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# How to Prepare Your Listings to Sell Quickly

## Introduction

Perhaps at no other time in history has being an exceptional real-estate agent been more necessary than in today's home-selling market. Thanks to a plethora of information available on the Internet and the ever-present motivation of the dollar, today's sellers are becoming more savvy and in some cases, more motivated to go it alone when it's time to put their house on the market.

Even when sellers find sufficient motivation to work with a listing agent, the relationship will be short-lived if no immediate results are quickly forthcoming. Add to this the skyrocketing number of agents who are being named in lawsuits (many frivolous, but time-consuming and expensive all the same), and we find some compelling reasons indeed for you, the real-estate agent to be at the top of your game.

This practical course will provide you with comprehensive information on the most effective ways you can help your clients succeed in getting their homes ready to sell quickly and profitably.

Let's begin by looking at the single most important component of the listing and selling process: the listing price.

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## Module 1: Establish a Listing Price That Will Sell

Nothing is more important when marketing a home for sale than the listing price. Consequently, as a listing agent, the most important responsibility you have to your client (at least initially) is to get this price right. And by this we do not mean telling your client what he or she wants to hear so that you can land the job of representing them. If you do this, then you will really have some hard work cut out for you! Rather, your job is to help educate your client so that he or she can establish a realistic listing price for his or her house.

There are many reasons why this is true. First, as a listing agent, it is your responsibility to market this house to the many other agents who are working with homebuyers. It is, after all, through the work of these individuals that you are most likely to strike a deal. Your client has every reason to expect a flurry of activity from other agents at his or her house as soon as it goes on the market. However, if the house you are representing is overpriced, then other Realtors in

your market, who are bound to know what it is worth, probably will choose to spend their time previewing those houses that are appropriately priced. And they will take their clients to those homes first.

When the house isn't being shown, then the seller will be calling you in anger, frustration and panic, telling you to get to work and market this house, and complaining to anyone who will listen that you aren't any good as a Realtor.

Even if other Realtors do show interest in this home and generate interest among buyers, there is often a pool of buyers who have seen everything on the market, and are watching daily for new houses to see. If the house you're marketing is over priced, then it is likely that they will never see it.

***The longer the house is on the market, the greater the perception that there is something "wrong" with the house.***

But perhaps these obstacles will be overcome, and interest will generate a forthcoming offer. In this case, the buyer probably will need a mortgage to purchase this house, and that will require an appraisal. What happens when comparable sales and market conditions don't support a sales price? Either the house doesn't appraise and the deal falls apart, or a lot of time is wasted renegotiating the selling price.

Historically, the longer a house is on the market, the less the seller will make at closing. In the meantime, his or her neighbor's house, which is appropriately priced, will sell even more quickly. And what does this do to your credibility? Well, it's likely to diminish along with the selling price of your client's house, not only among your peers but possibly, among other prospective clients who get the word that you've been a disappointment to this particular client.

**In summary**, establishing the correct listing price in the beginning will:

- Increase Realtor interest in the house
- Provide a wider response to your marketing efforts
- Generate more activity among prospective buyers
- Provide for a quicker sale
- (Ironically) Increase the seller's opportunity to make a profit
- Save you a LOT of headaches in the long run
- Make your client a lot happier

So how do you avoid setting the wrong listing price, and achieve the best listing price you can for your client?

**1. Prepare a Competitive Market Analysis (CMA):** First, study all of the comparables you can get your hands on for houses in the same neighborhood. Prepare for your client a computerized CMA, which provides a history of these comparables. It should include... But don't stop there.

**2. Know your market.** Be up to date on current market conditions, and whether average home sales are rising, falling or leveling off. Supply and demand always dictates the market.

**3. Know the difference between reality and fantasy.** In all likelihood, your prospective client is going to have very high expectations of what his or her house is worth. For one thing, the seller is personally attached to the house. Secondly, the seller naturally wants to get as much money from the sale of the house as possible. Therefore, the seller is going to try to sell you on the value of his or her house. Do your homework and know what is a realistic listing price for the house.

**4. Educate your prospective client.** Discussing the listing price instead of just including it with your CMA will help to avoid a lot of problems for you and the prospective client in the long run. The last thing you want is to get a listing that has no chance of selling! Be tactful, but be honest. If the prospective client chooses to work with someone who says what he or she wants to hear, you really won't have lost anything.

