

The National Association of Realtors® , “The Voice for Real Estate,” is America’s largest trade association, representing more than 1.3 million members involved in all aspects of the residential and commercial real estate industries.

**Remarks by Dick Gaylord
2008 NAR President
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Introduction

Good afternoon! It’s always exciting for me to visit REALTORS® here in Michigan. You contribute so much to our national efforts, and you have a great tradition of leadership and community service.

Today, I want to spend some time on two important topics:

- First, I want to talk a little about leadership.
- Second, I want to give you an update on NAR’s goals in 2008, and how you can help your members use the resources we offer to achieve them all.

Why Lead?

Let me start by asking you a question: Why did you decide to take on a leadership role? Does anybody want to share their answer?

Those are all good answers, and very similar to my own reasons for serving this organization. Like many of you, I have enjoyed a wonderful career, where I have been able to help so many young men and women buy their first homes. For me, nothing compares to that feeling.

I also feel that the REALTOR® organization has been very good to me and helped me succeed in my career. I benefited greatly from those who served before me – at the local, state and national levels.

Now, I want to give something back to the up and coming generation of REALTORS® and to the business that has given me so much.

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That’s why I am here today. Now, more than ever, we need strong leaders to help guide Realtors through a unique and challenging environment. Whether you are an AE, a newly elected leader, or a veteran, what you do this year will help shape our entire industry and this organization for many years to come.

Your national leadership is here to help you. Today, I am going to share with you some of the lessons I have learned over the years that have made me a better leader and can help you in the year ahead.

Leaders Have Vision

First, I have learned how important it is to have a clear vision. In the words of Henry Kissinger: “The task of the leader is to get people from where they are to where they have not been.”

I have had the opportunity to participate in the strategic planning process at every level of this organization. That experience has taught me how to work with others and it has given me an excellent perspective on what it will take for our members to be successful in the future.

How many of you have read NAR’s 2008 Strategic Plan? Can anyone tell me what NAR’s vision is?

Let me tell you: “NAR is the Voice for Real Estate, influencing and shaping the industry.”

It’s a simple but important statement. Knowing our vision and understanding what it means is important because it is the driving force behind all that we do on behalf of our members.

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The vision is explained and highlighted in the new version of the Strategic Plan, which reflects significant input from members, just like you. If you don’t have a copy already – go to Realtor.org and type the keywords “strategic plan.”

I ask every leader – new or veteran – to read the strategic plan and keep it close at hand in the year ahead. Think carefully about what NAR’s vision and our strategic goals mean to your association. Then develop a plan for your association that reflects our common vision and goals – and can help our members get where they want to be.

Communication

The second lesson I learned from my participation in leadership is how to be a good communicator. It’s not enough for us to understand our vision and goals – our members have to understand them, too.

Consider this short story:

A construction worker approached the reception desk in a doctor’s office. The receptionist asked him why he was there. “I have shingles,” he said. She took down his name and address, and asked him to have a seat.

Fifteen minutes later a nurse came out and asked him what he had. “Shingles,” he replied. She asked him a few more questions and told him to wait in the examination room.

A half-hour later, another nurse came in and asked why he was there. “I have shingles,” he replied again. She took his blood pressure and asked him to wait for the doctor.

Almost an hour later, the doctor came in and asked him what he had. He said, “Shingles.”

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The doctor said, “Where?”

He said, “Outside in my truck. Where do you want them?”

The moral of the story is: make sure people understand what you are doing and what you need from them.

For those of you in a new leadership role – don’t be afraid to get out there and talk to members. It can be intimidating, but the more you do it, the better you will be. And, if you are an association executive, make sure you explain how your association goals will help your members succeed.

I also encourage everyone to solicit feedback from members on your communications. For example, when I speak I always ask someone in the audience to critique me.

Anyone have any thoughts so far?

You see, even after 30 years of public speaking, I still learn something new – about the audience and how to make my points more compelling. Thank you!

Listen

Of course, communication is a two-way street, which brings me to the third lesson I have learned – how to LISTEN.

When I began in this business, I had just left the University where I had been teaching real estate courses. I thought I was a hotshot – only to realize I didn’t put one sale together my entire first year in the business. I was too busy talking and not listening.

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I may have been communicating clearly, but I didn’t have a clue what my clients wanted. When I began listening 95 percent of the time and talking 5 percent of the time, I began doing lots of business.

How many of you take time during your day to walk around your office and just listen to what other people are talking about?

