



Diary of a Real Estate Agent
Jon Citizen

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Diary of a Real Estate Agent

Day 1.

So here I am at the beginning of a new life. A life in real estate. Who'd have thought. It's the first day at TAFE in the compulsory real estate registration course. That's right - to work in real estate these days you need to do a minimum qualification at TAFE. No more cowboys in THIS industry. Noooooo siree.

The lecturer, herself a licensed real estate agent and until recently working in the industry, asks everyone to introduce themselves. Around the round table we go.

"Hi I'm Linda. I work at reception in a local real estate office. They want me to handle some of the rentals, so I have to do the registration course."

Hmmm. I didn't know that. Even the office workers need to do some study. Maybe it IS becoming a cleaner industry.

"Hi, I'm Rob. I work in the building industry. I know a bit about houses, buildings, construction & renos, and now I want to get into property sales."

Impressive Rob.

"Hello everyone. I'm Janet. I'm the new General Manager of the 5 star resort at the south end of the beach. It's part of my contract to complete the full licence."

Good for you Janet. Now it's my turn. It looks like the real estate industry truly is ready for some new blood; some new ideas; maybe even a sense of humour.

"Hi, I'm Jon." Good so far. "I've just spent over two decades working in advertising so I'm used to lying for a living. I thought real estate was the obvious next move".

... .. stoney silence.

... ..

"Thanks Jon.
and you Janita? ... "

Two weeks later I'm a fully fledged graduate of the real estate registration course. And that entitles me to well nothing really. But, some paperwork and five weeks later, I get a notification from the Department of Fair Trading that I am indeed registered. Now the irony is they've done a complete check on me & I've come up gleaming. No, that's not quite what I meant to say. The real irony is that every member of the real estate industry has undergone such a check & there are no criminal backgrounds lurking. See! It's a reformed industry. No crooks allowed. Immediately I go to the Office of Fair Trading website and search for my details. Sure enough, there I am, along with a big red disclaimer: "DO NOT DEAL WITH THIS PERSON. THIS PERSON IS CURRENTLY NOT EMPLOYED". Jeez, that's a bit harsh. You see, the certificate only allows someone to work under the guidance of a fully licensed agent. Now I know what you're thinking ... under the guidance of a professional and experienced cheat and liar ... but the world has moved on. In 2001, our wise political fathers passed a new all-encompassing real property act that has really cleaned things up and I have every expectation that honesty is now possible, even commended within the real estate sector.

In any case I guess the next step is to put that registration certificate to good use and go to the coal-face of the real estate industry - the suburban real estate office. Okay. Deep breath. Can't put it off any longer. Yep, this is the right time and the right place for me. Let's do it. Go.

Day 1. The REAL Day 1. The last day 1 was just a red herring day 1. This one is the ACTUAL Day 1.

The setting:

Suburban real estate office called "The Truth, the Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth Real Estate", but let's just call it "Truth Real Estate". (I'm pretty sure no-one's going to sue me over that one).

The cast:

Me - Jon Citizen. (Not my real name, but could well be the person whose credit card details are shown on bank commercials). Me. The newcomer. Sales Consultant. Sounds pretty good huh? After a quarter of a century of working in my own business as an advertising man, I'm having that mid-life sea change. Aged 50 plus (that 'plus' is actually more of a negative than a positive) I'm heading off to a brave new world.

I guess I should be thinking about retiring but my better half and I entered into parenthood much later than most - but still sooner than we expected. Life is full of those little surprises. So, with kids being kids and living at home until they're well into their twenties and thirties, I'll be working well into my nineties, so what better way than in the vibrant, ageless world of real estate. That's me. Jon.

Bruce - The principal of Truth Real Estate and recent friend who has given me the opportunity to shine in residential property sales. He's overcommitted and hugely time poor, but at the same time overly optimistic, relentlessly energetic and talks with great authority about all things real estate at a hundred miles an hour. I'm exhausted just thinking about it. Bruce came to real estate just a few years ago after a wide and varied working life. He did quite well quite quickly and decided to put his commissions into his own agency instead of his boss's pocket, and fair enough too. You've got to love Bruce. He's got a unique theory on how time works: "I'll probably be 20 minutes late tomorrow. I've just got to pop in to my brother's place and help him drop a new motor into the Vee Dub then take Aunty Merle to the hospital, but on the way I just have to ... ". Good on you Bruce. Consequently, he lives in a constant whirlwind of chaos, and, like a faithful dog, that storm goes everywhere with him. He's mid-forties and is the mainstay for his kids, after the wife took off with a much younger, wait for it ... real estate agent. The Real Estate Act of 2001 doesn't cover that one. So Bruce runs a family-comes-first shop. If you have to have to pick up the kids - no problem. I you have to go to a school event - no problem. How perfect is this? The ideal place to start in real estate. He's even casual about the dress code and prefers casual trousers and a polo shirt. No pressed shirt and tie. Although the leather slip-ons turn out to be a bit of an omen.

