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OF THE

FORCE

Preparing for the Worst

What is a business disaster recovery plan, and what should it include?

Stephen King has said, “There’s no harm in hoping for the best as long as you’re prepared for the worst.” In business, preparing for the worst can make the difference between survival and failure.

Surprisingly, a large portion of small businesses have no plan in place for handling a major disaster or disruption to their business. Seventy-five percent of small businesses lack a business disaster recovery plan, according to Apruve, a credit management platform for businesses. About 20 percent of companies will endure a fire, flood, power failure, or hardware/software disaster. About 80 percent of those that experience “significant data loss” will go out of business within one month. Also, 43 percent of businesses that do not reopen within 10 days of a disaster will never reopen, according to Apruve.

The best way to survive a disaster is to prepare ahead of time. A disaster recovery plan can help a business survive anything from a data breach to a fire or major storm.

“You need to start by having a written plan in place instructing key staff members on how to handle a situation, whether it be a natural disaster or the inability of an officer to fulfill his or her duties at the company,” says Elona Hamilton, Managing Broker at Hamilton Real-estate Group in Grayslake, Illinois.

A Cloud of Protection

When it comes to disaster recovery planning, Hamilton says, “The first thing you need to establish is how you will preserve and or access your data in the case of a disaster. Hopefully, most companies are majority paperless at this point. Subscribing to a reliable cloud-based server is essential. You need to make



sure the service you use is secure, so you do not have a breach of data.”

George Green of Exit Realty Cutcher, The Green Team, in Louisville, Kentucky, also advises agents take data protection seriously. To protect the data for his three offices, he has cloud backup in two locations and a main server offsite. He adds that his pay processes and contract implementation are electronic. With these protections, Green says, “The scale of an event to hurt us would probably halt the sales in an area first.”

A Guardian for the Company

“Another important component of your disaster plan should be a trusted person with the knowledge for your business,” Hamilton says. “This person should be capable enough to take over the reins if something happens to the main officer of the company, such as the managing broker. You need to have written instructions that this key person has in their possession. That way the business can proceed as usual in an almost seamless manner.”

Maintaining Connection

Living in an area with harsh winters, Emma Djiya, broker of three offices of 1st Class Realty in northeast Pennsylvania, learned that staying connected is the best way to keep her business running and service her customers without interruption. “Our IP phone system was a tremendous help and communicating with our cell phones does the job,” she says. “We service our customers without missing a beat.”

It is important to have all updated contact information, not only for employees but also for clients and vendors, easily accessible in order to navigate the emergency and respond afterward.

Physical Defense

In addition to securing and protecting information, the business must address the physical aspect of the disaster. Assessing the damage is the first step.

“I get out of bed and go check my properties,” says Gary Ferrara of Atlantic Florida Properties in Lake

Worth, Florida. Agents need to check on each property after a major storm or disaster, assess damage, and contact asset managers and vendors both to prevent further damage and to resolve the damage that has occurred.

Brokers also, have to address their office and equipment. Keeping a list and photos of equipment can help make insurance claims easier and also help provide a list of what needs to be replaced after a disaster that impacts the office.

A Basic Disaster Recovery Plan Checklist

A few key elements to include in your disaster recovery plan:

- **Communication**—Make sure to have updated contact information for all employees, vendors, and clients. Have a way to contact them quickly in an emergency.
- **Role Assignment**—Have a list of what each employee should do during or after a disaster to keep the business operating and get the office up and running again.
- **Office Equipment**—Keep an inventory of your office equipment in case of a natural disaster or fire. Take photos of equipment to make it easier to file insurance claims.
- **Property Checks**—Check each property to assess the damage.
- **Data Backup**—Conduct regular data backups, especially if there is a pending threat, such as a large storm approaching. Be sure files are stored in the cloud, so they are not damaged by physical threats.
- **Safeguarding the Plan**—A disaster recovery plan is only helpful if employees know that it exists and can access it when needed. Keep your plan handy and accessible, and review it with your entire team.

Top Five Apps for REO Agents

From calculating repair costs to creating floor plans, we've rounded up the top apps that can make life simpler for REO agents.

In a world where technology seems to be changing and developing at lightning speed, it can be difficult to sift through the new innovations to find the ones that can truly make a difference in our lives. Will a new app make it easier to track our projects, or is it simply a clunky replacement for something we already do? Will a new piece of software save us time or create extra tasks? At the end of the day, it is important to remember that no matter how great new technologies are, they will never be a substitute for human interaction.

