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**ANTHONY  
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# NEI's Real Estate Report

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## **Some Owners Don't Understand "Presentation"**

by M. Anthony Carr

I went out with some friends this week to look at some houses. They're moving up from a condo to a single-family home and they're very excited. As we caravanned from home to home, it was obviously clear that some owners in this market sincerely believe they can offer up a can of worms as caviar.

During a real estate course I took years ago, the trainer used a fantastic example of how human nature dictates the selection process. She produced two \$1 bills. One was fresh from the bank. You almost had to check to make sure you didn't have a second one pasted to the back it was so new. The second bill looked as if it had been gone through Desert Storm, been laundered several times and was nearly disintegrated.

She went to someone in the front row and asked, "Which one do you want?" The obvious answer was the clean, crisp, freshly printed bill. Why? The value of both was the same. They both are legal tender in any American retail outlet around the country and several countries around the world. But -- the clean one always got selected.

Thus, when we walked into a \$370,000 single-family home and found mounds of clothing in the living room, left over dishes on the table along with opened cans of soup and pots with soup in them on the stove -- the luster of the home on the market dulled quickly. Interestingly, this was not an anomaly in the marketplace.

Another home priced at \$449,000 was in about the same condition. The Realtor had not called the homeowners to let them know my friends were coming by; the for sale sign had dropped into the grass; there was no flier about the property inside the house; the bathrooms were scum covered; no staging of the home had been carried out whatsoever. There was even a bottle of beer strategically placed on the floor, next to the closet in the master bedroom. We were amazed. The lots were a quarter acre or less on both homes. How could they demand the money they were asking and not prepare the home for sale?

Then there were the properties my friends put on their A list -- clean and new looking inside; new or near new appliances; cleaned by either a very astute owner or cleaning company; home warranty included in the

asking price; plenty of bonus add-ons, such as bonus room, media room, large lot (half acre). All in the same price as the above two properties.



The requirements to get top dollar have and always will be the same:

**Clean the house.** Thoroughly -- before you put it on the market. If it's not clean, don't even consider putting it on the market. You will lose a contract just because of dust and scum.

**Paint the interior.** Paint is cheap, but cleans up any dwelling place.

**Declutter.** Get rid of everything you don't need to live on a day-by-day basis. You don't need your seasonal decorations. The kids can do without half their toys. You can probably live without a third of your furniture. Get it into storage or a friend's house. Space adds value.

**Have handouts.** With more properties on the market, you need to make sure your house is memorable -- with a good marketing plan that includes a flier the buyers can take with them.

**Price right.** Look at all the parameters of your house, not just the bedroom and bath count. One of the houses above is sitting on a half-acre lot with a 1-car garage and built in the same year as it's counterpart listed for about the same amount of money, but which has only half as much land and no garage -- not even a carport -- but they're in the same area. (This is mostly the Realtor's job, but a stubborn seller may cause an over-priced listing.)

When placing your house on the market, keep in mind it's more involved and requires more work than selling a used car. We're not talking a difference of a couple hundred dollars on price here. Missing the mark on price and condition could cost you tens of thousands of dollars.

## JANUARY AT A GLANCE...



**1 New Year's Day**



**16 MLK Day**

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New Year's Eve has always been a time for looking back to the past, and more importantly, forward to the coming year. It's a time to reflect on the changes we want (or need) to make and resolve to follow through on those changes. Did your New Year resolutions make our top ten list?

**1) Spend More Time with Family & Friends**

Recent polls conducted by General Nutrition Centers, Quicken, and others shows that more than 50% of Americans vow to appreciate loved ones and spend more time with family and friends this year.

**2) Fit in Fitness**

The evidence is in for fitness. Regular exercise has been associated with more health benefits than anything else known to man. Studies show that it reduces the risk of some cancers, increases longevity, helps achieve and maintain weight loss, enhances mood, lowers blood pressure, and even improves arthritis. In short, exercise keeps you healthy and makes you look and feel better.

**3) Tame the Bulge**

Fifty-five percent of adults in America are overweight, so it is not surprising to find that weight loss is one of the most popular New Year's resolutions. Setting reasonable goals and staying focused are the two most important factors in sticking with a weight loss program, and the key to success for those millions of Americans who made a New Year's commitment to shed extra pounds.

**4) Quit Smoking**

If you have resolved to make this the year that you stamp out your smoking habit, over-the-counter availability of nicotine replacement therapy now provides easier access to proven quit-smoking aids. Even if you've tried to quit before and failed, don't let it get you down. On average, smokers try about four times before they quit for good. Start enjoying the rest of your smoke-free life!

**5) Enjoy Life More**

Given the hectic, stressful lifestyles of millions of Americans, it is no wonder that "enjoying life more" has become a popular resolution in recent years.

**6) Quit Drinking**

While many people use the New Year as an incentive to finally stop drinking, most are not equipped to make such a drastic lifestyle change all at once. Many heavy drinkers fail to quit cold turkey but do much better when they taper gradually, or even learn to moderate their drinking. If you have decided that you want to stop drinking, there is a world of help and support available.

**7) Get Out of Debt**

Was money a big source of stress in your life last year? Join the millions of Americans who have resolved to spend this year getting a handle on their finances. It's a promise that will repay itself many times over in the year ahead.

**8) Learn Something New**

Have you vowed to make this year the year to learn something new? Perhaps you are considering a career change, want to learn a new language, or just how to fix your computer? Whether you take a course or read a book, you'll find education to be one of the easiest, most motivating New Year's resolutions to keep. Challenge your mind in the coming year, and your horizons will expand.

**9) Help Others**

A popular, non-selfish New Year's resolution, volunteerism can take many forms. Whether you choose to spend time helping out at your local library, mentoring a child, or building a house, these nonprofit volunteer organizations could really use your help.

**10) Get Organized**

On just about every New Year resolution top ten list, organization can be a very reasonable goal. Whether you want your home organized enough that you can invite someone over on a whim, or your office organized enough that you can find the stapler when you need it, these tips and links should get you started on the way to a more organized life.



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