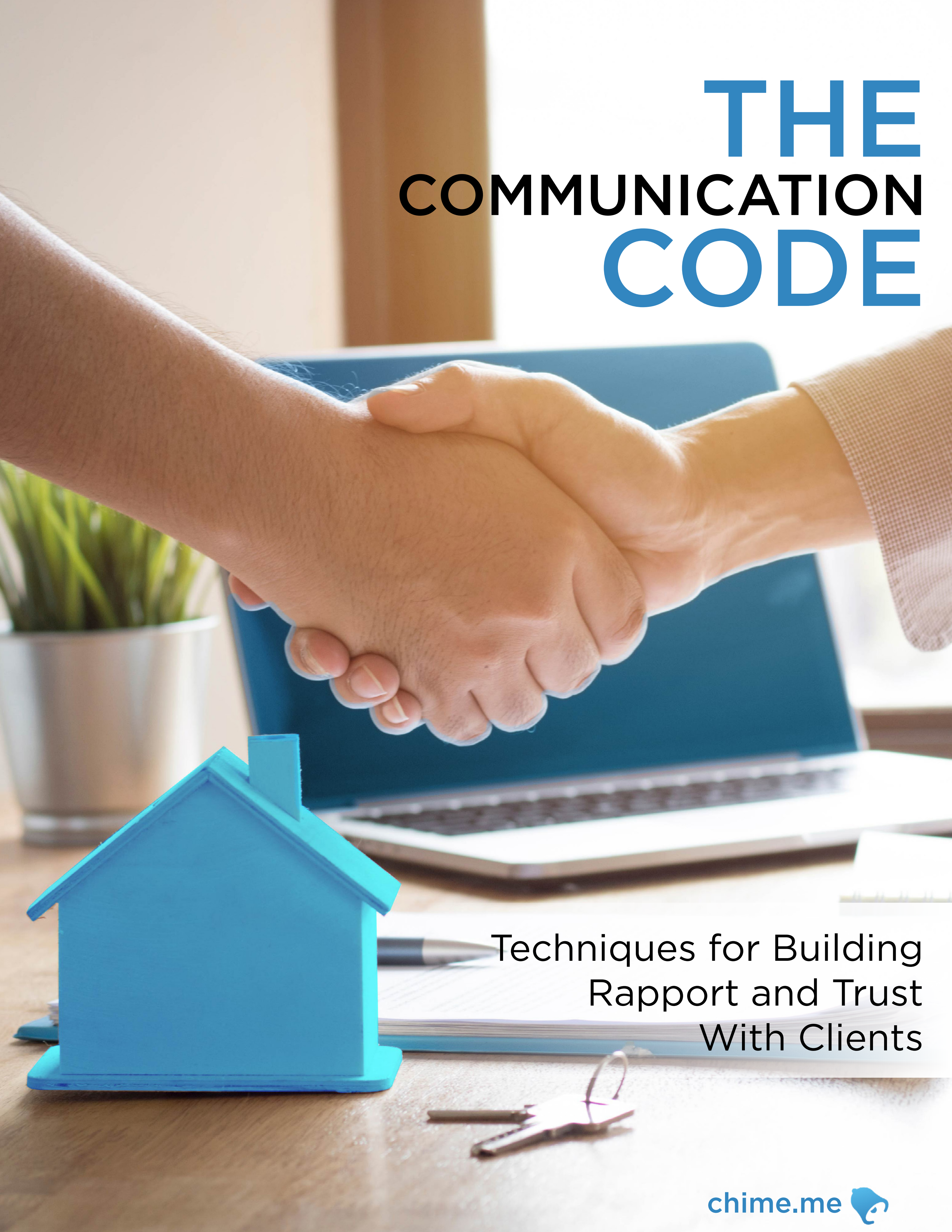

THE COMMUNICATION CODE

Techniques for Building Rapport and Trust With Clients

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DESCRIPTION

You pride yourself on your customer service skills and attention to clients' needs, but do you sometimes struggle with how to handle the emotional rollercoaster that the homebuying process can send your client's on?

