

## Survival of the fittest?

Charles Darwin once wrote "It is not the strongest or most intelligent that survive, but the most responsive to change." I wonder sometimes if "survival of the fittest" has become a misunderstood standard in our world. Does it really apply to human beings anymore, or has the growth and support of the society around us removed men and women from the standard that only the "fittest" survive?

It's an interesting question, and one made more pertinent by the challenging economy in which we live. As a broker for a large company it is my job to create an environment where all of my agents can thrive and succeed. This office culture is very much like an ecosystem. As your 2008 president my job, along with all of those at MAR and in the local leadership throughout the state, is to create an environment that is responsive to the needs of its members, and resistant to attacks from the outside.

So, let's bring Darwin in here. To me, his statement means that one does not have to be the "strongest or most intelligent" REALTOR® to survive, but that survival, or how "fit" you are is dictated by how able you are to adapt to your environment. That sounds very hopeful and positive to me. It puts the responsibilities on us to recognize what we need to do in any environment, but we must pay even closer attention in a changing market.

On an agent level it is of the utmost importance to understand the local market around you. Did you practice this way before when the market was hot? Maybe, Maybe not. Perhaps the phone rang so much and you were so beloved in your hometown that you could afford to simply be organized, smiling and efficient and hit your goals every year. Times have changed. Market times are double and triple what they were in the not so distant past. Your clients require longer term and more systematized communication. As a broker the most common complaint I hear from sellers is lack of communication or slow return of phone calls from agents. As an agent in the field, every expired listing I pick up has the same common thread. The understanding that our clients have all the access to information that we once held is a change you must come to terms with. What clients lack is the professional lens with which to see it. You had better make sure that you are the one providing that perspective, or someone else will.

This broad brush stroke of consumer perception that, "the market is slow" just doesn't cut it. Are listings slow? Are buyers looking but not buying? If a customer asks you

how you feel about the housing market do you understand it well enough to answer?

I'll give you an example. At the time I am writing this article, in my local market area homes between \$150,000 and \$175,000 are showing an inventory supply level of 8.5 months. In the same market area homes priced between \$350,000 and \$400,000 have a supply of inventory of 28 months. Now how do I answer the question, "How's the market?" I answer it by asking which market they are in, then I work on changing their feelings with information.

What would Darwin's model tell us is necessary? If we were animals and our environment changed we would adjust or die. We would have to learn new places to find shelter. We would

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have to think "where is the food?" when the places that we always looked for food were barren. If you worked in my market, and were given the information above, what would you do? Waiting for the phone to ring is akin to going back to the same barren place and wondering where the food is.

Creating a marketing plan which targets neighborhoods or expired listings between \$150,000 to 175,000 would be what I call "Fishing where the fish are." Which strategy do you think has the best chance to feed you? Which strategy would the "fittest" do to survive?

When you take Darwin's observations and keep them entirely within the realm of evolution, they have a harsh and merciless quality to them. I began this article by asking if "survival of the fittest" was a standard which applies to human beings. On a standard of "Live or die!" I believe we have evolved beyond that. However, when you take Darwin's theories and apply them to business, let alone such an entrepreneurial profession as real estate, they have a wonderfully empowering element of free will to them.

Gandhi was quoted as having said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

It's a new year, and the future is not yet written. Understand the world you live in, your home, your family, your business life . . .

Understand that the world is what we make it, and Be that change. **MAR**

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