

SUNDAY, March 29, 2020

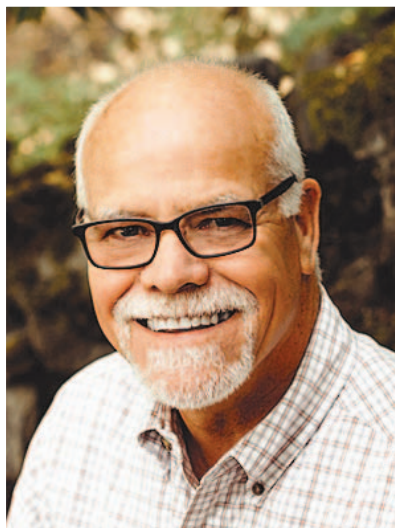
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2020 President
Spokane Association of REALTORS®

GUEST COLUMN

by Tom Clark,
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OPINION

A funny thing happened on the way to the office, this past week.

Even that seems funny to say, right now, because my office – perhaps like yours – is my dining room table. My stocking foot-commute takes fewer than 30-seconds. My coffee is just as I like it. My dining table works for now. These are the simple pleasures I enjoy in my office at home.

Here's the funny thing – for all the convenience and time-saving that technology and virtual presence have brought to our lives, the thing I missed most when I didn't have it any more, this past week, was human contact and the experience of living life in person.

I took so many things at work for granted before: the simple pleasure of seeing a client's wide smile, the simple pleasure of feeling a client's firm handshake, the simple pleasure of smelling fresh-made chocolate chip cookies at an open house - all, for the time being, gone.

At the time the governor's "Stay Home, Stay Well" order took effect at midnight Wednesday, some 17,500 housing transactions in Washington State were left in limbo. We expect those will be resolved in time, but each one represents increased anxiety for someone or some family in this time of COVID-19.

This past week, I interviewed Dr. Bob Lutz, the chief medical officer at the Spokane Regional Health District. I asked him, on behalf of our 2,300 Spokane Association of REALTORS® members, when we might expect a return to some normalcy in our businesses and everyday lives.

Dr. Lutz is the guy who looks at data from around the world, the successes and failures that are happening elsewhere on the globe, and considers it all in making his best decisions for our public health in Spokane. I like the guy; I trust the guy. When he tells me

we likely won't be out of this in two weeks – that two months are more likely – I believe him.

"I am encouraging people to prepare for the long haul," Dr. Lutz said. "For me, the long haul is 60-90 days of life not as we know it. Just doing things differently and adapting. We have to be resilient. Life has to go on. It's just going to be life different."

Dr. Lutz hopes he's wrong. I do too. But that's the reality that we must keep in the back of our minds.

That's two to three months in the workplace at home; of two to three months of close, personal contact with technology instead of people. I try to make an extra effort in this time to celebrate the small things with clients, the simple pleasures that continue to provide us with common ground. Offering coffee cards instead of coffee; cookie cards instead of cookies.

But it's not the same.

Clients, too, are saying it's not the same without the human piece.

As closely as a REALTOR® will typically work with a client, we often become friends for life. With all of the digital ways sellers and their brokers can market a property for sale, today, 91% of sellers still said a real estate agent or broker helped them when selling their home.

87% of buyers purchased their home through a real estate agent or broker—a share that has steadily increased from 69% in 2001.

78% of home buyers surveyed by the National Association of REALTORS® in its most recent Community Preference Survey responded that neighborhood quality is more important than the size of the home.

Again, it's less about the house and more about the people in and around it.

I've learned some new phrases in recent days; guessing you have, too. Words like "social distancing," flattening the curve," and

"toilet paper hoarder." I've also seen incredible resilience in our small business community with deep respect and admiration for the corporate citizenship in companies like the Donut Parade, Dry Fly Distilling, and The Spokesman-Review (COVID-19 reporting) all giving their products away because this is more a time for our humanity to shine, less our technology.

Speaking of humanity, if you are one of our neighbors who continues to work in a necessary industry – especially in uniformed service, medical service, and transportation service, **thank you for all you do** to keep the rest of us safe, healthy, and supplied. You are admired and appreciated beyond words! I pray for your safety every day until you're home with your families again.

I set out to write this column about real estate. It turned out to be a column about people, instead. That's the point, isn't it? Real estate is about people, not screen time. Every business is about people, about humanity, about living life in person and respecting one another.

When you think you're all alone, staying at home to protect 500,000 people in Spokane County, let me suggest you turn that around and look at it another way. 500,000 people in Spokane County are staying home to protect you and those you love. That's powerful.

I'll gladly stay home for that. I know you will, too.

Someday soon, we'll meet again in person – see that smile, shake that hand, and smell those cookies.

Soon. Very soon.