Trudy - Office manager, secretary and experienced support staff. Perhaps a little jaded by the industry. Capable. Efficient. Emotional. A mum. Trudy is the backbone of Truth Real Estate. She's dedicated to Bruce because of his ethics, honesty, and integrity (comparatively speaking) as well as his family situation. She knows he's a bit of a lunatic but has developed successful weapons for dealing with his permanent state of chaos. The shoulder shrug, the exasperated sigh, the roll of the eyes.

Julia - Also known as "Jules", but Bruce would spell it 'Jewels'. "She's bloody precious that Jewels. If you could sell property from a cafe she'd be a millionaire!" Fully Licensed agent. (Not just a certificate holder like me, Julia has done the whole year of TAFE training - real estate law, trust accounting, the exams, the whole bit. See! It's now a profession). Originally from England. Relatively new to the game. Posh. Slick. Unrealistic. Hasn't sold a thing in her first 12 months. Arrives at nine-thirty, leaves at two. Also a mum. But I think her hours are tailored more to the social life than the kids.

Debbie - Fully licensed agent. Experienced. Tough. Ex-hairdresser (so obviously has all of the answers to the hard questions). Like me, on the wrong side of fifty. Mutton dressed up as ... mutton really. You'll usually find Debbie pacing around outside with a coffee in one hand, cigarette in the other, and the mobile phone tucked under her chin. The bright red hair and the slightly too-short leopard skin dress complete the picture: long term professional Real Estate Agent of the female variety. There's always a deal going on and a million bucks just around the corner. Now close your eyes and just listen to the smooth husky voice. When you open your eyes you're probably reaching for your cheque book. Scary.

So ...

Here I am, but what do I do? I know for a fact that Bruce is always as busy as hell so I guess I observe and learn. Bruce bursts through the door. The pace is immediately hectic. Frenetic in fact.

"Okay Jon. The Petersens were in on Friday and they want to sell their starter property in Elizabeth Drive, so knock out a CMA with Trudy. I've got an appointment at number 740 The Lakes, 2 inspections at Aqua View, plus the new stationery to pick up and some wood stakes for the signs. Can you recharge the drill battery for me and drop the "just listed" flyers all along Harris Street. Did I tell you I sold Federal Crescent on Friday? ('hello' 'hello' ... stupid phone) And I took two new listings! Trudy, can you enter those details onto the ReNet site & show Jon how to do that please. It's pretty easy. You'll get the hang of that, no problem. Oh ... and the sales advice and the current stock files ... Trudy can show you all of that now as well. Okay, I'll be back in an hour and fifteen so I'll meet you at the Petersen's place at ten fifteen. Righto. Bugger, I'm running behind. See you later. If I'm a bit late, start without me Jon."

Start what without you? I was totally lost after the “Okay Jon” bit. Don’t panic. Do not panic.

Trudy gives me an all-knowing look & shrugs. “Welcome to real estate”.

Oh yes.

I’d arrived in this brave new world with a brave new philosophy. Having run a successful business in an extremely competitive industry for 20 years I was well aware of the

importance of having a market edge - a point of difference. There’s no point being yet another same-as real estate agent. I’d given it a lot of thought and I had the answers.

A show of hands: Who can pick a real estate agent from a mile off? Exactly. So I decided what the world needed now, as well as Love Sweet Love, was a real estate agent who looked like a normal everyday person in the street. This was a beachside community where everyone wore casual beach wear. Shorts, thongs and a T-shirt. Nice. But don’t worry, I dressed it up a bit with my best shorts, brand-new brand-name joggers and a pressed casual shirt. Smart. Along with this I would take my man-in-the-street speak. Yes. I would call a house a house or home, rather than a property, stock, or listing. A homeowner would be a homeowner, rather than a prospect, a buyer, a seller, or a plonker. Honesty with approachability. Armed with these impressive but unique tools, I was ready for the world and no doubt the world was ready for me.

I was ready to meet Bruce at the Petersen’s.