It is not easy for a client to sit back and wait for something to happen. If activity isn't immediately forthcoming, the tendency of a seller is to overly-scrutinize the Realtor's activities. You can head some of this off by giving your client some very constructive things to do which will only help him or her sell the house.

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## Module 2: Help your Client Get Realistic

**Congratulations.** Your honesty and tactful candor has set you apart from some other prospective listing agents, and you have a new client. Now what?

Encourage the seller to do some homework before putting his or her house on the market. A “test run” is usually a flop. To avoid costly mistakes, urge your client to get his or her house appraised before putting it on the market...particularly if he or she has owned the home for more than two years. (This is especially beneficial for those clients who feel that because they paid too much for the house, they have grounds for establishing a super high selling price.) At the same time, consider talking with your client about the benefits of having an inspection up front. This has saved costly delays for many!

As mentioned previously, it's a good idea in today's market to have the house inspected before it goes on the market. (You may even choose to pay for this, as some Realtors do.) If there is something seriously wrong with the house, the time to learn about it is before, not after, it's listed for sale. An inspector should assess everything from the foundation to the water heater to the gas and air conditioning system.

**A word of caution:** Please make sure that you receive a copy of the inspection report. If there is a problem with the house that the owner elects not to remedy, then it must be disclosed. The result of failing to disclose a problem the seller knows about could result in a lawsuit for both you and your client.

### Open Your Client's Eyes

Help your client market the listing effectively by viewing the house objectively. This is where some of you will really earn your stripes as salespeople! Why? Most people tend to view their homes with a little bias. They have invested both their money and themselves in making their house a home. They have decorated their home according to their personal taste. They probably have built many memories in this home, and they are likely to see things in the house, not as they are now, but as they once were.

For example, the pictures on the refrigerator represent their family members in various stages of life. Instead of an old bathroom that is cluttered with an endless array of prescription and other drugs dating 10 years back, they see a closet where they can find anything necessary for any ailment. The dirty lawn furniture in the backyard reminds them of the many evenings they sat outside holding hands and talking after the children were in bed. The fireplace with ashes and a half-burned log only reminds them of Christmas, when the weather was cold and a fire seemed cozy.

In short, your clients are emotionally attached and identified with their home, and it is up to you to help them to see it with the same new, objective eyes that any prospective buyers will have.

## Renovations and Repairs

In order to get a house ready to sell, the seller must tend to all necessary renovations and repairs. The type and extent of a household renovation depends primarily on the market. If your client is in a market or neighborhood with a substantial demand for houses, then the house may only need some cosmetic improvements to enhance its curb appeal and help it to show well.

An additional bathroom, for example, could add substantial value to the overall listing and sales price. Or new carpet and paint could go a long way in helping your client sell the house quickly and more profitably. Painting almost always help a house sell more quickly and profitably.

Of course, it is possible to over-renovate. There are numerous occasions when the buyer will want to make his or her own renovations (particularly if the perceived value of the land a house is on is greater even than the house). In some special cases, the buyer will actually tear the house down and build a new house.

In addition to market considerations, there is your client to consider. A homeowner not only is getting his or her house ready to sell, but is getting ready to purchase a new home. Over-renovating could be defined as going into debt or decreasing his or her profit margin to make household upgrades and improvements.

Therefore, you need to understand something about your client's financial situation and goals, and be prepared to show him or her which renovations make the most sense, and would give them the greatest return on their investment.

## Repair Work

Sellers may be surprised to learn from you that the owners who refuse to make household repairs are the ones who always lose more money selling their house in its "as-is" condition than those who spend some money to upgrade. Why? A house that needs repair work is perceived as being weak in both its potential and positioning; a perception of weakness lends itself to negotiations that result in a lower price than a house in good repair. A house that's in good repair projects the message, "I am worth every penny and more!"