We worked with top real estate agent Steve Wener who provided us with an inside look at his most tried and true communication techniques to build rapport and trust with clients, from initial conversation, through closing.

In this E-book you'll learn to:

- Throw out the script in favor of an effective qualifying conversation
- Gain the trust of clients through body language and empathy
- Tips for how to turn "no" into "yes"

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CRACKING THE CODE

WHY COMMUNICATION MATTERS MORE NOW THAN EVER BEFORE

Let's face it, consumers have seemingly endless options when it comes to how they go about their home buying search. With the increased popularity of real estate websites, consumers can search and find their perfect home without having to ever leave their computer, let alone contact a real estate professional.

In fact, a recent National Association of Real Estate survey reported 44 percent of consumers started their home search online, while only 11 percent started by contacting an agent.

Individuals who are looking to sell their home can cut out the real estate professional altogether should they choose to take part in the latest "ibuyer" craze which allows homeowners to sell their homes, sight unseen, to a company that will make them an offer online (sometimes within minutes) based on a property home valuation model.

Competition from technology isn't the only worry for real estate professionals. Human competition is also noteworthy, with more than 2 million active real estate licenses in the US, consumers have the luxury of being extremely particular when it comes to deciding who will help guide them through the complicated process of buying or selling a home.

What does that mean for the agent?

For an agent, that means having to go the extra mile to not only differentiate themselves in their market and better communicate their unique value propositions, but redoubling efforts to provide exceptional customer service to justify their commissions.

It also means being ready with the right response when a potential client comes through the door (or through text message, referral, etc.). Agents need to be well practiced at communicating not only their experience and dedication, but also stress that they will be their client's number one advocate. One of the best ways to do that is through verbal and nonverbal communication.

Everything from the language and tone an agent uses when discussing a client's credit score, to how they showcase their knowledge of the local market through a text exchange, can mean the difference between winning or losing a new client.

Most agents, however, are not taught the fundamentals of interpersonal communication, or how to handle the emotional roller coaster that the home buying transaction can be for some clients.

But a few simple and effective techniques can help agents not only convert clients from the initial client conversation, but help build rapport and manage a client's emotions all the way through the closing transaction.

HELLO, I'M YOUR FUTURE REAL ESTATE AGENT

NAILING THE INITIAL CLIENT CONVERSATION

Whether a prospect walks into an open house, comes by way of an online lead, or through a chance encounter at a local coffee shop, the first impression an agent leaves is crucial.

That's why having a repeatable, reliable and proven strategy to convert new clients is key. And instead of relying on a script that can seem forced, unnatural or dated, remembering a simple acronym can help an agent cover all of the relevant qualifying information to assess a potential client's needs, wants, musts and timeframe.

The acronym is **LPMAMA**

- LOCATION
- PRICE
- MOTIVATION
- AGENT
- MORTGAGE
- APPOINTMENT

Location
The first and most important question to ask a potential client is about location. Where do you want to live? And, don't just let your client's give you one city. It's important to ask follow up questions and find out if there are nearby cities, or specific neighborhoods that the client is amenable to along with the areas that are hard nos.

Price
While price might seem like a touchy subject to bring up too early in the conversation, having a clear understanding of a prospect's financial situation from the onset and being able to hone in on a price range and budget is crucial to setting expectations and providing your potential client with the most useful information for their search.

Motivation
When can your client move and why are they looking to move? Asking about a client's motivation to buy is one of the simplest ways to learn about their unique situation. Is a life event taking place? The birth of a new child, a divorce, a job change? Digging in and learning their reasons will also help you prioritize your time to know if this is a client who is in need of professional help right away, or if this is someone you might want to call on at a later time.

Agent
Throughout the course of a conversation with a prospective buyer you should always be prepared to ask them whether they have and agent they are currently working with or if they have already signed a buyer agent agreement. There is not use wasting your time or their time by finding out they are already engaged with someone else.

Mortgage
Are you paying cash for a home or do you need a mortgage? And, if your prospective client is planning on a mortgage have they been pre-approved? If not, do they need suggestions for professional so they can get started? This question also opens the door for you to serve as a resource for your potential client by recommending a preferred lender.