"I am a firm believer in technology as long as it is used as a tool and not as a replacement to personal interaction with our clients," says Don Orsini of Stone Tower Realty.

Orsini relies on Microsoft Office, Adobe, and his local MLS for market information, marketing, and customer relationship management. In the world of REO, he and his team use "most of the proprietary systems that asset management companies require us to use."

While a few go-to software systems can manage most of the workload of an REO agent, we sought out a few innovative apps that can aid REO agents in their unique set of tasks.



BoxBrownie.com

Selling an REO property comes with a unique set of challenges. These properties are often vacant and sometimes have been for quite some time, meaning they are empty, lack the personal feel of a loving home, and sometimes need repair. Of course, agents are not afforded an endless budget to repair and stage these homes, and it can be difficult for homebuyers to envision the potential some of these homes have.

Enter BoxBrownie.com, an app that helps everyone see these homes for what they could be with a little love. This app offers a range of services, all at flat rates. For just \$1.40 you can get a quick image enhancement. Virtual staging starts at \$28 for an image of one room. Fill an empty, dull room with beautiful furniture and complementary artwork. A 360-degree staged view is available for \$56. BoxBrownie can also help with copywriting and floor plans.



MagicPlan

MagicPlan is a great app for any agent, especially those who might have to work with contractors or obtain repair estimates. Snap a photo and get a floorplan. No measuring required. Use your floorplans for repair bids or for marketing. You can even add furniture to your floorplan to create images that resonate with potential buyers.

You can also produce professional-looking 3-D floorplans with companion app Floorplanner. Floorplans are available in several formats, including PDF, JPEG, and HTML. The cost of "on demand" services is \$3.49 per project. Agents can create an unlimited number of projects for \$19.99 per month.



Property Fixer

Designed for real estate investors who flip houses, Property Fixer is also a great resource for agents working with REO properties in less than perfect condition. The app can help them analyze the return on investment for various repairs and can estimate holding costs. This information can help agents themselves and can provide valuable information to pass on to asset managers, investors, and potential homebuyers. Three versions of the app are available, starting at free and reaching up to \$39.99 for the professional version.



Auction.com App

The online marketplace for bank-owned and foreclosed properties is now conveniently packaged in a mobile app. Not only can real estate professionals and investors search for foreclosed and bank-owned properties on this extensive app, but they can also buy and sell residential properties online through the app itself. It includes more than 30,000 properties across the nation. Users can search by keywords or location, save properties of interest and share them with others, bid on properties, or sell their own REO. The Auction.com app is available for free.



Zillow App

A go-to resource for homebuyers and many real estate agents, Zillow has created a comprehensive app with property information on both for-sale and rental properties across the nation. The Zillow app is great for finding comps quickly. Agents can view information on properties available through the MLS as well as more than 1 million properties that aren't listed on any MLS. The information is generally reliable and up-to-date. You can save searches and sync with your existing Zillow account. Also, the Zillow app is free.

REO Horror Stories, Or Is This Really My Life?

FORCE Member Carmen Quinn, Premier Properties & Associates, Inc., shares some of her memorable experiences from the REO trenches.



Panic, sweaty hands, throbbing temples, thoughts of, “Why is this happening to me?”—I know we all have a horror story or two from our careers in REO. I would like to share with you three of my own along with the hard-learned lessons from each. Horrifying at the time, they are now good for a chuckle and a reminder of how cautious we should be when working in the unpredictable world of REOs.

Predicament No. 1

On an initial visit to an REO property that was loaded with personal items, broken glass from the storm door, and the stench of rotting food or dead animals, I approached the property to complete my task. Just as I was trying to get the front door open, I saw a large pit bull charging up the driveway toward me. I quickly got the key to turn and slammed the door behind me. Safely inside, I noticed the property had a pet door entrance in the sunroom on the other side of the room. I could see the pit bull racing around to the backyard to get in. My legs got rubbery, and my hands were shaking so much I could barely pull down the pet door to keep out the pit bull, which was now barking and scratching at the opening.