As the listing agent, you need to be able to point out to your client those repairs that will add significant value to the house. These may include:

- Painting inside and/or out (if the house is due for a paint job anyway)
- Re-carpeting (if carpet is especially worn or out of date)
- Foundation repairs
- Roof or pipe repairs
- Plumbing problems
- Electrical wiring
- Heating and air conditioning
- Hot water heater

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## Module 3: Enhance the Curb Appeal

A prospective homebuyer's first impressions of a house are like a prospective employer's first impressions of a job candidate: it's the outside that counts initially, and so with a house, curb appeal is the initial way to draw in prospective buyers, many of whom will make a decision about seeing a house from their agent's car!

Step one is a "wake-up call" for your client, which can be established by walking with your client across the street and comparing how his or her house looks in comparison with the neighbors.

Here are some areas to consider from this angle:

- How do the roof shingles look?
- What about the exterior paint on the siding, door, trim and shutters?
- Is the grass cut and green? Are there any brown spots?
- Is any weeding necessary on the lawn or in flowerbeds?
- Are the shrubs nicely maintained and cut away from windows?
- Do tree branches need pruning?
- How do the gutters and downspouts look?
- Do the driveway and walkway need cleaning or bleaching?
- Are garbage cans, toys and lawn equipment stored away from view?

Here is a thorough checklist for enhancing the curb appeal of a house. These are the basics.

### The Front and Back Yards

- Remove all yard debris (from pets, trash, leaves, branches, etc.); pick up rocks
- Clear out obstructions in the walkway to the house
- Store toys and lawn items, tools and garden hoses neatly
- Weed the yard and flower beds
- Trim shrubs and dispose of dead branches (trim shrubs away from windows)
- Rake leaves
- Sweep the walkway (daily)

- Mow and edge the grass
- Clean the outdoor furniture and barbecue
- Put in new bulbs in outdoor lights; ensure lights are working properly
- Repair (and if necessary, repaint) gates and fences
- Clean the swimming pool

### **The Driveway and Garage**

- Sell, throw away or give away any junk or unwanted items
- Remove any oil stains on the driveway
- Repair cracks or broken concrete in the driveway
- Repair, if necessary, any faulty garage doors
- Empty and wash out trashcans
- Remove cobwebs and any insect nests
- Organize tools and equipment (hang or neatly store)
- Clean any windows
- Clear off any tables or workbenches
- Neatly store boxes (provide shelving for these, if necessary)
- Sweep the floor
- Close garage door(s)

### **The House Exterior**

- Repair parts of the roof that may be leaking
- Repair loose roof shingles
- Replace missing roof shingles
- Tighten any loose porch or deck railings
- Hammer down any loose floor or deck boards
- Sand and paint chipped deck boards
- Wash down vinyl siding on the house

- Wash down outdoor window screens
- Repair or replace shingles, gutters and downspouts
- Repair or replace cracked windows and torn screens
- Repair (and if necessary, repaint) window shutters
- Repaint or refinish the front door; polish doorknobs
- Oil any squeaky door and gate hinges
- Clean and polish windows

In some cases, it will make sense for your client to paint the house. A new paint job on the exterior will make the house look like new, and will normally make the appeal of a house—and its value—that much greater.

### **The Use of Flowers**

An inexpensive but effective way to add curb appeal to a home is with the use of bright or colorful flowers. These do not need to be planted (anything planted becomes “real property,” and must convey with the house), but your clients can buy and place them in flower bins, tubs or planter’s boxes. These, in turn, can go in various places: on or near the front porch, around the mailbox, around trees, in a windowsill, on a patio, and at various places throughout the front and back yard.

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## Module 4: General Interior and Common Area Improvements

It's important for you to prepare your client about what to expect from homebuyers who come to preview his or her house. They will turn lights on and off, open and close cabinets and drawers, flush toilets and look at fixtures. They may turn on the shower. They will turn on ceiling fans. They will look for signs of leaks under sinks and on ceilings. They will inspect the carpet for stains or damage. They will open and close the garage doors. They will open and close the windows. And they will form an impression of the house based on how it smells.

