



Closing with Style

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Often the closing is seen as merely a technicality involving just paperwork and signatures rather than an opportunity to reinforce your home buyers' loyalty to your company. While the appointment usually takes only about an hour, investing in preparation and planning for it can generate dividends beyond the exchange of funds for keys.

Begin at the Beginning

Outline steps to possession from the start, including the amount of advanced notice for the meetings that need to take place. Typically these include an orientation, a confirmation tour, and the closing appointment. Ensure that your customers understand how and when keys will be delivered and that they can store belongings in their new home only after closing and key delivery.

Embrace “Complete and Clean”

Numerous systems exist for finishing a home for delivery. Among these are the superintendent's punch list, quality assurance inspection (in-house or third party), an inspection by a warranty rep, or a blitz by a specialized prep team. Any of these can work; all of them can fail. The difference is not the method so much as the *commitment* to finish the home. This, after all, is what builders get paid for.

If you find that you fall short on this critical aspect of the new home process, make a choice to change. Examine items noted on orientation lists and sort them into categories, looking for recurring issues. One by one, eliminate or reduce those issues. Some builders do deliver homes without lengthy lists (anything over 10 items), so we know it can be done. You reach this rewarding goal by deciding to conquer this challenge.

By the Way ...

Provide reminders to your buyers no less than two weeks prior to the anticipated closing. These would include utility transfer details, homeowner insurance, last minute mortgage details, when final figures will be available, and the form of payment that will be needed.

Make certain they know where the closing will take place. Particularly folks moving into town from another city will appreciate some direction—or even a clear map.

Educate

The main focus of an effective homeowner orientation is education. How do the home's features work? What maintenance is needed? How does one keep the cosmetic surfaces looking good? What should the buyers expect long term?

The traditional inspection, which results in an often nit-picky list, often transpires because the home is incomplete: paint touch up has not been done, sometimes cleaning is still needed. And soiled windows make any home look unfinished. Home buyers will not listen to educational repartee when they are noticing item after item. Avoid this agony by presenting a home that is move-in ready at orientation.

Inspection should be incidental to education. Speaking of inspection—don't. Inspection is the builder's job; at the orientation, the home buyer should *confirm* the good quality, correct installations, and acceptable condition of cosmetic surfaces.

Celebrate

Add an element or two of showmanship. This could be refreshments or a move-in gift—something that shows thoughtfulness. One company, delivering a home to a recently widowed woman who was very attached to a small dog, brought her to tears when they gave her a dog tag with the dog's name and her new address. For just a few dollars, they created a story she repeated for months.

Move like You've Got a Purpose

List in hand—hopefully a short one—begin immediately to address noted action items. The quicker you communicate with trades and skilled personnel the more likely you can clean up those few last minute details before possession. Document each company or person you contact.

Most superintendents get this part done. Here's where problems start: the follow through stops with the phone call or email. The essential final step is to confirm by personal inspection that the corrective work was done, and done right. Service technicians quickly learn that when the superintendent asks for something, she means it.

Confirmation Tour

This 15-20 minute visit to review progress on any orientation items sends the home buyers to closing with peace of mind. Note that it will not help your position or reputation to bring buyers back out to look at a long list of still incomplete items. Real progress is critical. If an item is on back order, provide an estimated time frame for finalizing it. Seasonal items an issue? Have a separate area on the documentation where you list weather related details. This simple technique separates those details in the home buyers' minds, and buys you some time.

Closing Details

The company representative who conducts the orientation and confirmation tour needs to know the basics of settlement appointments: where, how long, who will be there, what preparation does the home buyer need to address, and above all—who should buyers contact with last minute questions? This knowledge can help calm a nervous buyer and eliminate potential anguish.

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Perhaps no meeting in the new home process gets as little attention as the closing appointment. While it admittedly is a fairly mechanical process of signing one's name about 75 times and exchanging a (usually large) check for possession, we can still make it hospitable.

Buyers should be greeted immediately and ideally by name. Depending on weather, offer to hang up coats. Get them comfortably seated in a private area and offer refreshments. The closing process should begin promptly, conducted by a professional who can define terms and get answers to questions. After an efficient review and execution of all necessary documents, again, a gift is in order. Something as seemingly small as key rings for their new keys is enough. The goal is to earn a smile. If you can maintain that mood, it helps earn a loyal homeowner who will reward your efforts with referrals and positive word-of-mouth.