

## To Stage or Not To Stage - That Is The Question

If you are getting ready to sell your home, you should give serious consideration to staging your home. You want to make sure your home is presented in the best way possible, so you can get your house sold quickly for top dollar. Even in today's market where inventory is very tight in some areas, the difference in the price received for a house that is staged versus a home that has not been staged can be thousands of dollars.

### First Impressions Are Important

Even in a market where inventory is tight, buyers are picky. If their first impression of your home is not favorable, they will move on to the next one. That's why there can be two similar homes in the same neighborhood, and one will sell in less than a week with multiple offers over asking price, and the other will stay on the market for several weeks (or even months) before getting even 1 offer at asking pricing.

Buyers have "tunnel vision" - they can't see past your "stuff" and picture themselves living in the house. Never mind that on a day to day basis their own home is cluttered with their own stuff. In their quest for a new home, they want their new abode to look like a model home! So as a seller, *the best way to get top dollar for your house is to make it look like a model home.*

### What is Staging?

Staging is preparing a home for sale so it has the best appeal to the most home buyers. Think of it as "detailing" for your house. It can involve any or all of the following:

- De-cluttering
- Cleaning
- Re-arranging
- De-personalizing
- Lightening and brightening
- Painting

If your home is in relatively good condition, it may just need a good deep cleaning and de-cluttering. If it has been a while since you painted, a new coat of paint can brighten up the room and make it look fresh. The paneling in the family room may have been quite fashionable in the 1970s, but it makes the room look dark and dated. You may like the bright pink and blue walls in the kids' rooms, but potential buyers might be turned off by the colors.



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## Do I Need to Hire a Professional Staging Company?

That depends. Will you be moving out of the house before it goes on the market? If so, you may need to rent furnishings, and hiring a professional staging company who already has them might make sense.

If you will still be living in the house, you may or may not want to hire a professional, depending on how much time you have and whether you are comfortable with your ability to do the preparation yourself. You may hire some professionals (like cleaners or painters), and do some of the other work yourself.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- How good of an "eye" do I have for home decor?
- Can I be objective about my home and my "stuff"?
- Do I know how to arrange a room to draw attention to its best features (or draw attention away from flaws)?
- Do I have the time and energy to do some or all of the work myself?

Some agents (like myself) have gone to training and are **Accredited Staging Professionals®**. If you list your home with me, I will provide you with a **FREE** detailed Staging Recommendation Report - a **\$350 value!**

Let's take a closer look at each of the steps involved in staging your home.



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## De-cluttering

Look at the following before and after pictures. Which is more appealing to you?



These pictures illustrate the importance of de-cluttering your home. If your children's toys are all over the family room, or your countertops have a lot of stuff on them, the rooms look messy. It may be the way you live in your home, but it's not the way you want to present the house to potential buyers. Let's face it - don't most of us want to live in a house that is always picked up and ready for company?

Do you have to completely clear everything away? No, but you do need to minimize the amount of visible clutter. It may be somewhat of a hassle in the short term, because you always have to get things out to use them, and put them away when you are done, but remember - the goal is to get your house sold in the shortest time for the best price!

As part of the Staging Recommendations report, I will note the areas that need to be de-cluttered, and give you specific suggestions for those areas. It may be as simple as putting toiletries in the cabinet or toys in baskets. Or it may require packing up some of your things and storing them somewhere. Look at it as giving yourself a head start on packing to move to your new home!



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## Cleaning

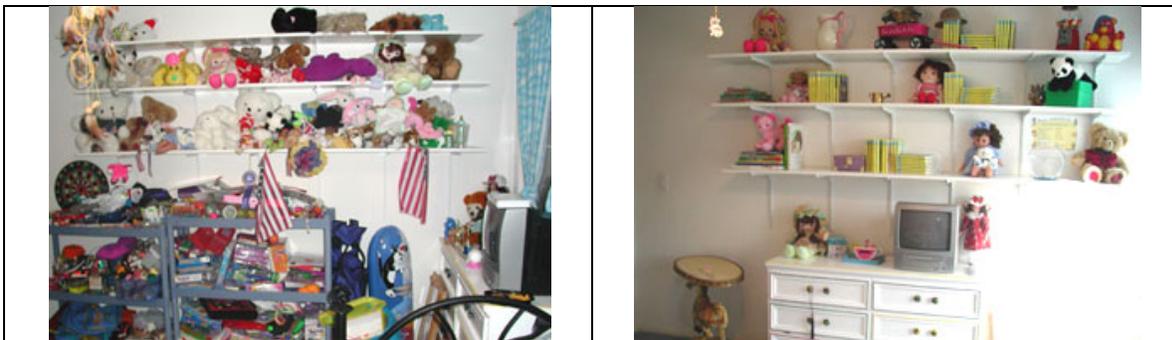
You've probably heard the old saying, "Cleanliness is next to godliness". Well, when you are trying to sell your house, this is very true! Potential buyers will see every little speck of dirt and dust in your house. If you haven't dusted in a month, they will notice the dust on the bookshelf, but not the beautiful fireplace. Your child forgot to put the lid on the toothpaste? Buyers will notice that before they notice the new sink and countertop. Go figure!

