nerve-wracking than a typical residential sale
- All Master-ASAs support each other and continue to share knowledge and expertise amongst the group

You have to ask yourself why you wouldn't engage a Master-ASA to help you, your parents, or another family or friend move in their senior years, and especially if you're dealing with a complex estate sale.

In 2008, I founded the ASA program and turned it over to Chris Newell in 2011. He has expanded the program into five provinces and made it one of the most recognized professional designation programs in organized real estate in Canada. I'm proud to have been one of the founding associates of the Master-ASA program, and a member of the select Regent's Council of the Master-ASA because of the value it continues to drive to all of the clients being serviced by the ASA-designated Realtors! What I have learned from other Master ASA members has been invaluable in my dealings with people and with family dynamics.

Step Eight | YOU AND YOUR REALTOR: COMMUNICATION

In a survey conducted by the National Association of Realtors, the largest complaint about Realtors was a lack of communication. They took a listing and then disappeared until there was some action on the property.

That is obviously wrong. A professional Realtor keeps the clients well informed and involved in the process. Marketing is complicated, but it should funnel into one very important thing: finding you the qualified buyer to get the value you deserve from your property.

A set time should be established, like Friday mornings. The Realtor will call and highlight the week's activities. Progressive real estate offices track each Realtor who shows a property. Email surveys go out within a short time after their appointment asking for feedback about the overall quality of the listing and the pricing. This is valuable information that has to be conveyed to you. You must be kept in the loop at all times. When there is a lot of activity, you should know and if not, then the property listing is not priced to attract buyers. It is always about price because price dictates the outcome in real estate.

NEGOTIATIONS: DEALING WITH OFFERS ...AND OTHER HEIRS

As the fun begins, and you start getting offers, things can heat up. If there are some inter-generational or family tensions, it can sometimes get downright ugly! The Realtor has to be trained in dealing with these situations. Deals are made because the Realtor you chose is skilled in negotiation as a full time, trained professional. That alone is the major difference between a discount and full service brokerage. A discount broker wants a deal at any price in order to move on, because they rely on a high volume, low margin business. A full service broker negotiates for his clients and can achieve a higher sale price.

YOU + YOUR REALTOR = TEAM YOU!

As you move through the motions of selling the estate or property, your Realtor is there to help you focus on what's important, keep you informed, and negotiate on your behalf once the offers start rolling in. Not every offer is a good one, but a professional Realtor will guide you through the process.

Their success should be solidly built on your success, and you should take nothing less than that!

A Bit About | BARRY LEBOW

Barry was honoured to have received in 2010 the rarely awarded **Meritorious Award for Real Estate Achievement** Toronto Chapter, Real Estate Institute of Canada "For outstanding contribution to the profession and high

- Over 5 decades of exceptional real estate service and dedicated to the future!
- No other Realtor in Canada has been accepted by more courts as a real estate expert than Barry Lebow (over 500 trials)
- Awards from major real estate associations, Canadian and American
- Recognized as one of Canada's leading real estate experts
- Teacher, trainer, instructor to thousands of Canadian Realtors

I am proud to have created and written the Canadian textbooks on senior real estate, for Realtors. As founder of the Accredited Senior Agent professional designation I have taught hundreds of Realtors how to deal with Seniors, downsizing, their families and estates. Today, with a career spanning five decades in real estate which started in 1968 when I became a residential Realtor, I've returned to my roots, my love of selling and helping families.

Over the years I've earned 14 recognized real estate designations, spoken or lectured to thousands of appraisers, mortgage brokers, Realtors, lawyers and other audiences across Canada, the United States, Mexico, the Caribbean and in Central America.

Many regard me as one of Canada's most recognized real estate experts, having testified in more than 500 trials in North America, and been accepted as a multi-faceted expert. My professional reports have been accepted by courts around the world and it has been a special honour to have court rulings where I have been appointed to handle a valuation, an arbitration or sale. Estate work has been a vital part of my ongoing career. From my early years in appraisal to years of selling. Estate work takes a lot more skills from a professional agent than just listing, putting on MLS and waiting for offers.

I have learned to deal with families, and to pay attention to their needs. Usually, a major problem in an estate is dealing with the stuff, from family heirlooms, valuables, charity items and plain junk. I work hard to make that easy for the family by connecting them with my vast array of contacts.

I have settled fights amongst siblings and heirs and have held hands with sellers whose sentimental attachment has overwhelmed them. There are a great many more skills and needs associated with an estate sale and this simple guide outlines what a good Realtor and Master-ASA must do for the sale of an estate property.

I welcome your comments, inquiries and am at your service.

Barry A. Lebow, FRI, CRF, Master-ASA, ABR, SRES, CREC, IFAS
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AskBarryLebow BarryLebow

Barry Lebow is one of the accessible, easy to chat with people in real estate. About the content in this guide - have questions or challenges, just email or pick up the phone. Your comments and concerns are welcome.

Thank-you

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