Trapped inside the house, my options were clear. I needed to call 911 and report this dog or try to make a mad dash for my car. The stench in the house persuaded me to go with the mad dash, and once I saw the dog digging holes in the backyard, I went

for it. Safe in the car, I called non-emergency 911. It took courage to go back for my next inspection.

Lesson Learned—Keep your phone on you, your eyes on the surrounding area, and get the door open quickly.

Predicament No. 2

I had just completed my pictures and report at an initial visit to a rural REO property on a hot summer day and was about to drive off when I realized I had left my sunglasses inside the house. I decided to leave the car running to charge my phone and to cool off while I ran in to grab them. As I headed out the back door with my sunglasses, to my shock, the doorknob came off in my hand! Because of the heat and humidity, the door was stuck, and I could not get it to budge. I quickly realized that escaping through the windows was not an option, as they were all jalousie windows positioned high on the wall with corroded aluminum louvers. The front door was even less of an option as it was padlocked on the outside. I looked around at all the

dead flies on the floor and thought that was not a good look for me.

Fast forward, and after three broken nails and sweating profusely, I was able to pull the stuck door open.

Lesson Learned—Keep your phone on you, never leave your car running, and get a multi-tool should you need to break out of your own property.

Predicament No. 3

A week before closing on an REO property, I went to do my final inspection, only to find water running out of the front door. While trying not to slip on my way inside, I found the ceiling had fallen in the kitchen and the cabinets were ruined. I had no idea how long after my last inspection this had happened. Since it was winter, it could have been a pipe issue. However, I was baffled since the property was winterized.

The asset manager called their own people to come and assess the damage for insurance purposes. The inspector found that a small piece in the shower faucet had been removed, causing a slow leak down onto the kitchen area below. He suspected sabotage.

I checked the entries to the electronic lock box, and no one had been there since the buyer's home inspection. Interestingly, the buyers did not seem surprised or upset when they found out about the leak. They were willing to close immediately with a \$20,000 reduction on the contract price. The buyers had extended the closing several times and were the last people to enter the property on the electronic lock box.

Lesson Learned—When you suspect that someone may be playing unfair, remove your electronic lock box, change your contractor box, and frequent the property more before closing.

When Agents Pay for Leads

A look at Zillow Premier Agent and whether it's worth the cost.

Real estate agents work tirelessly to capture and nurture leads. Zillow promises to deliver leads to agents for a fee through its Zillow Premier Agent program. As the largest real estate search engine with 188 million visitors per month, the program sounds enticing, but how effective is Zillow Premier Agent? Does it deliver quality leads, and is it actually worth the dollar investment agents are putting into it? We reviewed research, reviews, and consulted our own membership to find out.

What Is Zillow Premier Agent?

For those who aren't familiar, Zillow Premier Agent positions its members for greater reach and more visibility on Zillow listings. When Zillow Premier Agent submits a listing to Zillow, they are the only agent who can appear on that listing. When it comes to listings from agents who are not part of the Premier program, three Premier Agents will be listed below the primary listing agent. Also, Zillow recently updated the program and now calls agents directly to introduce them to leads that are actively looking to buy or sell a home. After the introduction, the agent is the only buyer's agent visible on all listings the lead views on Zillow.

Outside of these two main ways of providing exposure and exclusivity for Premier Agents, the program offers a handful of benefits that help agents market themselves and organize their leads.

First, Zillow offers its Premier Agents a website with a custom domain. While most established agents already have their own website, for those who do not or those whose websites need an upgrade, this can be a benefit. Not only can agents post their information and listings, but they can also include a mortgage rate

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New Members, New Faces

Each quarter, the FORCE features some of its new members in its newsletter. Here are some of the agents we've recently welcomed to our network.

Gregory Anderson

ACB Realty



Gregory Anderson has been in the real estate industry for more than 10 years, and he loves every

aspect of it. Even the days when things are not going so great, he believes it's all about attitude and knowing how to work with people. He holds himself to a high standard of accountability, which is extremely important to him. He understands the relevance of property management from pre-marketing to closing. He has completed many BPOs, CFKs, property preservation projects, bid submissions, monthly status reports, expense reports, etc. Completing projects on time, honesty, and integrity are all very important to him. Relationships are the foundation of his business.