Since I have been involved in leadership, I have had the opportunity to hear a lot from members from all backgrounds and experience levels. But I also make it a point to go around and seek out new voices who may not be inclined to voice their opinions.

When you seek out junior voices, two things generally become apparent: how much those members have to say and how important it is. I encourage all of you to take time every day to listen to what members are saying, and to seek out new voices in your association.

Again, if you are a new leader, don’t be shy – we want to hear your perspective.

Get More Members Involved

The next lesson I want to share really gets to the heart of our theme for the year: We absolutely must find a spot for everyone who wants to be involved in the association.

When I was elected President of the Long Beach District Board of Realtors in 1987, my mother said: “Dick, when you began in this organization, you sat in the back of the room. Your presidency is going to go fast, and then you are going to be back in the back of the room. So, do a great job and include everyone – everyone in the organization is an equal member!”

My mother was always right.

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Every member of this association has something important to contribute. Today’s beginners are tomorrow leaders. We need to encourage more members to participate in every manner possible. So, if a member or staff person in your area expresses even the slightest interest in contributing to the organization, I ask you to help them apply their ideas and talents; find a place for them, so that they can be more involved.

Dealing with Change

The final leadership lesson I want to share with you is about change.

John F. Kennedy said, “Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or the present are certain to miss the future.”

From home sales to technology, it seems like everything in the real estate business is constantly changing. And for members like me who have been in this business for a long time, it can be hard to accept that we have to do things differently.

When I first joined NAR’s leadership team, they gave me a blackberry. I really did not want to use it. But when I finally tried it, I quickly realized how much easier it was to communicate. I have been hooked ever since.

In my experience, often the most difficult part of embracing change is taking the first step. As leaders, we need to embrace change and set the example for our members – we have to take the first step.

Change in our business and our industry is likely to continue – at a faster pace and over the long term. If we do not help our members meet it head-on, we will all be left behind.

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NAR Update

Having a clear vision, communicating, listening, getting more members involved and driving change – these are the skills that we all need to focus on, as we lead our members and our organization in 2008.

So, what exactly are we leading REALTORS® toward?

As I mentioned earlier, the 2008 Strategic Plan provides a common vision for our organization. It also outlines several strategic objectives that are critical to our members’ success.

In 2008, I am asking all REALTORS® to focus on three of these objectives:

- First, we must strengthen our relationship with consumers;
- Second, we must be the most comprehensive source for real estate information;
- And, third, we must enhance the professionalism of all Realtors.

I believe our work in these areas will ensure that our members succeed in a more competitive and challenging market, like we are seeing today. Let me take just a few minutes to explain how NAR is helping you and your members achieve these goals.

Strengthening Relationships with Consumers

First, we are giving you some new resources to help you reach out to consumers in your local market and explain why real estate is the best way to build wealth.

We are implementing a “surround-sound” strategy that will help us generate positive news stories about opportunities in the real estate market. This strategy is aimed at bringing homebuyers who are currently on the fence back into the housing market.

In just a few weeks, we will be sending a toolkit to all state and local associations.

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These kits will contain messages for specific markets, letters to the editor and tips on how to pitch stories to the local media and reach out to community organizations. They also will include NAR research and news releases that highlight positive trends consumers may not be aware of.

I know here in Michigan, the market has been pretty tough. For example, here in Grand Rapids, we know that prices have been declining in recent quarters. But, what consumers and many REALTORS® may not know is that many homes are now under-priced.

That’s right, according to NAR’s Chief Economist Lawrence Yun, with continued job growth, prices are expected to increase again soon. That means NOW is a great time for someone to buy a home here in Grand Rapids and build wealth.

Use this information and other resources provided in the toolkits – which also will be available online – to explain what is really happening in the market. The more consumers we can reach with our message, the more successful our members will be.

Another great resource that you can use to help your members reach consumers is NAR’s popular Public Awareness Campaign – now in its eleventh year. This year’s campaign features new national radio and television spots. The campaign has always focused on the value of hiring a REALTOR®, but this year our ads also emphasize the value of becoming a homeowner.

The 2008 ads will counter some of the recent negative national media reports by highlighting the facts about housing as a primary way families can build wealth. As always, we will provide materials that you can use to tailor the ads for your local real estate markets.

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This year’s campaign also will direct consumers to a new Web site –

www.HousingMarketFacts.com. This site provides more information about the benefits and value of owning a home, identifies important public policy issues and includes direct links to different sections of Realtor.com.

