

Ellen James Martin: Make a strategic plan for sale and move

By Ellen James Martin

Smart Moves

Posted: 07/31/2011 12:00:00 AM PDT

After a lengthy period of unemployment, have you finally found a job in another state? Are you thrilled to re-enter the workforce, yet dread the daunting task of preparing your home for sale and moving to the new area?

If so, your first step should be to create a master plan complete with a timeline and a checklist to tackle this huge project, says Dorcas Helfant, a past president of the National Association of Realtors (www.realtor.org).

One key to a successful home sale is to put the pruning of your clutter at the top of your "to do" list.

"Walking into a house filled with clutter has a negative effect on buyers. Seeing all your stuff will mean they can't picture themselves living in your property and many buyers will just walk right out of your place," Helfant says.

Even if homeowners are still occupying their property while it's up for sale, Helfant says it's essential they pare down their possessions, including furniture.

Some unwanted accumulations can be sold, if not at a neighborhood sale then perhaps online. Giveaways donated to charities may yield a tax deduction.

Those who still remain unconvinced that it's worth the bother to dispense with excess belongings before selling may wish to consult a moving company for a preliminary estimate, Helfant says.

"The high cost of moving, including all that transportation and labor, comes as a shock to a lot of people and makes them rethink their plans," she says.

Here are pointers for those planning to cull and pre-pack for a distant move:

- Equip yourself with the right gear for the job.

Vicki Norris, a professional organizer and author of "Restoring Order to Your Home," says an efficient de-cluttering and packing program shouldn't require a lot of expensive equipment.

"Never buy a bunch of those big plastic bins unless you're absolutely sure you'll really use them in your new place. Otherwise they'll simply become a superfluous bother once you reach your destination," Norris says.

In most cases, cardboard boxes should suffice for your move. Ideally, these should be of uniform size, like the "bankers boxes" sold at office supply stores that stack neatly.

After prepacking the items you're determined to take to your next property, place these in your garage or a guest bedroom not currently in use.

Norris urges you to avoid renting a paid storage unit, which can be pricey and easy to forget about.

- Take a room-by-room approach to de-cluttering and packing.

Norris says it's very unnerving to approach your de-cluttering project in an unfocused way, working on several fronts simultaneously. Instead, she advises you to tackle just one room at a time, beginning in the areas of the house that will receive the most scrutiny from prospective homebuyers. These include your entryway, living room, dining room, family room and kitchen.

- Respect your children's feelings when clearing through their toys.

Children feel an understandable sense of alarm at the notion that many of their toys will be packed up and stored away until the move is complete. As Norris says, they need reassurance that their toys will be available to them once your family reaches its destination.

How can you calm your children's fears?

Norris suggests you involve them in the prepacking process, making a game out of choosing a few very special toys that can remain in their room until the move is complete and placing the rest in packing boxes.

"Don't pack their toys behind their back or they could be very upset and freak out," she says.

- Give extra attention to your kitchen.

As real estate agents note, most home shoppers won't routinely look inside a chest of drawers and examine your clothes. But many will open kitchen cabinets and are very critical of countertop clutter.

You won't want to remove basic kitchen items, such as plates and utensils, until right before you move. But you can pack away seasonal- and special-use items, such as turkey pans and souffle cups, Norris says.

- Try to remove unusual items before your property goes on the market.

Many homeowners have things in the house that could hurt their selling prospects because they take the focus away from the property.

"For instance, you wouldn't want controversial political books sitting out on a coffee table or intimate clothing where anyone could see it. Also, you'll want to remove from your place such personal items as a massage table or unusual religious pieces," Norris says.

- Realize that the purging process could prove cathartic once it's done.

Norris says many who complete the purging process discover, much to their surprise, that they feel less encumbered.

"There's something about moving that gives you the feeling of a fresh start," she says.