Alton Cooper

**Cooper Realty
Alton C Property Management LLC**



Alton Cooper is a licensed Realtor servicing the Winston Salem/Greensboro, North

Carolina, area since 1997. As a native of Winston Salem, he is very knowledgeable about the area and the market. He specializes in REO sales, residential real estate, short sales, and property management. He has handled hundreds of broker price opinions, cash for keys, monthly status reports, and sold more than 100 REO properties in the past several years. Cooper attended Chowan University with a degree in business administration with an emphasis in information systems. He started his MBA at Maryland University for real estate management. In 2016, Cooper was chosen

for his local state association Realtor Leadership Academy. He currently serves in his local Realtor association as committee chair for the Housing Opportunity Committee. He is currently enrolled to serve on his local Realtor Association Grievance Committee.

Michelle Gonzalez

RE/MAX College Park Realty



A native of southern California, Michelle Gonzalez serves Los Angeles and Orange counties as

a broker associate. Dedicated to serving clients as a straightforward, responsive professional, she has 13 years of experience in real estate and began working in REO specialties in 2007. Gonzalez has been a RE/MAX top producer for more than 10 years, receiving numerous sales awards. She applies her broad knowledge to standard sales, short sales, deeds-in-lieu, valuations, and more, treating clients with respect and dignity during the process. Gonzalez is fluent in Spanish and holds certifications as a Short Sales and Foreclosure Resource, Certified Distressed Property Expert, Seniors Real Estate Specialist, and Home Affordable Foreclosure Alternatives specialist.

Vladimir Jirinec

NBI Realty, LLC

Vladimir Jirinec has been in the real estate business for more than 15 years. He utilizes his strong technology background in support of his marketing efforts for REO clients. Jirinec truly sees each client not as an individual transaction but rather as an opportunity to cultivate a long-term professional relationship with a satisfied client. He provides outstanding REO services, including BPOs, repair estimates, evictions,

code abatement, and cash-for-keys. Jirinec believes all clients deserve a dedicated, caring, and knowledgeable professional who will stand up for their needs and goals.

Ryan M. Knab

Coldwell Banker Brokerage



If you're looking for a serious partner to help you negotiate the complexities of selling an

apartment, home, or property, you've come to the right place. The experience, dedication, and strong communication you'll receive from Ryan M. Knab will help ensure the successful and profitable sale of your property. He is a certified REO agent with Taza, Equator, Pyramid, HomePath, RES.NET, and Coldwell Banker. His cash-for-keys success rate is 100 percent, and his REOs spend an average of 55 days on the market. He offers full services on all assigned properties to secure and make the property presentable for sale. Once listed with the MLS, Knab markets the property on more than 700 real-estate sites, as well as within the vast database of Coldwell Banker. Exceeding your expectations is his goal.

Federico Maldonado

Grace Properties



An agent specializing in REOs and short sales, Federico Maldonado has 12 years, experience

serving the southern New Jersey area. With eight years of experience working with short sale properties, he has worked with Fannie Mae and Nationstar for short sales, as well as providing BPOs to select valuation partners. Maldonado closes 50–70 properties per year and received the

New Jersey Realtors Circle of Excellence Bronze Sales Award in 2016 and 2017. He also holds the New Jersey Short Sale and Foreclosure certification.

Michelle O'Connor

Michelle O'Connor Real Estate

A native of South Korea, Michelle O'Connor serves the Kansas City, Kansas metropolitan area as a broker. She has been a real estate professional for nearly 20 years, 13 of those as the owner of her own company. With a client-first philosophy, O'Connor and her team specialize in standard and luxury properties, short sales, commercial, foreclosures, and REO. O'Connor is a member of the National Association of Realtors, REOMAC, KCRAR, and REO networks. She has recently expanded across Kansas and Missouri and now has offices in Wichita, Topeka, and St. Louis.

Amy Stevens

Gardner Realtors



Having been in the real estate business for many years, Amy Stevens understands and

embraces what it takes to make it in this industry. She has several years of REO and property management experience. She has a network of local vendors who are familiar with the repair process through different asset management companies and are able to complete jobs within the projected timeframes. Serving a local market that has several military installations, coming from a military family, and as the wife of a disabled veteran, Stevens is well-versed in working with service members to assist in buying or selling a home. She is familiar with the REO process from starting with CFK and through to closing.