Again, I encourage you to use these tools and talk to consumers about all that we do for them. For more information, just visit www.realtor.org/awarenesscampaign.

Comprehensive Information

Our second strategic goal is to be the most comprehensive source of real estate information.

We all know that consumers want more information about their real estate markets and various properties. This is one of the main reasons Internet property searches are so popular today. But consumers also tell us that they need this information presented in a way that is most helpful to them.

As someone once said, “Information is a source of learning. But unless it is organized, processed, and available to the right people in a format for decision making, it is a burden, not a benefit.”

I already mentioned some of the great resources that NAR’s Research department provides to help Realtors reach out to consumers here in Michigan and explain what is happening in the market. But did you know that you can find more information on your region and metro area online at www.realtor.org/marketreports? That’s right – the insights I shared about sales and prices in Grand Rapids is available to Realtors free of charge.

NAR Research also offers a broad range of research studies and reports that can help members provide better information and service to consumers in the transaction.

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How many of you have seen NAR’s latest homebuyer and seller survey?

This survey is one of the best ways for agents to find out what today’s buyers and sellers are looking for and what they expect from a Realtor.

For example, the reports shows that homebuyers are younger, and they are using the Internet more than ever. There also are more first-time buyers. Not surprisingly, the report also shows that both buyers and sellers prefer working with an agent who can help guide them through the transaction.

Our cost versus value survey also provides information on what home improvements will help increase the value of their home. That’s great information for homeowners who may be looking to sell a home in the current market.

These are just two resources members can use to provide more information to consumers and win business in a competitive market. To access all of our reports, all you have to do is visit realtor.org/research.

Enhance Professionalism

Our third goal is to enhance the professionalism of REALTORS®.

Now, every single member of this organization contributes to our professional reputation – by upholding a strict Code of Ethics. The Code is the foundation for our association and our business success. It is what separates us from other practitioners.

We need your help to ensure all members here in Michigan get the training they need to adhere to the high standards of practice outlined in our Code of Ethics.

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We also need you to help your members get education and training in other key areas of the business.

Back in 1978, I heard a gentleman named John Lumblow, who owned the Lumblow Real Estate Schools, speak to a group of REALTORS®. He said, “Ten years from now, the people who will survive in this business are those who continue their education and those who provide a level of service like has never been provided before.”

I believe that statement was true then, and it’s even more relevant today. Recent innovations in the real estate industry – technology, the vast array of lending products, new business models, shifts in demographics and local market changes – have made it almost impossible to stay ahead of the competition.

In this ever-changing environment, education and training is no longer just a “nice-to-have.” It is a MUST for anyone who wants to succeed in real estate today and stay in this business for the long term.

NAR offers more than 20 designations and a broad range of other professional development resources through our affiliates. You can get more information on all of these resources by visiting the Education Page at Realtor.org.

Another way we can all enhance our reputation as the leading advocate for consumers in the real estate transaction is through political advocacy.

NAR made tremendous strides on the public policy front last year, passing legislation that will help our members and the consumers and communities we serve.

As you know, we achieved a major victory for consumers caught in costly mortgages, when President Bush signed the Mortgage Cancellation Tax Relief Act in December.

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Your Senator, Debbie Stabenow, was the lead sponsor of this bill in the Senate. Her support is a credit to your successful advocacy here in Michigan. Keep up the great work!

Thanks to your continued support of RPAC and grassroots, NAR also is helping to make affordable financing available to potential buyers through landmark FHA Reform. We expect this bill will go to conference early this year.

President Bush recently signed a bill that continues the Terrorism Risk Insurance Program for seven years.

And, for the first time ever, Congress also passed a two-year moratorium on banks entering the real estate business, which will take effect early next year. We also have record support for a permanent ban through the Community Choice in Real Estate Act.

Thanks to our efforts in 2007, REALTORS® are in a prime position to succeed on many other key priorities in 2008, including GSE Reform, Flood Insurance Reform, Natural Disaster Reform, Affordable Housing Trust Fund and Mortgage Reform. And, once again, our success depends on all of our members.

Laws and policies impact every aspect of the real estate business. If you aren’t involved in politics, chances are you will be out of business.

In 2008, the RPAC fundraising goal is \$10 million. That’s a lofty goal, and we can not simply rely on those who have given before. We need to work “All Together” to get each and every member to do his or her part – whether it’s \$10, \$50, \$100 or more.