Appointment
The last and most important step after determining the above is to close the appointment so you can continue to grow the relationship with the client.

While having a qualifying framework can be a gamechanger, the best way to ensure it actually works in the real world is to practice it over and over again until it becomes second nature. Find people you can trust, whether colleagues or friends, and role play like they are the prospective client. As you become more comfortable using the acronym you can also add in additional communication techniques outlined in chapter 4.

LAY OF THE LAND

PROVIDING YOUR CLIENTS WITH A ROADMAP

Once you've secured a new client, the real communication work begins. From the onset it's important to set your client's expectations for the journey that lies ahead.

One of the best ways to do this is to provide your new client with a visual representation of what's to come. Providing a paper flow chart mapping the entire buying process, from pre-qualification, to the MLS search, to contract negotiation, to home inspection, to permits, to HOA docs, to the lending process including; mortgage, escrow, title, and home warranty, to eventually the possession of the home.

Providing a visual overview of the process gets clients into the right mindset for what's to come and also shows the value of having an agent there with them to navigate each step.

But setting expectations is only one part of the equation, perhaps even more important is the agent taking the time to truly connect with their client and understand what they are experiencing during the process. Gaining a better understanding of the client's motivations will make it possible to empathize and sympathize with them throughout the transaction.

Here are a few general techniques to use:

- Understand their personality
- Listen to what their concerns are
- Pay attention to how you are comforting them
- Always use professional conduct
- Ask and re-ask what they are most concerned about through the process

In the event that something unexpected comes up during the process, out-of-line pricing or an unforeseen seller expectation, it's important to be ready to vocalize to your clients that you are willing to walk away from the deal if needed.

Whether it's how to handle the client's annoyance at the lender asking for the same paperwork over and over or having a strategy for dealing with your client's cold feet after an offer is accepted, taking the emotional component out of your dealings with your client and putting yourself in their shoes will be the key to managing a meltdown.

Constant communication and reinforcement of the bigger picture can also help reset emotional clients and better equip them to make it through each of step of the transaction unscathed.

Above all, the job of an agent is to be the calm sounding board that can artfully guide their client through the home-buying process, making it as stress-free as possible.

READING THE SIGNS

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CLIENT'S PERSONALITY TYPE

Taking the time to pay attention and respond to your client's unique personality traits can go a long way when it comes to better communicating and understanding their motivations for buying or selling.

One common personality profile assessment used by real estate agents and their teams is DiSC®.

The assessment involves a series of questions that produce a detailed report about your personality and behavior. While it's not necessary to require each of your clients to take the assessment, it is advantageous for an agent to take it so they can begin to understand their own working styles and better identify and respond to the personality types of their clients.

Those who take the assessment show tendencies in every category, but predominantly are stronger in two of the categories. The letters in DiSC stand for for the following words and attributes.

DOMINANCE

Person places emphasis on accomplishing results, the bottom line, confidence

INFLUENCE

Person places emphasis on influencing or persuading others, openness and relationships

STEADINESS

Person places emphasis on cooperation, sincerity and dependability

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

Person places emphasis on quality, accuracy, expertise and competency

As you go through the list, you probably recognize characteristics of your own personality and most likely that of past and current clients.

But when you start to think of these traits in relation to the journey of a home buying or selling transaction, it becomes more clear how you can better communicate and respond to clients based on their unique behaviors.

For instance, clients who rank high in Dominance are fast and decisive when it comes to making decisions. They are goal oriented and motivated by control. They have high standards and can be impatient and not the best at listening to what you have to say. They can also easily be irritated if they feel like their time is being wasted. For these types of clients it's important to make them feel like they have control of the situation and are continually keeping in touch with them when it comes to the progress of the transaction. You'll need to pick up the pace to keep up with these clients.

Those who rank high in Influence are fast and spontaneous decision makers, which can sometimes lead to changes of heart (consider yourself warned). Influencers are people-first oriented and motivated by praise and encouragement so be sure to keep that in mind when communicating with these clients. They are high energy but don't have much appetite for the nitty gritty so important milestones or deadlines will need to be reiterated to these clients over and over again. Influencers like to be shown the big picture so be sure to keep that roadmap handy at each step of the journey.

