

7 Questions to Ask Your Agent Before Selling Your Los Angeles Home

Find the right real estate agent to sell your Los Angeles home by asking the right questions.

By [Emily Manthei](#) | Contributor Sept. 7, 2016, 9 a.m.



The right agent is a major key for a successful selling experience. (GETTY IMAGES)

A home is often a person's largest asset, and selling it is one of the most detailed and important transactions they'll face. Potential sellers in Los Angeles need to be able to put their trust in the knowledge of a real estate agent who is skilled at making these complicated transactions, and knows the answers to common questions typical home sellers have.

According to real estate agents Tracy Do and Mark Mullin, both with Tracy Do Real Estate and Compass, "It's important to ask how active your agent is in today's market, because there are constant changes and nuances going on all the time." They note that an experienced agent will know how to navigate changes in the market, which is a huge part of managing the transaction.

For potential home sellers, asking the right questions and finding an agent who can answer them is key. We contacted some of Los Angeles' top real estate agents, as identified by OpenHouse Realty, a real estate technology company (and a U.S. News partner), to find out which questions are necessary for sellers to ask their agents, and why.

What are some red flags I should look for in a potential offer? Many times, sellers expect to get multiple offers and want to immediately go with the highest price. But Adam Bray-Ali, a real estate agent with Podley Properties, advises sellers to ask their agents if they see any red flags.

"One of the major red flags is [the] incomplete presentation of information," Bray-Ali says. "If a buyer has not completed the loan application with a lender, that is already a bad sign."

Of course, other signs are more subtle. If an agent picks up on some little things that, together, become a big red flag, it is important for a client to listen and trust the agent's expert advice – no matter how good the offer may be.

What does a typical escrow look like? Based on the current market conditions in Los Angeles – as well as seller and buyer conditions – terms of escrow are variable.

"We look at transactions we've recently closed to give clients an indication of the pricing and escrow elements that [they] can expect, but yesterday doesn't exactly reflect today," Do says.

As the flipside to looking for red flags, sellers should also ask what a typical escrow looks like at this moment. Some sellers need to stay in their current home for a specific length of time, which may be longer than it takes to sell the house. While that's usually a tough sell in a buyer's market, it's easier to include the condition in the escrow agreement in a competitive area like Los Angeles, which is something a good agent will know how to negotiate.

In addition to negotiating a favorable escrow agreement, a selling agent should also be able to answer follow-up questions like "How long should you remain in escrow?"

What are the tax implications? Getting into the weeds of California's unique property tax system can be dicey, but a good real estate agent should be able to tell you key details that could be game-changers for your sale. One example, Bray-Ali says, is a law that ties property taxes to the purchase price of a house. That means that over time, long-term homeowners get a tax discount.

But there are other implications for some buyers over 55, too. "Property tax appreciates slowly, at a fixed rate, which is always much slower than the typical market value of a property – especially in Los Angeles," Bray-Ali notes. "If you're an owner over 55, in some cases you can transfer that slowly appreciating property tax from the home you're selling to a new home that you're buying, which is a really powerful tool for someone who is downsizing or retiring."

What will buyers object to? Homeowners want to highlight the most positive elements of their property, but even when a seller puts their best foot forward, buyers won't be shy about pointing out what they don't like about a house. When an agent or agent team has a lot of experience, they will be able to pinpoint potential buyer objections and give the seller advice on how to mitigate those objections, either by offering staging solutions or providing neighborhood research.

According to Do, her firm gets feedback on what buyers like and don't like at open houses. Sellers need to ask for this valuable feedback to increase their chances of a better price for the property.

What can I do to get the best price for my house? To get the best price for your home, as a seller you will often need to make some upgrades, but you should also be smart about how you spend.

A common mistake Los Angeles sellers make is not taking care of termite control before putting their houses up for sale, Bray-Ali says. Taking care of this ahead of time will give the buyer one less piece of leverage to negotiate in escrow.

He also recommends using the same title insurance and escrow company, which can ultimately save sellers money during the sale. Consolidating these fees is something many sellers don't realize they can do until they break down all of the costs that go into the sale.

How much will it cost me to sell my house? Sellers are often unaware of how much it costs to complete a home sale. At the beginning of the process, Bray-Ali recommends sellers ask their agents to carefully review the Seller Net Sheet with them. The Seller Net Sheet is a comprehensive cost breakdown, usually created by the agent and the escrow company, which provides detailed estimates of all the costs that go into selling the home, including transfer taxes, escrow costs, loan payoff, termite control, agent and other company fees.

"It's a much more nuanced way to look at the price," Bray-Ali explains. "While the sale price is usually a point of great pride for the seller, the Seller Net Sheet is the more accurate description of the sale."

Is there anything you want to ask me? Do, Mullin and Bray-Ali all agree that a seller's most important strategy is to go with an agent who asks plenty of questions of his or her own. "Every individual has a unique way of looking at things, and my responses to all their questions are based on what I see their perspectives and their priorities are," Bray-Ali says.

Mullin agrees: "A good listing agent is going to, first, listen to the buyer's needs. If you're interviewing an agent who is doing all of the talking and not asking you any questions, I'd be worried."

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