

Professional Standards Update—NAR Case Interpretation: Listing Property at Excessive Price

Mr. A was about to retire and move to a warmer climate, and had discussed the sale of his house with a number of brokers. He dropped in on REALTOR® B to discuss the matter and said that various brokers had told him he should expect to sell the property at from \$150,000 to \$158,000. “Oh, that sounds low to me,” said REALTOR® B, “property moves well in that neighborhood and I recall that your house is in good shape and well landscaped. Give us an exclusive on it at \$168,000 and we’ll make a strong effort to get you what your property is really worth.” REALTOR® B got the listing.

He advertised the property, held it open on weekends, had many inquiries about it, and showed numerous prospective buyers through it for a few weeks, but received no offers. When activity slowed, and the client became concerned, REALTOR® B was reassuring. “We’ll just keep plugging till the right buyer comes along,” he said. When the 90-day exclusive expired, REALTOR® B asked for a renewal. He told the client that new houses coming on the market were adversely affecting the market on resales of existing houses, and recommended lowering the price to \$158,900. Client A ruefully agreed, but the lowered price did not materially increase buyer interest in the property. As the term of the 90-day extension of the listing neared, REALTOR® B brought Client A an offer of \$150,000 and strongly recommended that it be accepted. But the client objected. “You told me it was worth about \$168,000 and sooner or later the right buyer would pay that price. Meanwhile similar houses in the neighborhood have been selling within 30 to 60 days at around \$156,000.”

“I know,” REALTOR® B said, “but six months ago we had a stronger market and were at the most favorable time of the year and \$168,000 was not an out-of-line price at that time. But now we’re in the slow time of the year and the market is off. All things considered, I think the \$150,000 offer in hand is a good one. I doubt that a better one will come along.”

Client A accepted the offer and complained against REALTOR® B to the local Board of REALTORS®, charging REALTOR® B with misinforming him as to fair market value apparently as a means of obtaining the listing of his property.

At the hearing, the facts as set out above were not disputed. Questioning developed the additional fact that at the time of the original listing REALTOR® B had not gone through the house to make a systematic appraisal of opinion of value, and that his recommended offering price was not based on a systematic review of sales in the neighborhood. Members of the Hearing Panel pointed out that the neighborhood in question was a development of houses, basically the same in size and quality, that had been put on the market about 10 years earlier at prices varying from \$145,000 to \$150,000; that good location and land development practices had maintained a good market for resales, but there was no indication that any property in the immediate neighborhood had been resold for as high as \$160,000. When told that circumstances tended to bear out the complainant’s charge that REALTOR® B’s recommended price was a stratagem to obtain the listing, REALTOR® B’s defense was that he felt he had a right to take an optimistic view of the market.

It was concluded that REALTOR® B was in violation of Article 1 of the Code of Ethics.