



# How to Build a Successful **Real Estate Team**

Agents and brokers share strategies to shape a great team

Whether you are a real estate agent or broker who knows you can grow your business by growing your team, we share some real-world real estate team-building tips and success stories below.

## BROKERAGE TEAMS: Aligning Employees to Your Vision

Building a strong team is critical to the success of any brokerage. Real Estate Broker Aceneth Warner knows what it takes to find, train and retain agents for her successful brokerage A. Warner Homes Real Estate in Tooele, Utah.

### Finding the right team members to compliment your vision

For Warner, the definition of success is all business through referrals. This has been her goal since starting her brokerage in December 2016. She's accomplished this by delivering a very high level of client support, filling the home buying or selling process with the personal touch she believes this important investment requires.

Finding licensed agents who share her passion for her clients and her vision of a high-touch client approach helps the agents and the brokerage succeed, according to Warner.

She learned this the hard way, after having to part ways with one of the first agents she hired just a few months into starting her brokerage.

**"If they don't have that passion to serve the customer like I do, then it's not going to work."**

— Aceneth Warner of A. Warner Homes, Tooele, UT



## **“Outlining your brokerage’s guiding principles sets up expectations for a new team member’s successful transition to your team.”**

— Aceneth Warner, A. Warner Homes, Toole, UT

“What I learned from the process was to identify and address issues right away,” said Warner.

One way she tests whether an agent might fit is when agents call to see if she is taking on new agents. Warner doesn’t say much at first.

“I like to hear about their expectations,” Warner said. “Because that tells me a lot about what they want and what they are expecting and whether that aligns with my approach. If they don’t have that passion to serve the customer like I do, then it’s not going to work.”

“I think it’s important to step back and decide what it is you want to accomplish and be known for from the very beginning. It might take some time, but defining that vision is critical to successful team growth,” Warner said.

Knowing what you want other people to see helps you articulate your vision to prospective team members and provides a performance framework for your agents to follow. This has helped Warner successfully grow her team to include five agents.

### **A team in the office and broader community**

Warner and her five agents are well known in the community for providing regular community service acts and for a high degree of client service and professionalism during every stage of a real estate transaction. Because of this commitment to service, nearly 100 percent of her listings have been via referral since she opened her brokerage in December 2016.

“One of the first things I do is talk to my agents about service; not just helping their clients, but also about helping in the community,” Warner said.

When volunteering on a committee or at an event, Warner and her agents don’t talk about real estate or wear A. Warner Homes t-shirts. But they do share a passion for their clients and their community and that only helps the team dynamic, not to mention the business.

One agent, who is fluent in Spanish, teaches in the community twice a week. Another spends time cleaning a local park.

“When you focus on service, you don’t have to beg for business; it just comes to you,” said Warner.



## Investing in the team

Investing in staff development and training is another way Warner guarantees the team's success. She personally works one-on-one with any agents who join her brokerage for as long as it takes to feel confident the agent is working in a way that aligns with her high-touch client service philosophy. This training includes some educational sessions provided by Warner herself as well as sessions with various business partners like title agents, lenders, and home inspectors.

"I want to make sure that they are really getting it during the training," Warner said. "The house is the most expensive thing the buyer is going to buy, or the seller is going to sell. It's an emotional thing for our clients. I want my agents to see how it is all connected and how much their commitment to service matters."

Warner takes her time with the addition of new staff. She won't add more than one at a time and only considers adding to the team when she knows the newest agent is ready. Warner says she knows when she's hearing accolades from clients and when she sees that A. Warner Homes-level client service in action herself.

"Then I know I can move on and give my 100 percent to another agent," Warner said.

When it comes down to it, Warner says her brokerage's reputation is responsible for its success.

"I believe that when you provide quality and service, your work speaks for itself," she said. "I never have to make calls for new business."

## AGENT TEAMS: Finding the Right Partners and Structure

Many real estate agents face the challenge of balancing the more administrative aspects of the career like managing paperwork, scheduling appointments, and showing properties while simultaneously working to find new business. Just ask Elizabeth Ballis, leader of the Coldwell Banker Ballis Group.

### Hire the right mix of employees

A simple truth led this Chicago-based real estate agent to transition from being an individual agent to heading up her own team.

"You can't be everywhere at the same time," Ballis said.