Rosa Stimmler

NextHome Royal Lion Realty



Founded in 2016, NextHome Royal Lion Realty is a full-time real estate company with more than 14 years of experience, located in New Jersey. Royal Lion is a 100 percent minority women-owned small business, specializing in listing and selling properties, REOs, short sales, BPOs, first-time homebuyers, investors and property management, including both residential and commercial. Rosa Stimmler and her team strive to exceed expectations by providing professional, timely, reliable service with the best possible results. As a bilingual brokerage, the company provides service to both English- and Spanish-speaking clients. Stimmler's mission is to offer the most professional, informative, loyal, and dedicated service in the real estate industry. The best interests of her clients always come first, and she places the clients' concerns ahead of her own in each and every transaction, as she is dedicated to the development of long-term client relationships. Stimmler's philosophy is simple: "Satisfaction is the highest compliment for a job well done."

Michael Veltri

Premier Realty Group

Michael Veltri is an associate broker, licensed for 20 years with 12 years of REO experience. He has extensive knowledge of distressed sales, including residential, commercial, and vacant land. There is no sale too big or small for him to handle. He attributes his success over the years to doing what he loves and enjoying helping people. He and his real estate partner manage a full-service team fluent in both English and Spanish. They are efficient and have systems in place, so there is never a delay with any work orders that need to be completed. They offer 24-hour occupancy checks, have a high success rate with cash-for-keys, and have a 24-hour turnaround time for BPOs. Veltri and his team are well-

versed in all aspects of the REO transaction. Over the years, they have developed a unique marketing plan that caters specifically to the selling of distressed properties. Veltri himself is always the point of contact and can be reached seven days a week. Give him a chance to see what he can do for you.

Michael Wilson

Michael Wilson Realty

With more than 18 years of experience in real estate, Michael Wilson is a broker in the Buffalo/Niagara Falls, New York, area. He specializes in REO properties and providing BPOs, working with more than 30 financial institutions and investors. Wilson leads a team of five specialists, all knowledgeable in a range of REO services as well as the geographic region. A member of the National REO Brokers Association, Wilson sells over 300 foreclosures per year. He is also an emergency medical technician, volunteering as an EMS Chief for South Lockport Fire Company and as an EMT at Camp Good Days & Special Times.

Patti Williams

Allison James Estates & Homes

Patti Williams is an associate broker with more than 15 years of experience serving clients, managing offices, and training agents in the Richmond, Virginia, area. She specializes in transactions, including first-time homebuyers, new construction, luxury homes, relocation, and investors. Williams' certifications include Accredited Buyers Representative, Graduate Realtor Institute, and Certified Luxury Home Specialist. She spent two years traveling nationwide to train luxury agents, developing extensive knowledge in marketing and selling for all price ranges. Williams earned a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Kentucky.

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calculator, lead capture form, blog, and local MLS search feature.

Zillow Premier Agent also includes features for real estate teams and brokerages. They may set up team profiles and lead routing so that the most valuable leads are sent to the most experienced team members first.

How Much Does It Cost?

Each market has its own base cost for being part of the Premier Agent program. Then, agents may set their own advertising budget in addition. Both the base cost and the return on those additional advertising dollars varies by market based on the competition in that market. More expensive, more competitive markets cost more.

The agents who spend more in their market earn a higher "share of voice," meaning more leads are funneled to them than their lower-paying competitors.

"As with any lead program, some of the leads are good, and some are not. My results are always based on follow up. If I follow up quickly with a valid lead, I have good results."

—Art Garrison, Advance Equity Group

After doing the math, Fit Small Business estimates each lead costs between \$20 and \$60.

Does It Work?

The cost per lead may sound like a lot, and the complex algorithm that determines how many leads come your way is a little unpredictable. So, the question is does it work, and is it worth it?

On G2 Crowd, a review site that allows professionals to rate business tools, Zillow Premier Agent currently has 3.2 stars out of five.

However, Fit Small Business

calculated an average \$2.60 return for every \$1 spent in the program. Obviously, this varies.

While at least one FORCE member tried the program and has since discontinued using it, Art Garrison from Advance Equity Group is currently a Zillow Premier Agent and is pleased with his experience.

"I receive a number of leads each month," Garrison says. "As with any lead program, some of the leads are good, and some are not. My results are always based on follow up. If I follow up quickly with a valid lead, I have good results."

Garrison estimates his close rate is about seven percent, which he believes is higher than the industry average.

How Can Agents Maximize Their Returns?