Some people always keep their home immaculate. I knew someone who mopped the kitchen floor every day - sometimes twice a day! You could literally eat off the floor, it shined so much.

Some people are complete slob with a week's worth of dirty dishes stacked in the sink, and dirty clothes strewn all over the bedroom.

Most of us are somewhere in between. Our homes are "dirty enough to be happy, and clean enough to be healthy". When your house is listed for sale, it is very important to keep your home "show ready".

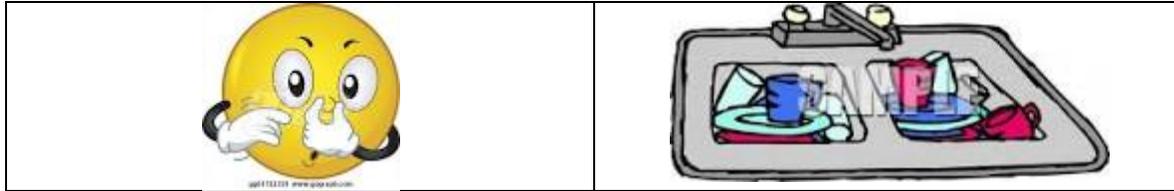
Keeping your house "show ready" every day can be a challenge. It means you can't leave the morning breakfast dishes in the sink because a real estate agent may show your home that afternoon. The kids' toys have to be put away every morning before you leave the house.



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In addition to actual dirt, buyers will notice all of the odors in your house. Had fish for dinner last night? The buyer will notice. Haven't changed the cat litter for 2 days? The buyer will notice. So try to be super conscious of the smells in your home and the causes of those smells. If possible, eliminate or avoid the causes of the smells during the period your house is being actively shown.



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## Re-Arranging

Sometimes the way we live in our homes is not the best way to present it to potential buyers. We've got way too much furniture in our homes, or we have "re-purposed" a room to a different purpose than what it was meant for.

Take a critical look at the rooms in your house. Do you have furniture that impedes the flow of traffic into or through the room? Do you have too much furniture in the room?

Sometimes all it takes is re-arranging the room to change the look and feel of it. When you walk into the room, where does your attention focus - on the big screen TV or the beautiful picture window that overlooks the garden? Do you have to walk around the couch to get to sliding glass door to the patio?



Often, as we live in our homes, our lives and interests cause us to re-purpose a room. Many of us have set up home office or computer areas in an unused corner of the dining room or the seldom-used living room. When we bought that great pool table, the only room it would fit in was the living room or the great room. That may work for the way we live our lives, but potential buyers will have a hard time picturing themselves there.

As part of the Staging Report, I will identify places where just re-arranging or removing some furnishings can help accent your home's best features.



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## De-Personalizing

This is often the hardest thing for sellers to do - remove their personal belongings, pictures, knick knacks, and everything that makes their house their home. However, this is one of the most important things you need to do to prepare your house to be shown to potential buyers.

There are several important reasons to remove many of your personal things. In addition to enabling buyers to see their families in the home rather than your family, de-personalizing can help protect your family and valuables.

Keep in mind that once your house goes on the market, there will be a lot of strangers traipsing through your house. Do you really want them to see your valuable collection of doodads? Do you want them to be able to figure out that you have a son named Jake, a daughter named Jenny, and what they look like?

What about things like religious pictures or symbols? Again, when trying to sell your house, you want it to appeal to as many buyers as possible. Some people of other faiths might pass on your house simply because of the religious items on display. Makes no sense to me, but buying a home is often emotional and not necessarily rational. You want to keep your house as neutral as possible so you don't alienate any potential buyers.

De-personalizing also helps you to start breaking the emotional ties you have to this house you have called home, and hopefully, start you looking forward to moving into your new home. Another plus is that, by packing up your valuable doodad collection and family pictures, you get a head start on packing!

Take a look at this picture and see what you can tell about the family just by what is on the refrigerator. I can see pictures of children, a calendar (that might have appointments, birthdays, etc. on it), and even baseball caps. It's a bit scary how much information a stranger could figure out just from looking at the refrigerator - never mind how the clutter takes my attention from the rest of the room.