The team approach has helped Ballis grow her business for the past 25 of the 35 years she has been a real estate agent. Sales more than doubled from \$5 million to \$11 million the year after she hired her first assistant 25 years ago. In the past six years, annual sales have been \$35 million to \$40 million.

According to Ballis, it was too much to try to be the sole person bringing in new business, and the person getting all the work done on the inside, such as managing contracts and setting up appointments.

While her team's dynamics have changed over the years, today's Ballis group includes three additional people: an administrative assistant, her daughter and partner Deborah Ballis Hirt, who is a licensed real estate agent, and a newly licensed agent.

The administrative assistant is an important part of the team. "To keep a well-oiled machine, you need somebody that oils the wheels," Ballis said.

The licensed administrative assistant's responsibilities include scheduling and confirming appointments, developing tour books, managing contracts, preparing transactions for closing, and working with the marketing department to prepare materials.

**Elizabeth Ballis of Coldwell Banker Ballis Group in Chicago, IL, finds adding staff to help with the administrative work most helpful. Her administrative assistant's responsibilities include:**



Scheduling and confirming appointments



Developing tour books



Managing contracts



Preparing transactions for closing



Working with the marketing department to prepare materials

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you need somebody that oils the wheels."**

— Elizabeth Ballis, Coldwell Banker, Ballis Group, Chicago, IL

## **Life partners can make good business partners**

Initially Matt Swanson's partner in real estate was his partner in life, but even the husband and wife duo found benefits in hiring other team members.

While he and Tracie Swanson launched the Swanson Real Estate Team at Keller Williams in Boca Raton, Florida in 2008, the team has grown from only the couple to include a transaction coordinator and virtual assistant.

"Our transaction coordinator gets paid per transaction, and she handles keeping track of all paperwork and making sure timelines in the contracts are followed," Swanson said.

"This frees us up to give our clients a higher level of customer service and communication," he said. "We also have hired a part-time virtual assistant through My Out Desk to help us with pre-contract paperwork, social media and working in our database. By having the VA, we can spend more time interacting with clients, past clients and our sphere of influence and less time on tasks."

Swanson plans to hire a full-time executive administrative assistant, who will take over the VA's and transaction coordinator's responsibilities, as well as handle other duties.

Working as a husband and wife team works well for the couple, but it has its challenges and rewards.

"We have learned to accentuate each other's strengths: Tracie is detail oriented, while I am results oriented," Swanson said.

"The biggest challenge is setting boundaries, so that work doesn't encroach on family time," Matt Swanson said.

"Fortunately for us, we like each other a lot, so we can work together and be a family together, and it works. It is not a good fit for every married couple."

## **Start slowly and divide carefully**

Real estate agents who want to build teams should start slowly, according to Ballis. A good start is with an "inside" assistant, who can keep the business running smoothly while the "rainmaker" is in the field getting business. Even hiring someone a few hours a week to help with marketing and contract management can make a big difference in an agent's ability to make more sales, she said.

"We did try to blend the inside/outside licensed assistant roles but that was not a productive way to work because it was too fragmented," Ballis said. "Having a licensed assistant adds another level of flexibility to work with clients in a pinch, but it adds a bigger expense for the agent."

Ballis uses pay incentives when hiring team members. She said she has always paid her administrative assistants a base salary, with a small bonus from every transaction, which is increased each year.



## Shared approach spells success

Whether yours is a husband and wife team, a family team or a team of unrelated people, it's crucial that members share a common goal, so everyone focuses their energy on the same thing, without going in different directions, according to Swanson.

All Ballis Group, team members meet with each client. That's because clients who hire the group usually hire Elizabeth Ballis and her reputation.

It is important for Ballis Group' to show clients that having another member of the team at a showing or other meeting is on par with having Ballis, herself, in attendance.

That is the Ballis Group's model, but some teams work differently, she said.

"... there are big, very successful REALTORS® who have 10 to 15 people ... but they don't deal with anything day-to-day. They don't do the showings. They do the negotiations," Ballis said.

Ballis said one of the more important things she learned about taking on team members is they should share her style in approaching business and real estate.

"I'm a 24-7 Energizer Bunny personality and having a person who is really laid back and calm doesn't work for me, because I have very high expectations," she said. "Clients are hiring your personality, so I think it is important to find someone that complements your style.

## Education's Role in Building Teams

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