If you decide Zillow Premier Agent might be a good fit for you, here are a few ways to make the most of the program.

First, consider your ZIP code. Popular and high-priced markets will likely be saturated with agents, and it may be more difficult to gain exposure there. Consider selecting a nearby ZIP code that might be less saturated. You may still gain leads that help you break into that desired high-priced market. Whatever ZIP code you choose though, make sure you can offer clients true insights into the neighborhoods, culture, local businesses, and schools there.

Next, it is essential that your profile be complete, professional, and personal. Even in lower saturated markets, you will face competition, and you need to stand out. Include a professional headshot, a well-written bio that explains your expertise and what you have to offer, and if possible, a video that captures your personality.

Lastly, client reviews go a long way in validating your experience and the level of service you provide. If you don't already have plenty of positive reviews, ask some of your satisfied clients to submit a review.

Brand Yourself for Achievement

Leveraging your brand to win awards and recognition.



Real estate agents hoping to gain recognition among their peers and their communities can leverage their brands to help them win reputable awards that show others their value and reputability.

One way to gain recognition and win awards in real estate is to be a top producer. Many industry awards come down to sales volume. However, other awards are given based on reputation, community involvement, or marketing strategies. Several years ago, Allen Trammell, a multi-million-dollar producer at Trammell & Co. Realtors in Little Rock, Arkansas, was named Arkansas Realtor of the year. He says, “Branding had something to do with that as that is part of the criteria.”

“There are always opportunities for new agents to get involved and gain recognition,” he adds.

Provide excellent customer service for all.

It goes without saying that one of the best things you can do for your brand is to provide exceptional customer service to all of your clients. Word of mouth goes a long way in attracting new clients, and today “word of web” is also key. Providing excellent customer service and asking for feedback and reviews online can help promote your brand and put you in the rankings for some industry awards.

Word of web is now being taken into account for certain industry awards. Zillow announced its “Best of Zillow” program in October, which will “reward and promote great agents who have a track record of making customers happy.” Zillow will create customer experience reports based on anonymous customer data to provide insights into agents’ performance, and those who provide the greatest customer satisfaction will be designated “Best of Zillow.”

Be a resource and supporter of your peers.

Some industry awards are determined through a voting process, and as such those who have cultivated positive relationships with other agents will likely come out ahead. Real estate is a competitive business, but those who support their colleagues and even competitors stand to benefit. Being responsive, courteous, and informative can go a long way in creating a positive brand that can potentially win you widespread recognition in the industry. Agents who are committed to branding themselves as an industry resource can also mentor other agents and teach seminars and continuing education courses for other agents.

Volunteer in your community and showcase your volunteer activities.

Real estate agents who volunteer in their communities position themselves as caring and relatable. Agents can share their volunteer experiences on their websites, blogs, and social media accounts.

Not only do various industry groups and brokers offer awards to agents for their community involvement, but also local publications and organizations often give awards to active community members and volunteers. You may find that giving back to your community brings you an abundance in return.

Develop a stellar marketing strategy.

While some association awards take marketing and branding into consideration, there are also awards aimed directly at those who have exceptional marketing and branding campaigns. The Real Estate Marketing Awards (REMA) recognizes “the best content marketing projects, agencies, and marketers in the real estate industry each year.”

REMA recognizes real estate companies who excel in a variety of marketing areas, including content marketing plan, newsletter or email campaign, public relations strategy, company blog, graphic design, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and overall social media.

Real Trends also recognizes top real estate websites in six distinct categories, including best overall website, best mobile website, best website design, best community, best property detail, and best video.

Apply with enthusiasm.

When filling out applications for real estate awards, agents should be thorough but succinct. Remember that the judges reviewing your application will likely be reading hundreds of applications.

First, make sure you have answered every question and met all the minimum requirements. An application lacking minimum requirements likely will be tossed aside immediately.

Don’t just talk about your success. Demonstrate it. Include statistics about your success, whether sales volume, downloads from your website, or subscribers to your newsletter.

When completing your application, think about what makes you or your team unique. Consider what you do that is above and beyond what your competitors do or what you have to offer that they don’t.

Also, try to ensure your application tells a story. It should reflect your brand, your values, and your personality.

The Power of Giving

Agents who give back through donations and volunteering not only strengthen their communities but also their own brand.