Here are some ideas for getting the interior and common areas into tip-top shape:

- Structural Repairs: Resolve any issues with respect to the foundation and structure, whether it's a beam issue or a foundation problem
- Lighting: A house on the market should be as brightly lighted as possible. Lighting warms a house. Therefore, all light fixtures need to be in working order. Light bulbs should be new and working. Electrical plates should be clean (and in some cases, replaced).
- Plumbing and Fixtures: Plumbing needs to work beautifully. Water faucets need to turn on and off easily, and the water pressure needs to be strong. Noisy pipes need to be repaired. The uptake from the tub faucets to the shower should be accomplished without wasting a lot of water. Fixtures should be shiny and bright. (In some cases, this may call for inexpensive replacements.) The source of any water stains needs to be repaired.
- Windows and Doors (and doorknobs) need to open and close easily and quietly. (Hinges on doors may need to be oiled to accomplish this.) Both windows and doors should be cleaned. Cracked or damaged windowpanes should be replaced. Doorknobs need to shine.
- Ceilings and Walls should be free of water stains. If there is a leak, your client needs to find its source and have it repaired. (If the source is the roof, this action may prevent a lawsuit.) In this case, some painting will be necessary. A new paint job may prove beneficial, as it is bound to be of overall value to the house.
- Carpet and Flooring: If the carpet is old and outdated, or is extremely worn, then it may need replacing; otherwise, a good cleaning will do. Wooden floors should be polished; if the floor is made of tile, then any broken or cracked pieces should be repaired. Any squeaky floorboards should be silenced.
- Bathroom and Kitchen Tile: May need to be repaired or re-grouted and re-caulked.
- Electrical issues need to be resolved. For example, all electrical wiring must be up to code; all electrical switches must be in working order. All the wall switches

should have clean plate covers. All the telephone jacks should be working.

- Space: Hang mirrors in hallways and rooms to create a sense of space. Make sure the house is well lighted.
- Odors need to be eliminated. Odors come from a number of sources: water leaks, pets, garbage, and tobacco smoke, to name a few. Therefore, advise your clients to keep the trash emptied on a daily basis (and perhaps twice daily) when showing the home. Kitty litters and dog crates need to be thoroughly cleaned, and if shampooing is not enough, dogs may need to be kept outside as often as possible until the house sells. (Or maybe a friend or family member can keep the pet...most dogs track in dirt after they've been out.) Using baking soda, or a little apple cider vinegar in a glass can do wonders for eliminating household smells. Putting potpourri in some small glass containers is a nice touch that also helps. During the showing, brewing coffee and having a little apple cider vinegar on the stove will make the house smell inviting.

## Miscellaneous

The following are some additional items that your client won't want to overlook:

- Smoke and heat detectors should be in good working order, with batteries
- Fire extinguishers should be in appropriate locations
- The house should be exterminated for pests (preferably before the house is being shown!)
- Closets should be emptied of everything except what is necessary for daily living.
- Televisions should be hidden, if possible; if not, they should be dusted
- Tapes, CDs and DVDs should be neatly stored
- All furniture should be dusted
- Recycling materials (cans, papers, cardboard) should be neatly stored outside the house
- Plants that are not healthy or in optimal condition should be removed

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## Module 5: Cleaning and Clutter

Nothing helps a home show its good points like a thorough housecleaning. This checklist will be helpful to your clients:

- Clean all walls of smudges, stains and fingerprints
- Repair any chipped plaster
- Clean wallpaper and wax any woodwork
- Launder curtains and drapes
- Clean mini blinds
- Vacuum and shampoo rugs and carpets
- Repair any worn spots on carpeting, or pull up and replace with area rugs
- Mop and wax floors
- Dust and polish furniture
- Repair and stain furniture nicks or scratches
- Repair loose doorknobs, sticking doors, windows and drawers
- Fix leaky faucets
- Replace all light bulbs; make sure all light fixtures are in good working order
- Clean all light fixtures
- Replace switch plates that are cracked or discolored
- Polish and shine any brass hardware
- Clean all glass and mirrors
- Tighten banister railings, if necessary
- Clean ceiling fans and make sure they are in good working order
- Clean the fireplace and polish the fireplace tools
- Clean all appliances in the kitchen and elsewhere
- Remove water stains, soap buildup and mildew, where necessary
- Clean the toilets; tighten the toilet seat if needed

- Wash shower curtains
- Re-caulk and repair grouting (or re-grout) where necessary
- Remove rust stains, mildew and water stains
- Eliminate clutter and organize closets, shelves and drawers to create space
- Remove unhealthy plants
- Take out the trash
- Disguise any household odors with vinegar on the stove or brewing coffee

In general, if it is dirty, clean it; if it is broken, fix it; if it is noisy, silence it; if it is not working, repair it.

