Guide to Successful Consultations

21-Day Certification Training Overview
Week One Getting Started and Establishing Your Business Foundation
Week Two Building, Branding and Marketing Your Business
Week Three Putting It All Together with Additional Expertise

Guide to Successful Consultations
Week One Overview
First Fifty Things To Do Personal Items #1-10
First Fifty Things To Do Planning Items #11-20
First Fifty Things To Do Preparing Items #21-29
Successful Service and Pricing Models

Website: Watch the Consultation videos.
Go to the Member Area.
Click on Week One.
Under Consultation Guide, click on Consultation Video 1 and Consultation Video 2.

What is a Consultation?

When you researched those in your area who are stagers you probably found out fairly quickly that the term “Consultation” can mean different things to different stagers. Striking a balance between what to “deliver” in the Consultation and how to charge for that deliverable is a critical element to creating a successful home staging business!

The Consultation is the gateway to your business and the prospect of future business with the client whether it’s the seller or agent. Your job is to get to know your client, build rapport, listen to their needs and expectations, assess the space, and deliver education and a plan that is

You can’t build a reputation on what you are going to do.

Henry Ford (1863 - 1947)
within their budget and time frame. Sounds like a lot right? Don’t worry, when you follow our specific consultation process you’ll find that it sets you up for all these initiatives to be achieved. **Vacant homes have a different approach which we’ll go over in Week 2, so this Consultation Guide is for Occupied Homes.**

**The Consultation Continuum**

The three big questions you should ask yourself are:

1. What is the Plan for my Consultation? Exactly how it will be structured and how much information to I plan to provide?
2. What is the reasonable time frame for my Consultation? Exactly how much time it will take.
3. What will my price be for this deliverable?

The easiest way to visually understand this is to view the Consultation process as a continuum of time, price and deliverables and assess where you want your business to land.

![Time Taken Continuum](image)

**My Entire Consultation Process and What It Entails >>**

Deliverable Given >>

Place yourself in your client’s shoes and ask what your expectation would be of a stager who comes for two hours to your home and charges $300. What would you expect to receive from them? On the flip side, what would you expect from a stager who comes to the home for 20 minutes and charges nothing?

The key to developing a strong consultation process that delivers on expectations and provides solutions is to strike a balance between expectation/price and deliverable. **Make sure you are providing your client a real bang for the buck without breaking your business!** We will be discussing your Services and Pricing in the next Guide but I put the Consultation Guide first because when you have an idea of how you want to structure your Consultations, you can then formulate the pricing **based on the deliverable.**

In order to understand how to do this is almost better explained in what not to do…

**Five Fatal Mistakes Stagers and Redesigners Make and How to Avoid Them**

I’ve reviewed many other training providers’ materials in the 9+ years I’ve been training and am surprised at the structure of the consultation they recommend. If you’re having trouble building
rapport with your clients or obtaining additional business from your clients, it could be that you are making one of these fatal mistakes.

1. **Doing a Walk Through of the Home Immediately** – A very popular staging how-to book recommends walking through the home right away in order for you to have clear “first impressions” but I believe this is a BIG mistake for a few reasons. The main reason you do not want to tear into the home right away with your client is because building rapport with your client, having some “couch therapy” and “taking their temperature” should come first. How do you take a client’s temperature? Well it starts with a sit down conversation where you ask them their thoughts on staging, selling and so on. A cold client is someone who resents the idea of having to pay someone to fix up their home and can’t understand why buyers can’t “see past their belongings.” A warm client is someone who is familiar with HGTV staging shows and can’t wait to get started preparing their home with you. Do you see the difference and the need to know what kind of client you have?

What if you were dealing with a very cold client who hated the idea of someone walking through their home and criticizing their rooms? Don’t you think this would be important for you to know BEFORE the walk through? Remember, the consultation is for your clients benefit mostly, so taking the opportunity to understand where they are coming from and what their expectations are first is essential. We will discuss how to do this later in this guide.

2. **Offering Free Consultations (Unless it’s a Bid for a Vacant Home)** – What is the problem with structuring your business like a painter and going to the client's home for 40 minutes and providing a proposal for free? First off, our industry still struggles with educating clients on the “need for staging” and developing the seller “buy in” and rapport needed for the job to be complete. It would be difficult to fit a sit-down discussion; education process and seller “buy in” with your clients if you had to be in and out in 20 minutes wouldn’t it? Secondly, “free” tends to attract the kinds of clients who have no intention of buying anything and hope to simply “pick your brain” and get something for nothing. These kinds of clients are what I call the “red flag” clientele. Thirdly, your business may not be able to sustain a model where you are spending hours on business and clients that you don’t get paid for. You may not need the money or may consider yourself a “hobbyist” but you are doing a huge disservice to the industry and your fellow stagers by offering too much for too little.

