

On Becoming an e-Agent—Making Time for Everything Part 24

By Jo Becker, BA

If you're eager to grow your business but marketing isn't your shtick or you yearn for efficient operations but don't have the time or temperament to learn and master new technologies, you may have found my last few articles overwhelming and overly optimistic.

If you take time to inventory your tools; evaluate your goals and needs; research, buy and get up to speed with the latest technologies and market yourself in an endless, consistent fashion, when is it you'll have time to meet with clients, write up contracts, review transaction timelines, follow up with lenders and escrow officers, attend walk-throughs and inspections, tour homes, etc.? Will you ever have personal time to spend with family and friends, take time off and go on vacation, workout or just have a little downtime for yourself?

Well, the answer is that you need to know what you do (real estate sales), and do it very well. Everything else (follow up, marketing, promotions, technology, etc.) you need to know at least a little about, but more importantly, you need to know the options available to you for accomplishing these necessary peripheral tasks most efficiently.

The best solution for one agent may vary widely from his/her officemate because their needs, technical or creative wherewithal, and overall focuses are likely different. If you're already a computer whiz, know how to run your business, have effective time management skills, and enjoy and are good at marketing, it's just possible you can handle it all yourself—you may have no time left for anything else, but you may very well be able to do it! If any of these are difficult for you, if you have plans of *someday* getting to this or that but never do, then you need some help to jumpstart your practice.

Finding help may be as close as bartering with your teenage son to design your website in exchange for car privileges, roping your mother into helping you fold and stamp mailers, or hiring a neighbor to layout property flyers as needed on her home computer.

Perhaps the most obvious choices—no matter what business you're in—is to seek out experts. Advertising agencies (such as Mindy Sullivan's 2 brains creative group) can design a marketing campaign and you can sign up for any number of intensive training programs available to master your computer system. Some agents choose to hire assistants to handle administrative tasks (delivering docs, processing paperwork, etc.) or serve as in-house, one-person technical or marketing departments. However, significant licensing, oversight, employment, and budgeting ramifications keep the average agent from going this route.

Other options include hiring someone like myself or Mindy on an as needed, project basis. Or, you might consider the use of a virtual assistant (VA) with one or more of the skills you seek. VAs are becoming more popular across all industries (do an internet search for "virtual assistant" for more information on this trend).

Whether you rope in someone you know, pay for extensive programs and services, hire a VA or look for help on an as needed basis, the common thread here is outsourcing. By evaluating your strengths and those tasks you most enjoy, you can increase your efficiency and stay (or get) balanced by delegating the tasks you're weak in or least enjoy to those who specialize in them. Deciding to hire a real estate assistant to sit beside you in your office, have a VA working with you from down the street or across the country, or contract with a marketing and technology specialist will depend on your specific situation.

Before you outsource, consider the following points:

- List all the tasks you need to do, including business-related functions as well as the necessary peripheral tasks
- Place a checkmark next to those you do, do well, and enjoy

- Highlight those that you don't like, never get around to, don't understand or just don't want to bother with
- Review the highlighted items to confirm whether or not you feel they are essential to successfully running or growing your business
- Determine what kind of help you need by categorizing the highlighted items—
 - Administrative (setting appointments, filing and processing paperwork, coordinating with vendors, etc.)
 - Technical (hardware expert, software training, data entry and maintenance, website design, etc.)
 - Promotion (flyers, presentation materials, brochures, website content, business cards, event planning, etc.)
- With this much done, consider your needs, managerial style, preferences, and budget—do you specifically want someone onsite working with you day in and day out or are you on the road and couldn't care less where the person worked so long as the work gets done? Do you need fulltime help, ongoing fulltime assistance, or could the tasks be grouped into projects that could be worked on as time and budget allowed.

The answers to these questions should guide you as you consider outsourcing your peripheral work. *Who* do you hire? *Who* do you know that has the skills you're looking for? *Who* do your friends and colleagues use; have you seen their work and like it? Talk with your colleagues and ask around. But above all, don't ignore the work that needs to be done—not your work of real estate sales, nor the work of promoting yourself and running an efficient ship. Success and balance comes to those who measure their strengths and compensate for their deficiencies.

If all of this seems too overwhelming, ask for help, but keep trying! Before long you will get the hang of it. In the meantime, *hang it there!*

Jo Becker has eight years of licensed real estate experience. As a former broker, she knows how important, and sometimes scary, technology and self-promotion can be. Jo has provided personalized one-on-one marketing consultation and computer software training to the industry since 2002. Services include relationship selling tips and techniques, data entry, software application training, custom marketing campaigns, design of collateral pieces, and website content design. 503/493-6883; JoByEmail@yahoo.com