Those who rank high in Steadiness work at a slower and more relaxed pace and value relationships above all else. They are good listeners and will appreciate follow through and detailed explanations. They aren't however, great with sudden changes so be sure to prepare them for any rough moments of the transaction that you expect. Under stress they can also become passive or indecisive but as long as a spirit of friendship and cooperation is maintained throughout they will feel connected to both the agent and the process.

Those who rank high in Conscientious are more systematic and careful in how they approach situations. They are task oriented and value accuracy and precision above all else. These are the rule followers who want to make sure you are doing everything by the book. And if it's not, be sure to be ready to hear about it. They can't stand disorganization or informality and can become stubborn when under stress. Be sure you have every i dotted and every t crossed before meetings with this type of client. Providing structure to both your work and conversations will serve you well in this relationship.

Once you understand how you function as an agent, then you can begin to notice the behavioral tendencies of your clients and start making it all about them. All too often agents are too busy selling themselves and in the meantime forget to focus on who is in front of them missing all of the crucial communication clues that can make for a successful long term relationship.

COMMUNICATION SECRETS OF THE EXPERTS

SPOKEN AND UNSPOKEN MESSAGES

Once an agent has a successful framework in place for qualifying new leads, it's an excellent time to start layering in different communication techniques (both spoken and unspoken) that can help build additional trust and rapport with clients. Choosing specific words to use and paying attention to subtle body language cues are interpersonal communication ticks that experts have been using successfully for decades.

Use Empowering Language

What does it mean to use empowering language?

Going the extra step to understand where that person is coming from, what they are going through at the time and being open and vulnerable enough to to connect with them as a human and not a potential paycheck.

So how do you put that into practice?

Here is a great example:

> Say you've just gotten a lead and you are talking to them about whether they have been pre-approved for a loan. The prospective client tells you that they have a credit score of 540, adding, "you probably can't do anything for me and I'm probably just wasting your time."
>
> A standard Realtor response might be something along the lines of, "You're right, it sounds like a waste of time to look at property. Call me when you are ready."
>
> But when you consciously decide to use empowering language and take the time to think about that person as a human, rather than a paycheck, you come to very different response.
>
> The prospective client is clearly down on themselves for having such a low credit score and are more than likely embarrassed that they have to reveal this information to you.
>
> So instead, why not respond using empowering language like, "We'll the only place you can go from 540 is up. So let's get you there."

Not only does this make the person more at ease with you, it also shows them that you are in a position to help.

Continuing to engage and empower the potential client you can add, "You would be open to sharing what happened in the past that brought your credit to 540?"

Offering further assistance you could say, “I work with some of the best credit repair people in the business, if they were able to help you, would you be interested in looking into that?”

Above all, the goal is to show the prospective client that you will support and be there for them for the long haul, which can be expressed by saying, “Your goal is to purchase a home sometime in the future, right? Time is irrelevant for me so I’m here as long as it takes for me to help accomplish your goal.”

Here you’ve gone from writing someone off to empowering them and establishing a connection that will more likely result in you being their first call when they are able to buy a home.

Mirroring and Matching

Along with using empowering language when communicating with clients, there are a number of subtle body language cues that you can use to build rapport and trust with your clients.

Most commonly known in the interpersonal communication field as “Mirroring and Matching Techniques”, these behaviors have been studied since the 1970s and when used correctly, have been shown to help individuals quickly establish rapport and trust.

Mirroring involves mimicking the mannerisms and behaviors of another person, such as nodding your head when the client nods their head. Matching refers to matching a client’s energy level, cadence or tone of voice.

Next time you have a client meeting, test out some of these techniques for yourself and see how they work.

Physiology

Take in the physiological clues that a client shows you with the same weight that you take in their words.

If your client leans forward when engaging with you, also lean forward.

If they speak with their hands, use gestures when you respond.

Keep an eye on their facial expressions, some experts will even go so far as to match a client’s blink rate!