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## Lightening and Brightening

Have you ever walked into a room with all the curtains drawn? Or a room with walls painted a dark brown or dark blue? How about a room with dark paneling? Did you notice how small and depressing the room seemed?

A room filled with light feels better than a room with all the shades drawn. Choosing a house to buy tends to be an emotional decision, so you want to appeal to the good emotions. Make sure you open the drapes and blinds before you leave the house.

Dark colors and dark paneling on the walls make a room seem smaller. One of the things that appeals to buyers is a larger home - they want to get the most home they can for the money. Even if the room is not physically larger, a lighter color on the walls can make it feel larger. The easiest solution is to paint the walls, and maybe add some more ambient lighting.

Neutral colors like white or beige not only make a room feel larger, they appeal to a wider number of buyers. Spending a hundred dollars on a couple gallons of paint and spending a weekend painting can result in a faster sale, and a better price.

Check out the before & after pictures below and see which you prefer.



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## Painting

Many of us like to express our personalities by the way we decorate our homes. We might paint the kid's bedrooms bright colors, or put an exotic wallpaper in the dining room. We love the way it looks! However, not everyone shares the same color preferences we do, and we want to make our house appealing to as many buyers as possible. One way to do that is to paint using neutral colors.

Many potential home buyers have little or no imagination. They can only see what "is", not what "could be". Your kitchen may be painted in the latest designer colors, but a potential buyer may not like those colors at all. Rather than imagining the rooms painted in their favorite colors, they will pass on making an offer on the house.

However, if the rooms are painted in a neutral color, the potential buyers don't notice the colors at all. In other words, a neutral color won't distract potential buyers the way other colors might.

Wallpaper is another of those decorating ideas that some people really like and some really dislike. One of the not so good things about wallpaper is that it can really date a house. This is especially true if the wallpaper has any small tears or seams coming up, or if the wallpaper has a distinctive pattern.

If you have been following the other advice in this report about taking down family pictures, and possibly moving artwork around to better accent a room, you most likely have screw holes and nail holes in the wall. It may not seem like much to you, but a potential buyer will focus in on things like that. So take the time to remove the hangars and patch the holes before you paint.

Even if the walls in your house are generally neutral already, if it has been a couple years since you last painted, a fresh coat of paint can enhance your house. We recently repainted our family room, using essentially the exact same color. But when we were halfway done, we stepped back and noticed how much fresher the painted walls seemed. It was sort of weird.

Take a look at these two pictures. Then look at some of the other "after" pictures in this report. Which do you think would appeal to more buyers?



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## What if my house is going to be vacant? Do I still need to stage it?

The answer is an emphatic "YES" if you want it to sell quickly, without any lowball offers. Let me give you a personal example.

A couple years ago, I invested in "fix & flip" property with some other people. The market looked pretty good at first, but there were some delays in getting everything done, and by the time it was ready to go on the market, things had taken a bit of a dip. Our profit margin was running a bit thin, so we decided to go ahead and put it on the market without staging it.

Keep in mind this house sparkled. It had fresh paint, new doors, a new master bathroom, a refaced fireplace, and all the hardwood floors had been refinished. I had spent several days over there cleaning every nook and cranny to make sure it was clean! However, we decided not to put any furnishings in the house. After all, it was practically new, so why wouldn't it sell quickly?



Well - after 60 days on the market, we had only gotten 3 offers, and they were all lowball offers. We owned the house outright, and we were not about to just give it away. However, it was getting to be a royal pain to keep going over to water the lawn and check on the house every couple days.

About that time I went to training and became an **Accredited Staging® Professional®**. I became convinced that the best and fastest way to get the house sold for a reasonable price was to stage it. I convinced my other partners to take it off the market for 30 days and let me stage it.



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During that 30 days, I rounded up staging stuff from several places. We used some of our furniture and accessories, and I borrowed some from friends. The only things I bought were a couch (off Craigslist for \$40), some pillow cases, some fake flowers and pots to put them in.

We put the house back on the market for the same price. Within 2 weeks we had a full price offer, and closed escrow about 30 days after that. Lesson learned!



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## So - To Stage or Not To Stage?

I hope you have found this information helpful, and you see the value in preparing your home for sale. A bit of time and money spent up front can have a big effect on how long it takes to sell your house and how good a price you get for it.

As an Accredited Staging® Professional®, if you list your home with me, I will provide you with a **FREE** personalized **Staging Recommendations Report. That's a \$350 value!** I will come in and look at everything in your home, and give you detailed recommendations for ways to improve the marketability of your house, many of which you can do yourself for relatively little expense.

Call or email me today to find out more about the personalized services I offer to each and every one of my clients! I look forward to speaking with you.

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Staging Recommendations Report

for

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