In many cases, your client may want to consider calling a maid service and asking them to do a one-time “make-ready.”

## **Clear the Clutter**

Clutter is a killer when it comes to making a good first impression. People love spaciousness, and clutter is a space robber. Also, homebuyers need to have an opportunity to envision where their furniture, counter-top appliances and knick-knacks will go. The seller’s clutter robs them of this opportunity.

Clutter tends to accumulate on shelves, in drawers and closets, in garages, attics and basements, on bedside and end tables, on counter tops in the kitchen, in the pantry, and very often, inside the ‘fridge!

Often, sellers have lived in their house long enough that they no longer notice their cluttered spaces. They need your help to see their house and its contents the way a prospective homebuyer would. And they need your input to understand that homebuyers will walk through their homes and possibly open every drawer and look in every cabinet. Homebuyers, after all, have “stuff,” too. Among other things, they are looking for is a house that will accommodate that stuff.

Persuading people to live without, even for a short time, is not always an easy task, but it’s probably going to be your job to persuade your clients to store or throw away all of those items that are not absolutely essential to everyday living during the time their house is on the market. Items that are essential to everyday life should be kept out of sight to whatever extent is possible.

The following are some clutter-clearing guidelines for you to share with your clients:

## **Unclump the Furniture**

One of the most effective ways to educate your clients about getting a home ready for sale is to send them to a model home. There they will find ideas about how to position furniture for the most spacious effect. They may find it necessary to eliminate some pieces of furniture they already have, and place those in storage until their house sells.

Depending on how great the need for help and the motivation to sell may be, you may want to share with your client the expense of hiring a professional to actually “stage” the home. Staging can be relatively simple or very involved, especially in a home where there is no furniture.

## **Eliminate Kitchen Clutter**

Here, as elsewhere, the goal is to create open space. This goes for the kitchen counters as well as the kitchen cabinets.

Starting with the cabinets: Dishes, glasses, crystal and china, pots, pans and containers that are not used daily, or at least weekly, should be boxed up and put in storage.

Next are the counter tops. Knick-knacks, candles and canisters should be boxed and put into storage. The coffee maker, toaster, mixing bowls, blender, juicer, etc. need to be stored inside the cabinets that have just been emptied. Explain to your clients that putting these small appliances in their cabinets should not compromise all of the open space inside. If that happens, then more stuff needs to come out of the cabinets.

Junk drawers need to be emptied, and drawers with items that aren’t necessary for everyday living need to be culled, and those items stored.

The Pantry. Sellers might begin to clear pantry clutter by simply using up its contents. Chances are that they don’t want to move their canned goods, anyway! Grocery sacks and plastic bags need to be put out of sight.

The refrigerator is another area that calls for attention. In addition to cleaning out the refrigerator, your clients will want to actually clean up the refrigerator...inside and out. (Time to put children’s artwork and magnetized items away.) An open box of baking soda will help to absorb unwanted odors...odors that the homeowner may be accustomed to smelling, but prospective homebuyers are not.

Another place that prospective buyers will look is under the kitchen sink. This area should be cleaned out as well, with any over-abundance of household cleaners stored away in boxes.

## **Unclutter the Storage Areas**

Storage areas need to be opened up as much as possible for the prospective homebuyer to see how his or her belongings will fit into these spaces. Items in the basement, garage, and even in the attic and storage shed should be stored neatly, and anything that is not absolutely necessary on at least a weekly basis should be housed in a storage facility.

Homebuyers generally want spacious closets; therefore, closet clutter also must be eliminated. Essentially, this means that closets in the seller's home no longer function as storage space. Clothes and shoes that are not worn weekly should be stored elsewhere. The same holds true for sporting goods equipment and boxes of stuff (Christmas ornaments and other items) that have accumulated over time.

### **Pull the Personality Plug**

As long as your client is clearing clutter, he or she may as well pull all references and indicators regarding the type of person or family who owns the home. Again, homebuyers are looking for a place that they can fit into, and the objective of the seller is to appeal to as many prospective homebuyers as possible. Therefore, it is the seller's job to depersonalize the house that is going on the market.

