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6 KEYS to Strengthening Your
REALTOR® Relationship

Buying or selling a home may be one of the biggest financial decisions you'll ever make. With a REALTOR®, you have a trusted partner to guide you through lending, inspections, negotiations, and other high-stakes steps along the way. REALTORS® are legally and ethically bound to act in your best interests, and strong communication can help you achieve the best possible outcome.



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This Consumer Guide highlights six ways to build trust with your REALTOR® and ensure you're working toward the same goals.

1 Research Their Reputation

- Read recent reviews and look for patterns in how reviews describe the REALTOR®'s communication style, negotiation skills, and results. Ask for referrals from past clients with similar goals.
- Check local expertise. How well do they know your target neighborhood or homes in your price point?
- Do they have any specific professional designations that show expertise relevant to your transaction, such as the Senior Real Estate Specialist® (SRES) Designation, the Military Relocation Professional (MRP) Certification or the Resort and Second-Home Property Specialist (RSPS) Certification?



2 Set Communication Standards

- Agree on how often you'll get updates (weekly, per milestone, etc.).
- Decide on preferred channels. Text, email, phone or in person.
- Set expectations for response times, especially during critical moments.
- Ask who you'll communicate with if your REALTOR® is unavailable.

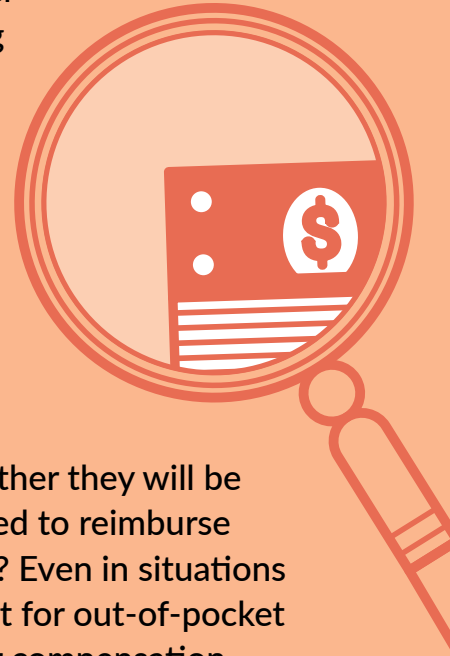


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3 Establish Transparency in Compensation

- When signing your initial Buyer Representation and Broker Compensation Agreement (for buyers) or Residential Listing Agreement (for sellers), make sure you understand exactly how your REALTOR® is paid and which services are included.
- REALTOR® compensation is negotiable; however, REALTORS® are not obligated to agree to work for less than they believe their time and value are worth.
- Ask about which agreements you may be asked to sign later in the process, such as a listing renewal agreement.
- If out-of-pocket upfront costs are necessary, clarify whether they will be paid by you or your REALTOR®. If the latter, are you expected to reimburse your REALTOR® at a later time, such as the close of escrow? Even in situations where a REALTOR® would not typically seek reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, there may be exceptions for certain properties or compensation models, such as flat-fee or hybrid hourly/commission models.
- Make sure all financial expectations are documented in writing to avoid surprises at closing. You can write these in the “Additional Terms” fields of your representation or listing agreements or attach them as addenda or amendments.



4 Discuss Risk Reduction



- Review key contract terms, contingencies, and timelines together.
- Understand how your agent helps protect you during negotiations.
- Ask about common pitfalls — and how to avoid them.
- Make sure you know your options if issues arise during escrow.



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5 Dive into the Data

- Ask what your REALTOR® uses to determine pricing or offer strategy.
- Review comparable sales (“comps”) and local market trends together.
- Understand what’s driving value in your neighborhood and at your price point.
- Use local data sources to guide decisions. News headlines and national averages might not be relevant to your transaction.

6 Use AI Wisely in Your Home Search



- If you use AI tools for initial research, verify insights and accuracy with your REALTOR®. Your REALTOR® has access to up-to-the-minute data and MLS information that is unavailable to AI models or the public.
- Check results against reliable sources. AI tools can make significant errors (in a very confident voice!). Also, they are programmed to tell you what they think you want to hear, not what is in your best interests.
- Be cautious of automated estimates that may miss local nuances.

To learn more about how to maximize your REALTOR® relationship, visit C.A.R.'s *167 Things a REALTOR® Does for Clients*.