

# Ron's Homeowner News™

Courtesy of Ron Mitchell ☞ Macdonald Realty Ltd. ☞ (604) 617-9642

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## How to Negotiate Like a Pro

Whether you realize it or not, you are a negotiator. You negotiate with your spouse over which movie to see, with your three year old over eating broccoli, or with a car dealer over that new car. Unfortunately, most of us never get any real "training" in this important skill, so, in the hope of making your next everyday negotiation easier, I offer you the following tips.

### Prepare, Prepare, Prepare

The old cliché is true: failing to prepare is preparing to fail. The task of preparation is two-fold. First, obtain as much information as possible about the object of your negotiation; what is the cost of similar products or services? What determines the price? Second, make a list of must-haves and like-to-haves. It will serve as your road map in your negotiation. If your initial offer is rejected, what will be your next step? What is your alternative if you cannot reach an agreement at all? What is theirs? It helps to write these things down before you make your first offer.

### What's The Real Motive?

Here is a surprise: it's usually not the money. The salesman may be more interested in reaching his monthly quota than getting a high price for his product. The home seller's primary concern may be a fast sale due to a new job in a different city. People typically spend the most effort on negotiating the price, but spending

some time on discovering the underlying motives of your counterpart is time well spent. You may find that you can satisfy the other person's underlying concerns without sacrificing things that are important to you.

### Back Up Your Offer

You want to avoid having your proposal appear arbitrary. Back it up with facts: how did you come up with your offer? Your research now comes in handy. The more you can show that your proposal is fair, the stronger your position, and ultimately, the better your chances are of getting what you want.

### Let 'em Talk

Once you've presented your offer, pause and let the other party respond. There may be a period of silence in the discussion, and it might even feel uncomfortable. Resist the temptation to continue to explain your position. You may inadvertently give away more information that you should. Allow the other party the time to consider your proposal and give them an opportunity to reply.

### Be Firm and Friendly

Very likely, your first offer will be rejected or countered. If the counter-proposal seems unfair to you, ask the other party to justify it. "Help me see things your  
*(continued, Page 2)*



This month Spring will start, and with it a new real estate selling season. Is a new home in your near future, or are your family and friends talking about buying or selling soon? If so, please give me a call. I will use my knowledge and expertise to make your real estate transaction as smooth as possible, and will do the same for anyone you refer to me. I offer friendly service, a caring attitude, solid advice, and there is never any sales pressure.

### Ron Mitchell

(604) 617-9642 (direct)

(604) 467-3871 (office)

RonMitchell@telus.net

www.ronmitchell.bc.ca



## Three Free Things That Will Make Your House Sell Faster

There are a thousand and one ways to increase a home's appeal. Some are practical, some are not; some are cheap, some are not. Here are the three easiest (and free!) things that will make your home sell faster:

### Sparkle

I show dozens of homes to my buyers every month and I am always disappointed when I come across one that is dirty, messy and cluttered. Oh, how those things decrease appeal. Buyers will assume that if a home is messy, it must also be in poor repair and there must be things unseen that are wrong with it. Needless to say, this will result in longer time on the market, and possibly a lower price. And how easy it would be to make these homes look great with just a little bit of elbow grease. Having a squeaky-clean home (especially the kitchen and bathrooms) is a must if you want a quick sale. Removing clutter and keeping everything orderly and organized is also highly important. Make your home sparkle, and it will sell faster.



it look shiny, big and more appealing to potential buyers.

### Warmth

You've heard this before – people don't look for houses, they look for homes – warm, cozy places they can call their own. How do you make your home feel like home to prospective buyers? One way is to tickle their noses. Well, not literally.

But by making your home smell really inviting you will give it that homey feel people love. The best smell is the smell of clean (and this goes back to the first thing on our list – make it shine).

But you can go a step further. I know sellers who would bake cookies before showings, so the home would smell of fresh cookies. If baking is not your cup of tea, then a scented candle (vanilla, cinnamon or coconut) may do the trick. Having a pleasant (but not overwhelming) scent will give your home an aura of warmth and will put more smiles on buyers' faces.

These were but three easy strategies. For more tips, you know who to call!

### Shine

People love big things. Big cars, Big Macs and big houses. So how do you make your house look big if it isn't (or super-sized if it's already big)? With light! The more light, the better. Before a showing, open all the blinds and raise all the curtains to let in as much natural light as possible. If privacy is a concern, use white curtains that let light in and block the view from prying eyes. Also, turn on all lights and lamps in the home, even in the middle of the day. Bathing your home in light will make

*(continued from Page 1)*

way; how did you arrive at this number for XYZ?" Again, your research will prove invaluable. Insist on some fair, neutral standard on which the price should be based. Be firm, but friendly.