Real estate agents guide and assist their clients through an important time in their lives. Whether purchasing their first home, relocating, downsizing, or upsizing, purchasing a home is an incredibly important and personal decision. At the heart of the real estate business is helping others improve their lives. It’s no surprise then that real estate agents are often active in their communities in other ways, spending their time and resources donating to charities and volunteering their times to build stronger communities for themselves, their clients, and their neighbors.

Sixty-six percent of Realtors volunteer on a monthly basis and 82 percent donate money on an annual basis, according to the 2018 Community Aid and Real Estate Report, published in December by the National Association of Realtors (NAR). Among those who volunteer, agents volunteered a median eight hours per month. Among those who donate money to a cause, the median amount was \$1,000.

The Business Case for Giving

While giving back can come from a sense of altruism and often makes the giver feel good; there is also a business case to be made for giving back to the community. Eighty percent of real estate agents said they consider participating in their community as an important part of their business plan, and 49 percent said it was “very important” to their business, according to NAR.

Volunteering in the community is one more way for real estate agents to meet and network with other community members, real estate agents, and potential clients.

Also, both volunteering and charitable giving can be a great way to position a brand in a positive way. Brokers and agents can post photos of themselves and their team contributing to a cause, such

as helping build a home for Habitat for Humanity or volunteering at their local food bank.

Those who donate a portion of their earnings can make sure this is front and center in their branding. Mention it in advertising campaigns, include it on your website, and maybe even put it on your business card.

Attracting a New Generation of Conscientious Buyers

While giving back builds a positive image among any demographic, millennials are particularly drawn to businesses that give back, according to a recent blog post on MillennialMarketing.com.

"Many brands are trying to create new ways of piquing millennial interest by embracing the 'giving back' trend," according to David Tal on the Millennial Marketing blog.

"Many brands are trying to create new ways of piquing millennial interest by embracing the giving back trend."

—David Tal, Millennial Marketing blog

"My projection is that we'll be seeing less realtor faces on benches in the future, and more marketing that's tied to things that the next generation cares about."

Targeted Ways for Real Estate Pros to Give

Agents looking to contribute positively to their communities and perhaps build their branding by giving have plenty of options.

One easy way agents can help with very little effort is by participating in the Salvation Army's Real Estate for Rehabilitation program. Knowing that many people get rid of items large and small during the moving process, the Salvation Army created this program to help families and acquire donations. Agents simply encourage their clients to schedule a Salvation Army pick-up for any furniture or items they no longer need. The Salvation Army even has

an array of marketing materials available for agents, including brochures, moving cards, and a Salvation Army model truck for the office.

For those who have little time to give but are willing to donate monetarily, Charitable Agents is a great option. Through Charitable Agents, real estate agents donate 10 percent of their earnings from each transaction to a charity of their clients' choosing. Clients choose from a list of options, and the donation is made in their name. Homebuyers can specifically also seek out agents using Charitable Agents through the program's directory.

For agents who are willing to give both time and money and who want to give in a way that relates to their business, there are Giveback Homes. Founded in 2013, Giveback Homes is a growing group of real estate professionals who donate funds and physical effort to build homes for those in need across the nation as well as in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Haiti. Because it is designed specifically for real estate professionals, Giveback Homes also has online profile pages and marketing materials at the ready for its members so they can let their clients and communities know they are doing good.

Additionally, those looking for other opportunities that benefit their communities or align with their personal ideas and interests can visit sites like Volunteermatch.com to find opportunities for them.

Other Ways to Get Involved and Give Back

- Fund a local scholarship for high school kids.
- Organize neighborhood clean-up days.
- Serve on local boards such as the school board.
- Sponsor local events such as races, concerts, etc.
- Donate and volunteer at local schools.
- Campaign for homeowner-friendly policies and taxes.
- Go door-knocking for canned food donations for a shelter.
- Host a toy drive at the holidays.
- Volunteer at a local hospital or nursing home.
- Raise money for a down payment for a family in need.
- Host free seminars or other educational events for first-time homebuyers.

AGENTS HELPING AGENTS

The 7 Leadership Skills You Need to Lead Your Team to Success

A great leader does more than delegate tasks. A great leader inspires others to set and achieve their own goals. Knowing that their success depends on their team, a true leader is dedicated to each employee and colleague.