3. **Not Assuming and Closing the Sale** – The seller has phoned or brought you to their home for a reason, and that is because they want their home to sell. In order for homes to sell for the best price, they need to be staged, so assume the sale starting from the moment you answer the phone. Being intentional with your words and having a plan in place from first phone call to end of consultation is critical. We will provide role playing ideas to walk you through this.

4. **Not Mentioning Redesign** - Who is the number one target market for interior designers and redesigners? New Home Owners! You are staging a future “new home owners” home, so essentially you have first crack at this client. I’ve met so
many stagers who only think that staging is what they can do and forget the critical redesign component of their talent and business. If you don’t “up sell” the redesign side of your business then you are missing out on 50% of it. If you handle the client superbly and subtly up sell your move-in redesign business through the process, then expect that client to use you for their new home.

5. Not Staying in Touch and Following Up – Sales 101 simply states that keeping in touch is most of sales. Setting up a contact management system (Week 2) and connecting via social networks are easy ways to stay in touch with clients past and present. The simple act of sending a newsletter or posting some of your finish choices for a current client on Facebook will remind your past clients of the work you do.

HSR provides a consultation process that addresses each of these mistakes for both Staging and Redesign, so keep reading.

Consultation Process for Occupied Home Staging or Potentially Redesign

A lot happens before you even get to the consultation portion of your client interaction, and the Home Staging Resource wants to make sure you are completely prepared, so buckle up! Here’s the quick process we will be going over:

1. Taking the phone call and what to say
2. Doing the research for better preparation
3. Bringing the right forms, tools and accessory items
4. What your consultation process should look like
5. What your Walk and Talk or Staging Report process should look like
6. Next Steps and follow-up

First Things First

I’ll never forget my first consultation with a home seller who happened upon my website and wanted me to bid on her vacant home. I was already nervous about my first consultation. To make things worse, I felt ill-prepared to handle a vacant home! I had no process. Thus, I had no control over my consultation. The home seller ran all over me. I left feeling like I needed structure built around educating the client and providing me with more credibility.

Needless to say, I was not the confident organized professional I should have been. We can only learn from our mistakes and share what we have learned with others. I’m going to go into detail every step of the consultation process so that you can be confident and organized going in to your first consultation.

This brings me to the importance of confidence that comes from knowing what you’re doing, having a plan, and providing "value" to your clients. The Home Staging Resource wants to provide you with the ongoing training, plan, organization and products that will help you achieve the expert knowledge and training your clients deserve. Part of that confidence comes from having a process and a big part of it comes from refining your design skill set which is best done by getting ideas from others, so going onto www.houzz.com in your free time and saving photos to your ideabooks will help you become more confident as well.
Even if you're new to staging and not the least bit confident going into your first consultation, think like you have $20,000 in your pocket and you’re going to give it to the home sellers by providing them with this consultation. Believe me, this is a confidence builder and the analogy is not so far off.

Another critical confidence builder is role-playing. Before you put yourself in front of a real estate agent, make sure you have practiced with a friend or neighbor. No matter how prepared you are for your consultation, the first time is always a little nerve-racking. Once you get that first Consultation over with, you’ll realize how much value you have to offer and how rewarding home staging really is!

What separates you from your competition is your professionalism, decorating expertise, ability to educate your clients, and your warmth and service. At the HSR, we are firm believers in giving generously of your knowledge, time and assistance because it’s the right thing to do and it goes far in your marketing efforts. This is a small, referral-based industry where people talk. You want them to talk wonderfully about you. In fact, HSR’s goal for you is that you build a handful of real estate agent partnerships that exclusively use you for all of their listings.

**Professionalism at All Times**

Being a true professional should go without saying but let me tell you that most people make the mistakes below in our industry and it alienates them from clients. Here are a few rules I think worth mentioning:

- Always compliment the home before criticizing.
- Speak expertly in terms of using principles and elements of design during the staging time to highlight/de-emphasize the architectural elements of the home (see our Design Modules which go over example of this in detail)
- Think before you speak. Listen. Listen. Listen.
- Answer questions honestly…even if you don’t know, you can source the answer.
- Provide honest time lines, costs and expectations – even if it’s not what they want to hear.
- Never talk badly about any of your competitors or colleagues.
- Understand the personality and temperature of the individual you are working with. Tailor yourself accordingly.
- Always be punctual, professional looking and prepared.
- Return phone calls and emails promptly.
- Never use the phone during your client’s time.
- Remember your good manners by always asking permission to touch their things and open their cabinets.