Speaking

How does your client speak? Pay attention to the rate and cadence at which they speak and try to match it when appropriate.

Also take into account the volume of their voice. Are they loud and boisterous or shy and withdrawn? Match their level to make them more comfortable.

Employing slight variations in the pitch of your voice can also help keep a client tuned into what you are saying, particularly if the subject matter is dry.

If you are on the phone where it's hard to gauge the non-verbal clues a client is sending you, adding a smile to your face will automatically brighten your voice and can serve to re-engage them should they seem distant.

Words

Along with pitch, tone and speed, paying attention to the specific words a client uses is a surefire way to build trust quickly.

Note not only the words but the grammar that a client uses and meet them at their level.

You can also reinforce that you are listening to your clients by repeating their phrases back to them.

For example, if I client repeatedly says that "they aren't in a hurry to buy", you can rephrase that as part of your reply. "I understand that you aren't in a hurry to buy right now, but ..."

Respectful use of mirroring and matching can make a client feel more connected and attuned to you. Taking the extra time to notice these subtle markers will also help you more quickly notice if a client has become distracted or disengaged.

HOW TO TURN "NO" INTO A COMMISSION

A "TEXT" BOOK EXAMPLE

A real estate agent's communication abilities are truly put to the test when the primary communication channel is over text message rather than over the phone or in-person. Text messages can be sent rapidly, without assurance of a timely response and for the agent, there is no way to rely on body language to see if a connection is really being made.

But, as San Diego-based real estate agent Steven Wener recently proved, being tactical, thoughtful and continually reiterating your commitment to your clients can help position an agent to successfully convert an online lead through text message.

According to Wener, the key is to express that you are truly in their corner from the get-go and have the courage to say, 'this what I'll do and this is how I'll show up for you.

The following is a real life example of when a lead he was texting began their initial conversation by saying "no" when Wener asked the address of a home he was interested in. After a few days of texts back and forth, Wener was able to win over the client to the point where he was asking Wener if he could make an offer on the property.

Here is how it unfolded:

> After leaving a voice message for the lead, Wener followed up on his property inquiry with a text message. The lead had originally reached out with a specific property in mind but when he texted Wener back he said he'd found a different property that he was interested in as well.

When Wener asked if he would provide the address, the lead said "no".

Rather than being deterred by the client's response, Wener continued to gain his trust by doing due diligence on the original property and staying in touch with updates even when the listing agent for that property wasn't getting back to him, which helped win over the client with the following text response:

> "Thank You!!!!"
> All the while, Wener reaffirmed his expertise in the market with texts like:
> "After 24 years in the business, I'm always pushing to make things happen. As a top producer in the region I never let up."

He also reiterated his commitment to his clients with texts like:

> "As we don't know each other well, it's not possible for you to understand my motivation, but when I'm hired, I work to make things happen and never let up or let off. I will keep pressing the other side which shows you how poorly they are as representatives to the seller."

Eventually the client not only sent over the address of the property he was interested in, but two others he had been looking at as well.

By the third day of communication the client went from being guarded about the properties he was interested in (for fear that Wener would share the addresses with other buyers) to asking if Wener could find out if one of the property's sellers was still entertaining backup offers.

Wener was able to transform an online lead into a client by artfully guiding the text conversation and eventually landing a 5-figure commission.

Next time you are texting with a lead keep these tips in mind:

1. **Don't recoil if someone is direct**
2. **Take emotion out of the equation and don't allow yourself to be passive aggressive**
3. **Kill them with kindness**
4. **Show them your expertise and willingness to go above and beyond**

CONCLUSION

Cracking the communication code and building trust and rapport with clients is a process that takes practice, patience and the investment of time, but if done right can yield huge dividends in the form of lifelong clientele and referrals.

Above all, it's important to go into every encounter with a client with the mindset of putting yourself in their shoes and doing the best you can to communicate understanding and empathy of their situation. At the end of the day an agent's job is to serve as the advocate and sounding board for their client, taking their personal emotions out of the equation. Setting expectations early, giving clients a roadmap of what lies ahead and understanding their unique perspective can help ensure a smooth journey from lead to close.