In the living areas, remove and store family pictures, trophies, awards, certificates, knick-knacks, souvenirs and collectibles. In the bathroom, store all cosmetics, hair products, hair dryers and drugs. Remove family-specific drawings and photographs and any other personal items from the walls of the house.

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## Module 6: Showing the House

Finally, the house is appraised, inspected and given a thorough cleaning on the inside and out. Now the phone call has been made: buyers are on the way. What to do? Here are some ideas to share with your clients:

### Availability

If a house is to sell quickly, it needs to be available for showing at all times. Encourage your client to let you put a lock box on the house by explaining that if showing appointments have to be scheduled, Realtors are likely to skip that house and go to one that is accessible and convenient to see.

It is wise that the house be empty when prospective buyers arrive. When the seller is home, prospective buyers will not feel the freedom to look as closely at the house as they may need or want to. They will feel like guests in the home. And the seller may feel forced to answer questions that he or she is not prepared to answer.

If the seller simply cannot leave during the showing, advise him or her to answer questions only when asked, and to leave it to you to point out the features of the home, respond to any objections, and to discuss the price, terms and possession of the house.

### Indoors

- Remove any open food containers and clean up any dishes
- Empty the trash
- Clean and deodorize pet areas
- Make the beds
- Put away clothes and shoes
- Clear off counter spaces
- Brew coffee in the kitchen
- Turn on all of the house lights
- Open all the interior doors in the house
- Open all the draperies and blinds
- Set the thermostat to a comfortable level

- Pick up toys and clutter
- Make room in the entry way closet for guest coats
- Put out fresh towels in the bathrooms and kitchen
- Remove personal items from the bedrooms and bathrooms
- Put toilet seats down
- Vacuum and dust if time permits
- Turn off all appliances (televisions, washing machines, dryer, etc.)
- Turn on some soft classical music
- Put the children in the car to go with you

## **Outdoors**

- Throw away any pet or other debris
- Close and store garbage cans
- Pick up and put away any toys or other items
- Remove any vehicles from the garage and close the door
- Get the pets and take them with you

Now your client is ready to take an enjoyable outing, and leave the selling to you!

This course has taught you some of the tried-and-true ways to prepare a new listing for the homebuyer's market. These are ideas that have withstood the test of time...and many Realtors (and sellers) can attest to their value. Hopefully, you have come to understand that it is your responsibility to help the Seller help you sell his or her house by making that house as attractive and saleable as possible.

By following these suggestions, you can save your client (and yourself) a lot of time, disappointment and angst in the emotional process of showing and selling his or her house.

Now you're ready for the next step in working a new listing: marketing.



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## How Can YOU take Advantage of this Course?

### Consider the following steps :

- Step 1:** First, print this module, 3-hole punch it and save it into a binder.
- Step 2:** Open your calendar and schedule a personal training appointment just for yourself this week at the time of day you have identified as your peak mental energy time.
- Step 3:** At the scheduled time, separate yourself from all distractions in an undisturbed place. Ask co-workers to leave you to concentrate. Put the cares and worries of your world on hold – just for about 10-15 minutes or so. YOU deserve this special training time and so does your business, so enjoy it.

### Suggested Routines for FAST Comprehension

1. **Quickly read** the entire module to get the overview of the situation.
2. **With pen in hand**, re-read for inspired learning.
3. Ask yourself these **two Key Questions**: (take notes in the margins or backs of pages.)
  - What changes should result in you or your business from learning this module? (This is a great time to set some GOALS in writing.)
  - What are you going to do as a result of your learning this module? (In writing, specify measurable actions you are going to take to reach the goals above.)

### For Example:

Teaching someone else is a great motivator. Your **GOAL** might be to teach the essence of this module to another person. Your **action** steps might be:

- Decide **who** to teach
- Decide **when** to teach this person
- **Call** your 'student' to schedule the training
- Prepare to teach:
  - a) Reorganize the material to fit your style
  - b) Rehearse; then rehearse again
  - c) Present to your 'student'

Once you have reached your goals above, plan to reward yourself in some special way. Why not enjoy a special lunch with your 'student' to celebrate?

Congratulations on learning these new skills, tactics and proven strategies. Remind yourself these trainings are putting you in the top 3% of your field — a rare place to be!