If you haven’t donated yet, please do so early. And talk to your members about the important of participating in our advocacy efforts – through both RPAC and grassroots.

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Explain to them how our legislative success impacts their bottom line and their reputation as the voice for consumers in the transaction. If they understand how they benefit, they will participate.

Building relationships with consumers, being the most comprehensive resource for real estate information, and enhancing the professionalism of all REALTORS® – this is our focus for 2008. And there is only one way to do it – “All Together.”

Second Century Initiatives

But what happens to the organization after 2008? How do we prepare our members to succeed for the long-term?

Just as NAR is helping you face current challenges, we also are working to give our members a competitive edge well into the next century.

As you know, this past May, NAR’s Board of Directors approved funding for 13 bold initiatives that will help us achieve our goals over the long-term. We are calling them the Second Century Initiatives, and in 2008, NAR will focus on four of them.

First, NAR will seek to build a direct relationship with the consumer.

Consumers share our interests – in the transaction and on key public policy issues. Imagine the difference we could make, if the Voice for Real Estate spoke for 10 million consumers – in addition to our nearly 1.4 million members.

As part of our enhanced outreach, NAR also will improve REALTOR.com.

Second, NAR will create a new technology venture that will give us a seat at the table in Silicon Valley.

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There is more capital flowing into technology today than before the dot-com boom. We need to work with investors to create technology that benefits our industry and is owned by our members.

Third, we will work to create a National Real Estate Gateway. The Gateway will include information about every parcel of property in the U.S. This is now NOT a matter of “how” but “when.” Others are already working on it, but we will be the best because we have more than 1.3 million experts “on the ground” in every neighborhood in America.

Finally, after close to two years of study, member survey, and due diligence, NAR’s Board of Directors voted to submit a plan to charter a new REALTORS® Federal Credit Union and provide initial funding. This credit union will be a fully independent, credit union member-owned legal entity. Its groundbreaking, internet delivery system will offer 24/7/365 access, and it is being designed to meet the unique personal and business financial services needs of REALTORS® and their families.

Rest assured, we have spoken directly with members of Congress, and this initiative will not impact our efforts to keep banks out of the real estate business. In fact, nearly every government agency, as well as the U.S. Congress, has a credit union. This is simply another member benefit.

We will keep you posted on all of these initiatives in the months ahead, and don’t forget to check Realtor.org for the latest news and information on all of our great resources.

A Legacy of Success

Clearly, we have a lot on our agenda in 2008. For many organizations, goals this big would seem impossible. Yet, I am confident that REALTORS® will achieve them all – no matter what happens in the market – because we already have proven what we can do when we work “All Together.”

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Since NAR was founded in 1908, the National Association of REALTORS® and its members have influenced nearly every aspect of the real estate industry and our profession.

It is REALTORS® who have made ethical conduct a staple of our business by adopting and enforcing a strict Code of Ethics. In doing so, we have helped protect millions of consumers from unfair business practices.

It is REALTORS® who have promoted the sharing of property information among practitioners and created a Multiple Listing Service that both protects consumer privacy and makes the transaction more efficient.

It is REALTORS® who have helped raise the homeownership rate to nearly 70 percent, by advocating for laws and policies that protect private property rights and make housing more affordable and accessible.

It is REALTORS®, who have expanded our knowledge and innovated, decade after decade, to ensure we always provide the best information and service to every consumer we serve.

And, yes, it is REALTORS® who have promoted competition in the market by encouraging new business models and by keeping large banks out of real estate.

Together, REALTORS® have shaped an uncommon team of America’s best and brightest entrepreneurs – many of whom are right here in your association.

Thanks to members, like you, REALTORS® stand for more than we ever have before. We build communities, we make homeownership possible, and we drive one of the most powerful industries in the world.

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Conclusion

NAR will mark our Centennial this May at the MidYear Legislative Meetings in Washington, D.C. I hope you all will join us, as we celebrate 100 years of contributions to our nation and kick off a new century of success.

Until then, I ask you to look beyond the headlines, and stay positive. Remind your members of all that we have accomplished together, and assure them that we have what it takes to succeed in any market, if we work hard and stay focused. Last, but not least, encourage them to play an active part in shaping our next 100 years.

Each and every person here today has the ability to be a great leader. And, if we work “All Together” there is no goal we can’t accomplish – in 2008 and beyond.

Thank you!