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BROKER'S VIEW

At work, staying positive aids productivity during the pandemic

"I find that sticking to a routine provides comfort and a sense of being in control, especially when we have lost control over so much."

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BY TERE SHELTON BERNACE
Special to the Herald

After getting over the initial shock and fear of the COVID-19 pandemic and imminent "shelter in place" measures, I knew that an important objective for our independent real estate office was to stay positive and productive.

I recognized that this was going to be a fluid situation with an uncertain duration (likely to get worse before it got better), that my tactics would have to meet the evolving challenges, and that everyone — clients, associates, staff — would be taking their emotional cues from me. My first priority was ensuring the safety of my adult children who live in New York City, and once they were settled into our home here in Miami, I was able to focus completely on our employees. Out of an abundance of caution, we made the tough decision to send all staff home, with continued full pay and benefits. Fortunately, my home and our remote office systems have accommodated these changes almost seamlessly.

SPREADING ENCOURAGEMENT

Once it became clear that our people were safe and that we could continue to function, I moved on to staying positive, trying to keep those around me positive, and moving my business forward in new ways. At the start of this shelter in place cycle, I began the daily practice of posting "Daily Words of Encouragement and Silver Linings" on our social media platforms and via email to our mailing list. Creating this content — more than 40 posts at the time of this writing — has kept me thinking positively, and shared that positivity to our sphere.

Some of my favorite messages, accompanied by complimentary graphic design and imaging, have been: "The next hug and kiss will be better than the last," "Never underestimate the power of nice," "Get up, get dressed, stick to your new routine and tackle your to-do list,"and other encouraging ideas.

We put serious thought into the tone and attitude of the messages, making sure to anchor the cheeriness with reality and common sense. As the situation became more prolonged and the anxiety seemed to grow, they have become more forward-focused: "Time to recharge and gain momentum to bounce back," "Shake it up, add something new to your routine," and "Even in the midst of the unimaginable, six weeks have not been wasted. Six weeks have opened our eyes, our minds and our hearts."

We have also adapted our marketing efforts to the new scenario, always searching for the right balance between promoting our business, communicating that we are available to our clients, and being sensitive to the situation and the hardships burdening so many people. We also published an open letter in print and social media emphasizing the resilience of our city, our real estate industry and our firm. The letter ended on this positive note: "We are optimistic. Our bounce-back, that of all of us, will be one for the books."

CONNECTING INSIDE AND OUT

Those first two or three weeks were very slow in terms of work as we and our clients came to grips with our new reality. It was important for me to stay engaged and productive. Internally, my staff and I established new remote procedures, participated in weekly training and webinars, and encouraged associates to take this time to improve their skills and broaden their knowledge.

But the single most important practice for me has been to personally call associates, colleagues, and our past and present clients, for no other reason than to just check in, connect, and see how everyone was getting along. (I made a point to not discuss business on these daily calls.) No matter how busy or stressed or distracted I may be on a particular day, I am committed to checking off every name on that day's call list.

Of course, the new circumstances have resulted in other "to-do" lists around the house/office/gym. These calls and added tasks have quickly became part of a schedule centered around work, exercise, family, and socially distanced time with friends. I find that sticking to a routine provides comfort and a sense of being in control, especially when we have lost control over so much. Continuing to get up early, dressing for work, and eating as I would under normal conditions have been incredibly stabilizing, as have energetic walks (sans cell phone) to clear my mind, put things in perspective, and develop new ideas.

Like you, I do sometimes worry about the future of my children, our population, the market, and my business. However, this choice of conveying optimism has proven to be a successful strategy at home, in business, and beyond. There are still many unknowns, but our words and our attitude always play a large role in shaping our future.

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