



choose a realtor



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Building a good working relationship with your realtor is one of the most crucial steps when you're buying a property in Florida. **Lesley Dolby** and **Steve Schaffer** explain why choosing a realtor is so important, and offer some expert tips on how to make the association

So much of the world today depends on making the right connections in order to be successful and reach your goals. When you're making an investment in property, which for most of us is the biggest investment of our lives, you need to be particularly conscious of making the right decision when it comes to choosing the professional who will be helping you with the transaction. Here are some of the most important points you need to consider.

STEP 1: WHY A REALTOR?

First of all, not everyone licensed to sell real estate is a realtor. Only members of the National Association of Realtors in the US and Canada can use that term. Realtors must undergo more extensive, regular training

and education than non-realtors, as well as having to abide by a strict code of ethics. Realtors are also the only agents that are legally allowed to have full access to the MLS (Multiple Listing Service).

When buying a property, you could do your own searches and then contact each individual listing agent for information. However, that takes a lot of effort and is completely unnecessary when buying properties in the US and Canada, because most of the property listings are in the MLS database. In addition, each individual agent you contact about their own listing will be working on behalf of the seller. You could work with a non-realtor, but their not having legal access to the MLS limits the choice of available properties they can offer you, which is not in your best interests.

If you're buying a new home, you could do your own research and then contact the various builders in Florida, or their UK representatives. However, once again you'll be working with someone who represents the seller, as well as being left with a very limited choice.

The best way is to choose your own realtor, one who lives in the area you're buying in and who can then help you to find the most suitable property, based on your personal criteria. Your realtor's commission, which is earned upon completion of the sale, is paid by the broker who listed the property (or by the builder of a new home), not by you, the buyer. Basically, you have everything to gain by having a realtor work with you.

STEP 2: HOW TO CHOOSE A REALTOR

Since any realtor can sell most of the available properties in the area you're buying in, it's not really about the property, but more about the company and its agents. It's always best to work with someone living in the area where you're buying and who is experienced in the intricacies of the local market. A company with a good reputation is an obvious choice, so try to find testimonials from previous buyers.

Look for a company whose owner and agents are dedicated to professionalism and are involved in their realtor associations, as well as being committed to advanced learning and professional designations. Examples of professional realtor designations are ABR (Accredited Buyer Representative), GRI (Graduate Realtor Institute) and CIPS (Certified International Property Specialist). The PhD of real-estate designations is CCIM (Certified Commercial Investment Member), requiring the longest number of hours of study and the greatest amount of specific experience.

The industry changes rapidly and only agents who strive for continued education and self-improvement can keep up with the necessary knowledge. Look for a brokerage that doesn't just hire any agent who walks through their doors, but only true professionals who hold themselves up to a high standard. Real estate is a people business and so it's not about the number of agents a company has. It's true that 20 per cent of realtors do 80 per cent of the work (actually, these days, this is closer to 10 per cent and 90 per cent). Great service is more about experience, knowledge and personal attention from dedicated agents.

To be able to use professional designations, a realtor must have passed the required exams, paid the required annual dues and maintained membership in the various associations. All realtors are listed in the membership directory of the National Association of Realtors at www.realtor.org. To be able to sell properties in Florida, a realtor will be listed in the Florida Association of Realtors member directory at www.fl.living.net, as well as their local association, which you can find from the national directory.

When first searching for a realtor, chemistry is very important, as is good communication, prompt response and listening to your particular needs, as opposed to steering you to a particular development or



