

It's a group effort at IRG, and the Golden Rule

Bruce Simmons

Huntingburg Press

DALE: "I could do as good a job as they did."

After selling two houses and buying three, Monica Leitch evaluated the experiences, and the realtors she dealt with.

Sounding a bit like Goldilocks tasting bowls of porridge, Leitch dealt with a variety of professionals, but the upshot was that she could not only match them, but beat them.

It's simple, really. Be honest. Be accessible. Build a relationship with your client. Those were the things Leitch was looking for, and what she delivers now, as a realtor.

Moving to Huntingburg only a few years ago, coming from Wisconsin, by way of Minnesota and Terre Haute, following her husband in his education and career.

Leitch worked for an agency in Jasper for a few years, but left when one of their principal realtors decided to build their own business.

It was a decision that wasn't hard to make, and she hasn't regretted making it. Indiana Realty Group is a going concern, and "it really is a group," she said.

"We work together in a small

office. But everybody knows everybody else's listings, and we all work to get properties sold, not just our own."

It sounds ideal, and Leitch is very satisfied that IRG's way of doing business is the right way. She thought it would be, and that's a big reason it was an easy decision to go with Kim Esarey, who left an agency in Jasper to set up in Dale, and one she hasn't regretted, not in the entire six weeks they have been in existence.

"It's a close working environment, but we keep it loose, and helpful, and mentoring," she said.

The other agents live in Tell City and Santa Claus, and there's another Huntingburger in the office, too. They tend to concentrate on that part of southern Indiana, but they're not exclusive.

On location or on price. The average cost of a property sold through IRG is around \$45,000. That means there are some that go for as low as \$18,000, and some that cost a pretty penny, such as a property in French Lick that ran over \$400,000.

But each customer gets the same treatment, said Leitch, and that means working for them until they're satisfied.

Which means that the agent is satisfied, too.

Leitch recalls working with a couple for over five months, and looking at 75 houses, before they finally found the one just right for them.

That was her most satisfying experience in buying a house ... and the properties examined were all around \$40,000, the couple's target price.

That's a lot of work, a lot of time invested in one sale. But that's how it is at IRG, she said. "We want your business for life."

Leitch was a stay-at-home mom before getting into realty. She talked it over with her family, particularly her two kids, before beginning a series of classes that added on to her business degree by garnering a realtor's license, then a broker's license, and then certification as an E-Pro, which means she's mastered the technology required for selling on the Internet.

Sounds simple, maybe, but there were only three E-Pros in Jasper, and now there are two,

since Leitch has moved out.

Her kids, now 16 and 17, sometimes go with her when she inspects a new property.

"They're brutal," she said, laughing. "But they have a good eye, and I listen to them."

Listening is something crucial when selling a house, she said. Her specialty is first-timers, and many agents don't like to deal with them, as there are so many questions. Leitch is patient, maybe from being a mother, and answers questions, no matter how many there are.

But listening can go both ways and sometimes doesn't, as when a seller is disappointed by what the realtor says their property is worth.

Of course the seller wants as much money as possible, and it wasn't so long ago that it seemed no matter what you paid for a house, you could turn around and sell it for considerably more.

That memory haunts sellers today, and sometimes interferes with their understanding of the realities of the current market.

"The realtor is not emotionally attached to the property," said Leitch, "and what they tell someone is the truth. They don't have

any reason to undervalue a property, but people sometimes don't want to believe them."

As for the market, of which we hear so much every day, Leitch says it has of course affected them, but not so much as you might expect.

"It is a buyer's market, and someone looking for a first home has an excellent chance to find what they want."

As for selling, she advises waiting. In the long run, everything will come full circle, she says. After all, it's your home, and if you're not planning on moving any time soon, why worry over dropping prices? Everything will balance out, eventually.

But if you have to sell, be prepared to settle for less than you'd like. If getting out from under a property is your goal, keep that in mind, not that you're missing out on money you'd hoped for.

She knows the psychology of the seller and the buyer, having been both. And that brings her back to how she conducts business. Be honest; be accessible; and embrace the relationship, as she said.

There are another couple of

practical "commandments," Leitch believes in advertising and advertising must have photos.

"Every time I see an ad that doesn't have a photo, I wonder 'What's wrong with it, that they don't show me what it looks like?'"

An ideal ad, then, would show both exterior and interior, because if there's no shot of the inside, she's off and wondering about what's wrong with it.

And avoid an adjustable rate mortgage. She wags her head at having to even say it.

Any last piece of advice for a would-be buyer?

Make a list of what you want in a house, she said. Have that list ready for when you talk to a realtor. It saves your time and theirs. It sounds simple, like so much of what she's talked about, but there's a world of ins and outs to master in order for things to go as well as you want them to as you navigate what can be treacherous waters.

Monica Leitch has studied hard to learn those ins and outs, and stands ready to steer a client to safe harbor.

Estimated... You are invited to attend