### Don't Marry the Deal

Unless you are negotiating a peace treaty between two warring countries, the thing you are negotiating about is probably not an absolute must-have, no matter how much you would like it to be. Be prepared to walk away. It may make the other party more eager to cooperate. And if it does not work out, it's okay. There is always another day and someone else to make a deal with.

### Buying or Selling Soon?

*One of the best ways to ensure that you win in an important negotiation is to have an expert on your side. If you plan on buying or selling a home soon I stand ready to use my negotiating skills and experience to help you get the best deal possible. Give me a call or drop me an e-mail and let's work together!*

## Free Special Report Available

### The Seven Expensive Mistakes Sellers Frequently Make

is a four-page special report that no seller should be without. If you are thinking of selling a home soon, arm yourself with the knowledge that can help you avoid expensive mistakes too many people have made. Request this report today – there is no cost or obligation.

**(604) 617-9642**

**RonMitchell@telus.net**

# Fresh Herbs From Your Kitchen Garden

Absolutely nothing tastes better than a delicious home-cooked meal prepared with herbs harvested from your very own indoor kitchen garden. You don't have to have a green thumb or an acre of land. All you need are a few carefully prepared containers, a sunny window and the following helpful tips:

## Selecting Herbs

Variety is the spice of life, especially when it comes to choosing which herbs to plant. Start by selecting those you use most when cooking. Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme are always among the top ten. Oregano, marjoram, chives, lavender and mint love the indoors. Unfortunately, old favorites like basil and fennel fare better outside. Make a list of the store-bought herbs you have in the kitchen and then drop by your local garden center where you will find those herbs available in four-inch pots and as seed packets. Always pick out the healthiest-looking (not always the largest) plants. If you opt to start your garden from seed, make sure the packets are not out of date.

## Containers and Soil

Once you've made your selections, the friendly garden center staff will be able to recommend the proper containers and the kind of soil you'll need. Herbs thrive best when allowed to dry out between waterings. This means containers must have good drainage, with a water catch-all underneath and possibly a little gravel packed below the soil line. Choosing just the right soil mix is very important. An overly rich mixture produces lots of foliage, but very little flavor. Two parts potting soil to one part coarse sand or perlite is the magic formula for maximizing each herb's zest.

## Planting

Be sure you plant your annuals and perennials in different containers and

don't forget to separate those aggressive, fast-growing plants from the ones that grow slower and require more time to develop.

## Caring for Your Garden

Your indoor herb garden will thrive in any south or west-facing window which receives at least of six hours of sunlight each day. Lack of sunlight can be supplemented with Gro-lights, if necessary. Herbs require regular watering (usually weekly, sometimes bi-weekly), but don't overdo it. An inexpensive water meter will eliminate the guesswork. To develop and flourish, your garden will also need to be fertilized on a regular basis. Slow-release pellets or fertilizer sticks are an excellent choice. Keep annual herbs indoors all year 'round. Perennials thrive best if you take them outside during the summer. Just be sure their outdoor surroundings are similar to their in-house environment.

## Harvesting

When it comes to harvesting your herbs, you can enjoy them fresh from the plants or you can dry and store them. To encourage new growth, be sure to cut off whole stems, not just leaves, but never remove more than one-third of an entire plant at one time. To dry your herbs, hang them upside down so the oils will flow back from the stems into the leaves. Drying time takes from two to four weeks, depending on weather conditions. Once dry, store them in containers in a cool, dark place. By following these easy tips, you will be able to grow and maintain a bounty of tasty, tantalizing kitchen herbs that will be ready 365 days a year. Bon appetit!



**Q: Can I, as a seller, be present at showings?**

*A: Can you? Yes. Should you? No. Buyers feel more comfortable looking at homes when sellers are not hanging around. They feel more relaxed, can take their time to look around, and feel free to discuss the home amongst themselves and with the agent. Speaking of agents, they are more in tune with what a particular buyer is looking for than the seller is. You may be really proud of your newly remodeled kitchen and feel compelled to focus on that when talking to the buyer, when what the buyer is really impressed about is your home's three-car garage. When a showing is scheduled, hop over to the neighborhood coffee shop for a few minutes and let your agent do the work you've hired him or her to do.*

