

Agent Interview

Buying a home is probably the most significant investment you have planned. Each family is unique, and their strengths (and weaknesses) will, in part, determine how they negotiate their sale. Having an experienced agent on your side guiding you through the process can save you thousands of dollars and hours in searching. Here are some questions to consider asking during that first meeting and before you commit to working with the agent.

How long have you been an agent?

We cringe when a seller tells us they are going to list their house with a family member who just got their license. Take it from someone who reads the research in academic journals – experience matters to sellers and buyers. They say it takes at least a thousand hours of practice to become proficient in an activity. Do you want to be part of an agent’s learning curve?

What did you do before you were an agent?

Almost all the agents in Tallahassee were something else before they were real estate agents. There are a handful of Realtors in Tallahassee who grew up within families that were also in the business of selling homes. Most have had previous careers before getting their real estate license. There is no right or wrong answer here, but do you want a former disc jockey representing you with a lack of negotiating experience or life skills?

How many homes do you sell each year?

This is a question to get at that experience you want to represent you. Agents could have had their licenses for years and not sold any homes. The average agent sells approximately 12 homes a year. If the agent sells way more than this, they may not have the time to give you and your contract the attention it needs, or you may be handed off to someone you haven’t even met. If they sell way less, they may not have the experience you need to protect your investment.



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Do you work with both buyers and sellers?

Negotiations should not be a zero-sum game with a clear winner and clear loser. Negotiations should be about finding mutually satisfying terms and conditions. An agent who works with both will be able to help you ‘get into the head’ of the other side and offer perspective and have alternative approaches that have worked in the past.

How do you help buyers compete in this strong sellers’ market?

This comes from experience. There is no single answer to this one. Each buyer and family are unique, as is each house and seller. The things that work in one situation may hurt you in another. What you should look for is that your agent has an idea of what your strengths are and how to help address any issues that concern you.

Do you have references I can call?

Beware of hiring anyone that cannot offer references. I once interviewed for a job that required 25 references, and at least one set of references had to be five deep – meaning they know at least five of your other references. That was fun, and while you do not need that many references, beware of the agent that does not have any to offer. Funny thing, we hire people for what they know and then want to fire them for who they are... pick someone you can trust and talk to and feel comfortable around.

What is your experience in my price point?

If you hire that luxury agent who usually works in the \$500,000 price range and you are looking in the \$300,000 range, they may not make your home search as important as it should be. Likewise, if you are buying a luxury home and the agent has never handled a transaction at that level, you may be missing that experience you need to protect your investments

How do you get along with other agents?

There was a Facebook post on a private real estate agent training page (with thousands of experienced agents across the country) asking whether the relationship between the listing agent and selling (buyer’s) agent matters. Within a couple of hours, there were hundreds of responses, and all of them said that the relationship impacts the outcome. Tallahassee is a laid-back town, but even the locals have their limits. Those agents who approach negotiations as a winner take all game get punished in the long run. It may seem like a good idea to choose the young, ambitious maverick Realtor until you get three low-ball offers in a row. You do not want to get hit in the crossfire between long-running feuds. Pick an agent that gets along with almost everyone and who serves their community.