Ten fifteen came and went. I wish I’d gone with it. No Bruce. I paced up and down for a while knowing that “fashionably late” didn’t apply here. Good on you Bruce. It’s all well and good to have my market edge, but it’d be handy if I knew even a little bit about an appraisal inspection. Was I supposed have a clipboard in my hand? A canny eye for detail? An educated nod and reassuring “mmmmm”? Am I supposed to offer up a few gems like... “you’ve done a beautiful job of the mixed hardwood floors and the Earthstone tiles Geoff. And that’s a perfect choice of frieze on the tiling Nikki.” What if the Petersens were expecting an on-the-spot value of their house? I was out of my depth and gulping down water, which was reappearing in vast quantities on my brow. The deep

end indeed. I was expecting to be the down-to-earth sidekick to the voice of experience. The Dynamic Duo of property sales. It was not to be.

So far it'd been a career of deep breaths, so one more and knock on the door.

"G'day Jon, great to meet you. Come on in". What Luck! Geoff Petersen is dressed just like me (but not quite so sharp) and he's about the same age with similar interests. He and Nikki used to live just near me in Sydney and we got on like a house on fire. As opposed to a listing on fire, or stock on fire, or a prospect on fire. We exchanged a few stories and tips on pets, moving house, music and culture, while managing to avoid religion and politics. I had a good look around, handed over the relevant current market info (that Trudy prepared while I looked on in bewilderment) and we said our goodbyes like long lost friends. Perfect. Couldn't have gone better. Still, bit of a pity Bruce didn't turn up, but I think I covered it all pretty well. Especially for a first-day first-timer. The world is ready for me, and I'm ready for the world.

So you can imagine my surprise when Bruce read the email to me a mere one hour later.

"Dear Bruce, Nicky and I are thoroughly disgusted by your unprofessional attitude to the market appraisal of our property. Firstly, we are JEFF and NICKY, NOT "Geoff" and "Nikki" as written on the cover page of your appraisal document. Secondly, your sales consultant, Jon, turned up in shorts and joggers and proceeded to chat about topics unrelated to the sale of our home. In my entire life, I've never met an agent who wears shorts and joggers. There's no way we could allow someone dressed in this manner to present our property for sale. Finally, the report you compiled contained far more information than we required. In conclusion, we will be proceeding to sale with another agent, who incidentally valued our property at considerably more than you did! J. Petersen."

God. Oh God ... what if I'm wrong? What if the world isn't ready for a new style of agent? But I'd done the research! Every single friend and acquaintance had told me they'd really love to deal with a real estate agent who was just like a normal person. Not so in-your-face. Not so full of themselves. Not so over the top. Not so cliched. Apparently not so. Although maybe Jeff and Nicky were just an aberration. If I'd been wearing a watch I would have looked at it to see how much longer the day would last. Not even lunch time. I'll go for a walk and do the letterbox drops.

At least I'm dressed for that. Letterbox drops. Don't they just annoy people? I know any time I get a leaflet from an agent, apart from having a chuckle at the photo of the beaming face, I just chuck it in the bin & hope they don't waste my letterbox space in the future. A hat and sunnies should compliment my ensemble beautifully.

"Jon luv, I wonder if you wouldn't mind dropping these brochures into the post box while you're out on your walkies. Thanks Poppet. And you should definitely change your mobile to my network so that we can all talk for free. Bruce has taken my advice and the darling has never looked back. I don't suppose you could do my open home on Saturday - It would be wonderful experience for you". I'm not sure when Jewels turned up, but here was the chance to have someone else do her bidding. Princess Jewels.

Precious. She'd told me that she was a 'prestige property specialist'. Beachfront penthouses, villas and the over million dollar homes ... of which there were two in our area. Her desk was strictly designer. Everything matched. Or is it coordinated? But then, my shoes complimented each other perfectly, so I knew where she was coming from.

The Sun was beating down and I welcomed the chance to hustle some letter boxes. As I left the office, Debbie was outside smooth-talking through her smoke haze, pacing like caged leopard, and dressed a bit like one as well: "Jane, an open listing is okay for some, but darl, you deserve better. Now you and I know that the house next door sold for four-fifty, and the one across the road, sold for four-fifty three, and the one behind sold for four-fifty as well, but yours has got something special. What you've done with it is quite remarkable. It's really got a vibe about it. Look, if I can't get five twenty-five for it, you can keep my commission ... ". Now THAT line I must remember! If I can't sell your home, you can keep my commission, which is zero. Poetry. Real estate poetry, and every man's a poet. Sadly, I don't even seem to be able to rhyme.