**Have a tough real estate question you need answered? Just give me a call or send me an e-mail**

**Ron Mitchell**  
 (604) 617-9642  
 RonMitchell@telus.net



**Ron Mitchell**

Macdonald Realty Ltd.  
22718 Lougheed Hwy.  
Maple Ridge, BC V2X 2V6

**REBGV reports increased housing demand in February**

Demand for detached homes continues to be strong across Greater Vancouver, with particularly high sales volumes occurring in Richmond and Vancouver Westside. For the past 2 months, the number of properties listed for sale and those sold on the MLS has outpaced the 10 year average. We saw an increase in demand across our region

last month as more buyers entered into the market in advance of the Spring season. The intensity of the activity varies between communities. To effectively analyze real estate statistics for the purpose of buying or selling a home, it's critical to focus on your neighbourhood of choice because, like we see today, conditions and price can fluctuate within municipalities.

In Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows we saw the average price of a detached home increase from \$457,943 in January to \$469,900 in February and the number of sales increase of 53% from 66 to 106.

Townhouses decreased slightly from \$298,819 average in January to \$294,857 in February with 32 sales compared to 26 in January, a 23% increase in the number of homes sold

Condominium average increased to \$227,800 compared to January's average of \$218,631 with 25 sales in February compared to 10 in January, a whopping 150% increase in the number sold.



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ARCHITECTURE CORNER: FAMOUS HOMES

**MAR-A-LAGO**

Situated in tony Palm Beach, one of the wealthiest communities in the world, is one of the largest private residences in the world – Mar-a-Lago. A true architectural jewel, this property has an interesting history that includes a billionaire heiress, a U.S. president, and a real estate mogul.

Mar-a-Lago was built in 1923 for the cereal heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post and her second husband, Wall Street wizard E.F. Hutton. No luxury was spared for the 110,000-square-foot property. Boatloads of Dorian stone were shipped from Genoa, Italy. Over 36,000 original Spanish tiles were installed, some dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Hispano-Moresque architectural wonder sits on 20 acres of land that front both an ocean and a lake, thus it's name, Mar-a-Lago (Spanish for "from sea to lake"). One hundred twenty-eight rooms, each more beautiful than the next, are designed in different styles, from Venetian to Norwegian, for the ultimate in grandeur and opulence.


After the death of Mrs. Post in 1973, and in accordance with her will, Mar-a-Lago was given to the U.S. government to be used to host presidents and foreign dignitaries. President Nixon stayed there on several occasions. But the government decided that the annual upkeep of one million dollars per year was too much for the taxpayers to bear, so it gave the property back to the Post foundation. The property fell into disrepair.

Enter the real estate billionaire Donald Trump. In 1985 he purchased Mar-a-Lago for a mere eight million dollars, which included all the original furnishings, twenty-seven sets of china and four thousand pieces of silver. After restoring it to its full splendor, he moved into a part of the residence, and turned the other part into an exclusive country club. Memberships are still available. Fee: \$100,000.




*Summer home of Donald Trump and an exclusive country club, Mar-a-Lago was at one time considered to be the world's largest private residence.*

# Steak and Cheese Sandwiches

 PREPARATION TIME  
20 minutes

 COOKING TIME  
10 minutes

 PERFECT PARTNER  
shoestring fries



**SHOPPING LIST**

- beef top round • bell peppers
- provolone cheese
- sandwich rolls

**ON HAND**

- oil • salt • onions



The price difference between top round and less expensive round steak is significant.

Purchase round steak and slice it thinly across the grain to tenderize. No one will notice the difference!

## Steak and Cheese Sandwiches

### INGREDIENTS

- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 onions, sliced into rings
- 2 bell peppers, sliced into rings
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 pound beef top round, sliced into strips
- 4 sandwich rolls, split lengthwise
- 1/2 cup shredded provolone or Swiss cheese

SERVES 4



- Reduce your cleanup time by microwaving the onions and bell peppers. Place in a resealable plastic bag with 1 tablespoon oil and microwave on HIGH for about 4 minutes.

### Make Ahead

You can prepare these special sandwiches, foil-wrapped and ready for baking, up to 2 hours ahead. Refrigerate until ready to cook.

♦ **VARIATION**  
*Monterey Jack cheese with jalapeños makes a delicious, spicy version of this sandwich.*

**1** Preheat oven to 400°F. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat; add onions, peppers and salt. Cook vegetables over medium-high heat until tender, about 10 minutes.



**2** Add beef to skillet. Sauté for 2 minutes for medium-rare. Remove beef and vegetables from skillet with a slotted spoon; drain.

**3** Divide beef and vegetables evenly among sandwich rolls. Top with cheese.



**4** Loosely wrap sandwiches in foil. Bake until cheese melts, about 10 minutes.