

Less is more

When it's time to sell your home, de-clutter is the operative word.

By Thom and Sandy Corrigan

We walk in our neighborhood and community almost every day. I am always amazed to see several expensive cars sitting in the driveway and through an open garage door, view a mound of stuff! Stuff. We like to buy and collect stuff. Enough stuff that we no longer can park our cars in our garage, and we need to rent storage units to store more stuff. Every year our family has an "*Our stuff can be your stuff*" sale. Others call it a garage or yard sale, but we know what we are selling- our stuff. It is part of what has become a national past-time- trolling neighborhoods looking to get a deal on someone else's stuff to haul back home and add to our collection. This is all well and good until it is time to sell your home. Now the stuff has just got to go. It is time to pack up, donate or throw out some of the stuff that you have collected and some of the stuff you chose to display around your home.

As home-owners, we are attached to our homes and may not realize how our treasured mementos might look like clutter to someone outside the family. Many times, sellers don't want to pack away their family things for showings, and this can really affect the sale of your house. Real Estate agents will sometimes hire a stager as part of the selling package because they may be uncomfortable disclosing to the seller that their home needs work and avoid upsetting them. Personally, I never get too uncomfortable explaining to a seller that those treasures have to be packed away in order to get top dollar for the home and we get involved in some level of staging in every listing we take. At the end of the day, the dollar wins over sentiment.

You may be thinking that you just redecorated so your house must be perfect, but staging a home is not redecorating it. Redecorating a home focuses on the seller and their personality. Staging focuses on the buyer. It provides the current home owner with the knowledge to rearrange the furnishings, pictures, accessories, etc. in the best possible manner to enhance the rooms function, appearance and balance.

Now, back to your stuff. The first thing you must do is de-clutter your house. You will have to try to look at your house with the eyes of a buyer. Many times we are so used to our clutter that we block it out! Go through each room and remove any clutter you see. The rule of thumb is to remove 1/3 to 1/2 of all your stuff on each bookshelf and flat surface. Organize toys in decorative boxes that are hidden away in a storage room (perhaps a room for storage in the basement or move all boxes of stuff to the garage). You can always take them out again when you don't have any booked showings. Bookcases should be neat and attractive interspersed with a few attractive and generic pieces of sculpture or the like. Closets should be cleaned out so that only clothes are visible. Remove stuff stored at top and bottom of closets. Place clothes out of season in storage. In fact, place any clutter you have found in storage as well. You have to move anyway and you will have to pack less later when you do move! Again, the rule of thumb is to have no more than 3 pieces/books/ etc on any one flat surface. The other rule is use lots of "white space", that is, less is more.

We sold our home and moved to a new neighborhood this past October. When we decided to move, we experimented with this process ourselves. I will be honest, the process of getting enough stuff out of my home-office to make it really sellable was hard. I wined and proclaimed I would not be able to do my work without all my stuff. But in the end, I adapted, we put 50 boxes of our stuff in storage (in the garage), priced our house right and sold it in 11 days in a buyers market! This really works, and is common enough to be expected now by sellers.

For finishing touches, when someone is coming over for a showing make sure the house is spotless. A good rule of thumb is to run the vacuum at least in traffic areas for 5 minutes each morning before you leave for work. Turn on the table lamps for ambient lighting. Play some soft music for ambiance. Spray a little bit of air freshener before hand to give the house a nice smell – not too much or it might look like you are covering up an odor! Take everything off the refrigerator. Try putting some vases of fresh flowers on the tables for added appeal. Set your dining or kitchen table as if your best guests were coming to dinner, and leave it set. It is an inexpensive upgrade to your home that really helps to build an environment that is inviting and memorable.

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