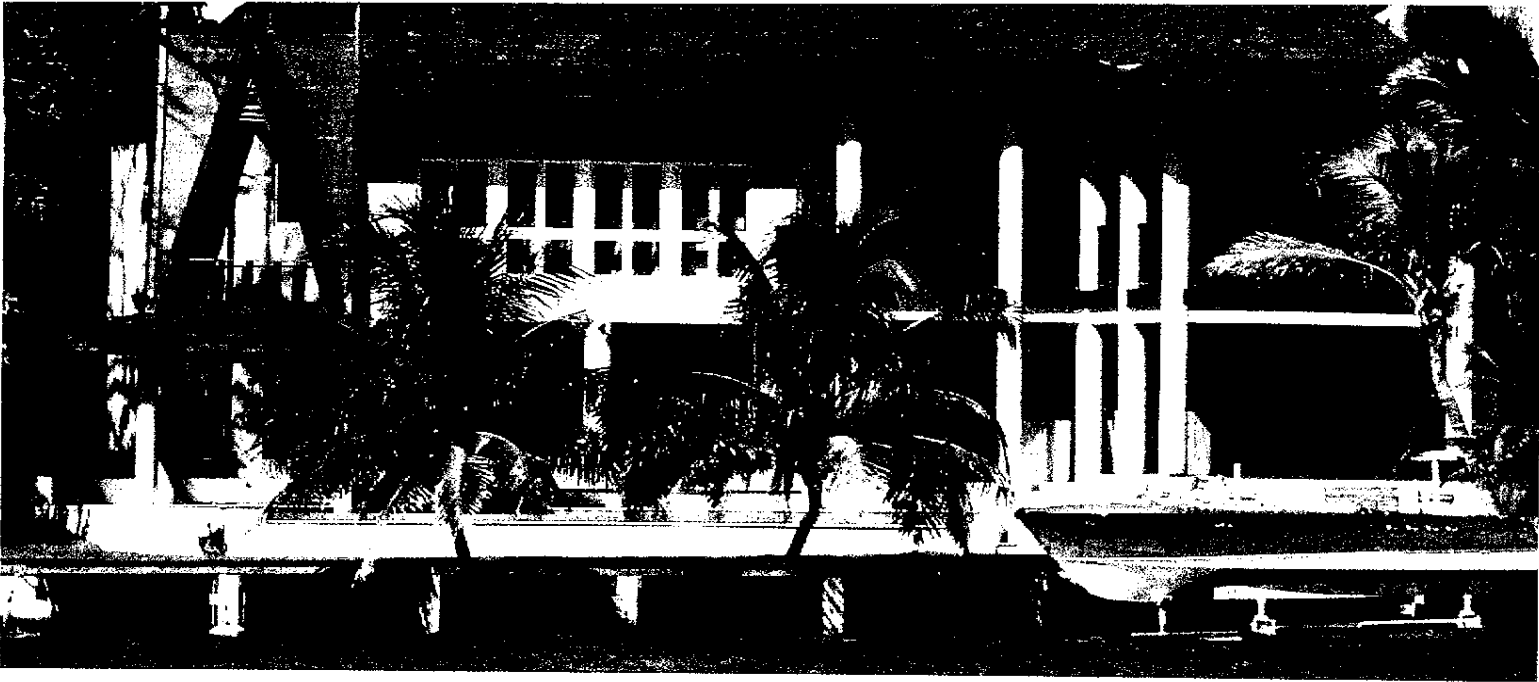
property. Glossy pictures and flashy verbiage can help to get you in the mood to purchase, but don't be fooled by what you see and hear. A good camera angle may not reveal the big picture and a complicated description may not tell the whole story. A good realtor should be unbiased and able to explain things, while allowing you room to listen to your inner voice and develop that vital comfortable gut feeling. The key to avoiding buyer's remorse is being able to see and understand options and alternatives so you can make a sound decision.

Once you've chosen a realtor, unless you're unhappy with them at the beginning, stick with them. Realtors spend a lot of time and effort in working with buyers and only get paid upon completion of a sale, so every realtor will want to be assured that you're a serious buyer and that you aren't working with anyone else at the same time. A relationship with your realtor should be based on mutual trust.

STEP 3: WHAT TO EXPECT

A good realtor, while striving to be a good guide, will ultimately have to submit to a buyer's personal choices and decisions. Thanks to the internet and email, you can establish a dialogue quite easily before you go ►►

Left and above Using a realtor can make finding and buying your dream home simpler, smoother and more secure



to Florida to view properties. In order for your realtor to give you the best service, you need to be totally open and honest about your needs, wants, timelines and budget. Your realtor can then select the most suitable properties available, sending you detail sheets. However, these should only be used as a guide to what's available, because by the time of your visit, the actual property availability is likely to have changed.

When viewing properties with your realtor, you should be shown a good selection of properties in various neighbourhoods that closely match your criteria. At no time should you ever feel pressured or uncomfortable, and a good realtor, having already determined your needs, will never push you beyond your limits. They should also have good connections to other businesses involved with a real estate transaction, such as a mortgage broker, banker, home inspector and property manager.

Once you've decided to move forward, your realtor will be involved from start to finish and beyond, making sure the transaction goes as smoothly as possible. A lot of work is done behind the scenes while you're back in the UK. Pitfalls can and do occur, but it's a professional's job to try to steer clear of them, or help to find solutions to them.

STEP 4: AFTER COMPLETION

Finding a realtor is about long-term relationships. They should be happy to keep in regular contact with you and check how things are going. Most professionals want their clients to be happy and will strive to make them feel comfortable with their purchase. Many realtors meet up with clients for drinks or dinner when they go over to Florida for future visits. If you've been happy with your realtor, they should be the first person you turn to when you're ready to sell your property, or even to buy another, knowing that you should be able to expect the same professional service. ☀

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Above A competent realtor will be able to guide you through every step of the purchasing process

Realtor checklist

- 1 For protection, make sure you know who you're dealing with. Unless it's a new build, where the builder and his sales representatives don't have to be real-estate licensees, everyone else who sells real estate in Florida must be properly licensed with the State of Florida. This can be verified by searching for a licensee at www.myfloridalicense.com. You'll need the exact name of the agent or company for this. If in doubt, call and ask who will be handling the sale in Florida.
- 2 Don't be fooled into buying through a company just because it has a big advert, a large stand at the property shows, a glossy brochure, big incentives and smooth-talking salespeople. Also, just because a company has offices all over the US doesn't mean that this will help you in the area where you're buying. Each office is usually independently owned and is still only as good and professional as the owner and the people who are working there.
- 3 Look for a realtor who specialises in the type of market and the area where you're buying. Look for evidence of commitment to the industry, as well as dedication to after-sales service and relationships. Testimonials from past buyers will help verify this.
- 4 Don't be pressured into making a purchase that makes you feel uncomfortable. However, once you've made the decision to buy something, remember that a Florida contract is binding from the beginning.
- 5 Once you've found a realtor that you're happy to work with – preferably before you actually go to view properties – stick with them, unless they turn out to be unsatisfactory at an early stage.