George Green of Exit Realty Crutcher, The Green Team, believes many of us are looking at leadership a little backward—or perhaps upside down.

"For years, we have seen leadership and achievement modeled through a pyramid or a ladder. Those in charge are 'climbing' to the top." Instead, Green suggests the opposite.

The "visionary" should be at the bottom with "the weight of the entire company on that person's shoulders," according to Green. Like many successful brokers and team leaders, Green has found that servant leadership and dedication to one's team reap many benefits.

According to several experienced FORCE members, real estate leaders need these seven skills to prosper.

1. People Skills

"A real estate business is based on people skills," says Elona Hamilton of Hamilton Realtor Group. "Your business would not last long if we did not have the ability to make others comfortable and confident within their environment."

Hamilton compares employee relationships to client relationships, saying, "You are selling your client on you and your abilities; you are selling staff just as well. When your brokers and your staff can feel safe and confident in their work environment, you will have longevity with them."

She suggests leaders have compassion.

2. Ability to Listen and Understand

Good leaders understand what is happening in their business. There-

fore, it is important to listen to agents and staff, and according to Hamilton, it takes more than just hearing the words being said. Hamilton says, "It is helpful to always try to read between the lines."

Angela Prince of Prince & Associates Realty also feels strongly that listening is not a passive activity. "If you pay attention and listen well, you will hear more than just the words, which will give you some inside information on what is being said," Prince says. "Not everyone knows how to say what is on their mind."

3. Honesty

In addition to listening, leaders should be intentional in their own words. "Being honest is huge," Prince says. "When you are honest with your agents and employees, they will gain a level of respect for you. Honesty goes a long way for the growth of the agent/employee and your relationship with them."

4. Knowledge

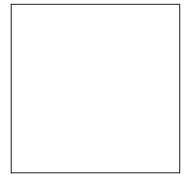
Agents and brokers continue to expand their knowledge through experience and education in their field, and according to Hamilton, this is an essential component to any professional but is especially important for those leading a team of other professionals. Hamilton says, "staying on top of rules and regulations" and "following them even when there may be an easier route" is crucial.

5. Commitment

Succeeding in real estate takes a lot of dedication. Furthermore, succeeding as a leader in the real estate field requires a strong level of



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commitment not only to gaining clients and making sales but also to one's employees. "You must be committed to your agents and their success," Prince says. "I am sincerely committed to my agents and their success, and it is the best feeling as they grow into super agents."

6. Strong Team Development

Muniz feels that creating a strong team of driven individuals is vital for any real estate office. "I've picked my team carefully based on past performance, and if the person doesn't work out, we simply move on," says Elizabeth Muniz of Better Homes and Gardens Rand Realty.

Building a strong team even applies to those who are a one-man team. Agents working in the REO field must develop and lead teams of vendors and contractors. Gary Farrera of Atlantic Florida Properties uses a straightforward, no-nonsense approach to thrive with vendors.

"I look for people with the neces-

*Building a strong team
even applies to those who
are a one-man team.*

sary talent, the necessary licenses, I explain what I want and show them I have a checkbook in my pocket," Farrera says. "Everyone gets paid immediately on my watch."

When things go well, he provides feedback. When things don't go well, he doesn't rehire that contractor.

7. Ability to Motivate Others

A true leader does more than delegate tasks. A leader motivates others to work hard, take the initiative, and pursue their own achievements and that of the entire team.

Many will agree that appreciation and recognition go a long way in motivating others. "I motivate my employees and my agents by appreciating them every single day. They know I am there for them and they can come to me for anything," Prince says.

Similarly, Hamilton says, "Remember and acknowledge them every chance you get; it will pay off in the end.

Muniz says, "Constant reaffirmation is the best way to let your team know they are doing a great job. I

will always take the time to reward my team and tell them they are appreciated. I let them know they are a crucial part of the success of the business."

Emma Djiya, broker of First Class Realty, recognizes her employees through achievement awards. She also "clearly communicates expectations" to set her employees up for positive results.

While appreciation goes a long way toward motivating agents and staff, Green says it is critical to recognize that different people are motivated in different ways. "You motivate employees in the way they need to be motivated," he says simply. He uses the DISC personality assessment to determine how to motivate and reward each of his team.

"You can't blanket everyone as motivation to some is demotivational to others," he says. "Understanding your team and their needs is paramount to success."