I arrived back at the office hot and sweaty and perhaps looking not quite as glamorous as earlier. Bruce was in the midst of a power meeting with what I instantly recognised as another agent:

"Jon, this is Jill. Jill's a good friend of mine who works at the real estate office down the road. She's one of the good guys.

Jill, this is Jon's first day. Any advice?"

Jill's a tough, chunky little bulldog with a good grasp of colloquial Australian. Dressed to sell in permanent press slacks and a tailored top with the company logo emblazoned across the front pocket, Jill is every bit the real estate professional. She leans forward for effect. This is going to be important. She almost raises one eyebrow, points a stubby finger at me and looks down the barrel as she delivers the gem:

I've just got one piece of advice for you.

Play it straight, and never ever lie.

Trust me on that one mate.

You lie and it'll catch up with you."

Bruce nods the nod of the knowing. "There you go Jon. Some good advice for you. Thanks Jill."

Lunchtime. I made it. Got to get out for a few minutes to clear the head.

I arrive back and there's a full-on sales meeting raging in the staff amenities area (kitchen). Bruce is in the midst of an exasperated tale of real estate woe.

"... so that bloody Jill, pardon the French but I'm really ropeable, back-doors me on that listing that I'd told her about in strictest confidence. Walks out of here less than an hour ago, marches right up to the client's front door and steals the listing from under my nose, then has the gall to look me in the eye over the phone and tell me she plays tennis with the owner - who I happen to know died last year at the ripe old age of ninety-two".

I resisted the urge to follow-up being back-doored via the front door, but I needed to clarify one thing: "So Bruce, is this the same Jill who put her fat little fingers on a stack of bibles and urged me to, ' Play it straight, and never ever lie'?"

"Jon, the longer I work in this industry the more surprised I am by the depths that these agents will sink to." A couple of weeks later Bruce asked Jill if she'd like to join him at Truth Real Estate. One of the good guys.

Stop the diary right there. I need to explain a few things. I know I'm only up to early afternoon of day 1, but every now and then I have to fill in a few details of how the real estate industry really works. It's the only way I can justify the pain. Some good has to come of all of this. So ...

CMA. Current Market Appraisal. This isn't "The Sound Of Music" so we won't start at the very beginning (tra la la la) . We'll just cover things

ad-hoc as they come up. There's nothing like an orderly mind, but I'm afraid my mind is nothing like orderly. Have you ever had an agent offer you an "appraisal", a "valuation", a "market estimate"? You know - the never ending stream of flyers in the letter box: "We're in your area this week and we can now make this one-time sensational offer of a free market appraisal of your property. A current market valuation absolutely obligation free. Our team of expert consultants ... blah blah ... ". Well it ain't no science I'm afraid. They just log in to an agent subscriber website, type in your address & get all recent sales, from say the last six months, within a kilometre radius (for example). Bingo. Up pops all of the relevant sales info along with photos, descriptions, details, sales history, area demographics and all kinds of statistics. Very impressive stuff. The agents then re-package this with their own branding to make it look like they've really put in the hours. So anyone can knock out a CMA given an hour or two. Even an inexperienced sales consultant. Although it takes me a bit longer.

The site is Real Property Data www.rpdata.net.au and I must say that it's a totally mind-blowing site. You have to be a real estate agent to be able to join (plus part with considerable subscriber fees) but once in, you can find all sorts of things about any property. For instance, how is it that agents can send a letter addressed specifically to you? How do they know your name and where you live? RP Data. They know when you bought your home and how much you paid for it. They know your property's complete history of ownership and pricing, as well as how many bedrooms, living areas, bathrooms, along with a series of photos. RP Data. Oh yes. Pretty soon they'll have CCTV mounted in each of our rooms to update the pics and the virtual tours: Uh-oh. Mrs Williams has just changed the curtains and trim in her bedroom. Auto-update the site & email the database.

Now I should just mention that on top of recently joining this fabled profession, my better half and I were in the process of selling our home and buying another, so our exposure to agents was at an all-time high - unlike our regard for the said real estate professionals. And this, dear friends, is how I learned about "Conjuncting". I know it sounds a bit like an eye disease, but in reality it's a greed disease. And this is how it happens:

You walk into a real estate office and alert a sales person to your slight interest in buying in the area. "Hi ... we're interested in looking at homes in this area ... just starting the ball rolling ... not in a hurry ...".

The agent hears this as “Hi, we’re red hot buyers. Do NOT let us leave this place without a firm commitment. Make us your eternal friends so that we’ll trust you implicitly and won’t ever want to deal with another agent - who, incidentally, shouldn’t be trusted in any shape or form.”

You also mention that you’d need to sell your existing home, so it’s not like you’ve got cash on the spot. The agent hears this as “You’re such a great guy we’d also like you to sell our existing property and make an extra big fat commission on that as well, while at the same time controlling the whole deal exclusively.

So far so typical. You describe your needs - four bedroom, two bathroom, quiet street and so on. The agent then proceeds to show you loads of totally inappropriate properties that clearly don’t fit the brief and you begin to think that he didn’t listen. While that’s probably true, the real reason is that he currently doesn’t have a listing that suits, but can’t bare to let you go to another agent.

You say “What about that lovely big house at the top of Ridge street?” “Ah yes ... that’s actually listed with Future Realty, but I can get you into that one tomorrow. Don’t worry about a thing. I’ll organise it all for you. Just a word of warning on those blokes at Future: Now I don’t normally like to criticise the other agents around here, but those guys are currently under investigation by the Department of Fair Trading. A bit on the dodgy side. Yeah, apparently the licensee sold a property for a couple of pensioners; turns out it went for well under market value ... to his brother. Can’t abide that sort of thing. Gives the whole game a bad name. I reckon if you don’t play it straight, it’ll catch up to you.” The recurring theme. “So listen, don’t worry about a thing, I’ll sort it out for you”.

Congratulations. You are now conjuncting. That means instead of dealing with one agent, you’re dealing with two. Fabulous. And this is how it works: You mention something about the property of interest to your agent, he / she passes on that comment, with small adjustments, to the vendor’s (sellers’) agent, who in turn passes it on, with small adjustments, to the vendors. The vendors then respond to that via their agent, he / she passes it back along the line, with small adjustments to your agent who in turn relays that message, with small adjustments ... to you. Plenty of room for creative licence and multiple versions of the truth. So that’s the position we were currently in with our buying and selling with our lovely conjuncting agent, Mark. But more on that later.

Bruce launches through the door.

“Okay Jon, I’ve got some hot leads for you to follow-up on. All of these people on my buyers list have been looking for private acreage just out of town and the Richards’ place would be perfect. Give them all a quick call to let them know it’s on the market - but they better move quick. How’d you go with those “open for inspection” signs?

Trudy did you get Saturday’s ads into the local paper? Oh God I’ve got to pick up the kids. And Jon, here’s some new “meet the team” brochures for you. Where’s Jewels? Is anyone else’s phone getting reception? Don’t tell me she’s having a coffee meeting again. And Jon ... Roger Williams in particular - he’s a HOT buyer. Call him first. Did I tell you I just sold Mountain Drive? Got the asking price. Can’t do better than that. I’ve just got to duck out for a pest and building, but I’ll be back to do that listings caravan before you take off for the day. Jeez, I’m smoking a packet of cigarettes every time I walk past Debbie at the doorstep. Does she swear a bit much or is it just me?” Fade to black with ‘Hello hello? ... Can you hear me now? ... How about now?’

I really must listen to the bit after “Okay Jon”. So far it’s just not sinking in.

I opened the Richards file, brought up the property on our website, got all of the info and did the homework. This, my friend, is any easy one. We’ve got the right property AND we’ve matched it to the perfect buyer. Bring it on.

“Hello Roger, this is Jon from Truth Real Estate. I work with Bruce. I believe you’re interested in private acreage just out of town. Well as it turns out we’ve just listed a fantastic Spanish Villa on five acres just off Hillcrest Avenue.”

“Not the least bit interested. Goodbye.” Click.

Note to self: “Hot Buyer” = someone who turned up at an open home or was browsing the real estate window and happened to mention something along the lines of “I wouldn’t mind something like this myself sometime”.

The smoke haze and the husky voice drifts through the open door on the lazy warm spring breeze. Jewels’ vacant desk is once again a testament to lifestyle. Trudy’s fingers are a blur of speed typing, punctuated with occasional sighs. Bruce is out and about, probably in three places at once. Truth Real Estate is humming and all is well with the world.

Thank God for the “meet the team” brochures. The ever present letter-box drops. With their help I limped through to the end of the day, as well as making the acquaintance of many a grumpy dog. Day 1. Jeez. This is the learning curve that everyone talks about. No problem. No problem at all. I’m pretty sure the tough bit’s over and from here it’s all downhill. Okay then. Let the good times roll coz I’m primed and ready. Let’s GOoOOoo!

And the sun sets at the end of a very long day 1.

Day 2.

There was no Day 2.



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