**Initial Introductions over the Phone**
Let's assume your first contact with the home seller or agent is the initial phone call during which they are just trying to "get some information." While this may seem like a prospect, I want you to consider this a client and be very intentional with your interaction. Here's a great way to answer a phone call (my notes/reasons are italicized):

**You:** Company Name, how can I help you?  
**Client:** I wanted to find out about your staging/redesign services.  
**You:** Wonderful! Which of my clients has referred you?  

*(Do you see how this builds your credibility instantly in that it assumes you have many clients referring your business regularly?)*

**Client:** Actually I found your website on the Internet while searching on Houzz. I'm putting my house up for sale on a limited budget and I've never worked with a stager and needed to know how it works.  

*(We've learned two important things: how they heard about you which will be critical to where you spend your marketing dollars and whether they have ever worked with a stager.)*

**You:** Great. I'd love to manage your staging project. I specialize in being able to research and read your specific buyer demographic, so that we can use what you already have to create a vision or lifestyle that that buyer will aspire to and want to have. My customers can live and show their space easily, so that the hassle of selling is minimized tremendously. Does that sound good?  

*(Notice how I inserted what should be your mission/about you philosophy which helps them to understand a bit about why you're different and how you can benefit them?)*

**Client:** Yes it does. Since I have no idea how this works, can I ask what you charge?  

**You:** Of course, fees are important to discuss. Each staging project for a home that is not vacant begins with a phone interview and a two-hour, onsite consultation home assessment, for which the fee is $300*. Here's what you can expect to gain from that two-hour working session: I will research your market in order to determine the typical buyer demographic that will be viewing the home, I will review your existing furniture layout, color schemes, lighting and accessories and make suggestions for better traffic flow, modernization and online photos. I will repurpose what you already own to create "emotional connections" for the buyers. I will identify "price eroding" items that buyers believe will cost more to change than not. I will also make shopping and potentially cosmetic recommendations that will greatly improve the sales price of the home while eliminating elements buyers will likely disapprove of. I do all of this in a 20-page, Staging Report that we fill out while we walk through the space, so that you can refer to it regularly. At the end of the two hours, you will have a thorough plan for the work and how to get the most from the sale.  

*(Do you see that I immediately link the fee with the value of what is provided during that time? This is important because it sets the expectations right away)*

**Client:** $300 for a consultation? I didn’t realize there was an initial charge for that meeting and was hoping to interview a few stagers in the area.  

**You:** Some stagers will come to your house for free but let me tell you how that typically works and why I don’t think it’s in your best interest. In a scenario where a stager is not paid for their
time, they usually don’t provide any worthy ideas to move your staging project forward. In contrast, when you hire me for a two-hour consultation, we actually work the entire time and I give all the ideas you’ll need to get the best price for your home. Since we’re working together the entire time, you’ll be better able to judge my expertise and the merit of my ideas. I know you’ll be pleased with what you learn during the consultation, plus you are able to keep all the notes and ideas we generate to do the rest of the project yourself or have me handle the project for you. I’d love to work with you and have some availability on May 3rd or 4th at 9am. Shall I book that appointment now?

(Do you see how I educated the client on the alternative, without bashing my competition? I used the question as a way to further advance my credibility/expertise while closing the sale)

Client: Yes, thank you.

You: The consultation fee is $300 and I accept Visa or MasterCard. How would you like to pay?

(Getting the money up front is always easiest for both you and the client…if they don’t want to pay it all up front, you should insist on a 50% deposit to hold the day)

You: Okay, let’s talk about your home…

Here’s where you can take out your handy **Seller or Realtor Pre-Appointment Order Sheet** and gather the beginnings of the information you’ll need to research the home and buyer demographic, as well as build rapport with the client (forms are below).

Do you see how easy it would be to tweak this conversation for a design client or agent? It won’t change a lot since the crux is communicating the value, credibility and expertise you provide to the target market you are speaking to. Go ahead and create a similar dialogue for an agent or home builder who calls or a prospective design client.

You should always try to answer the phone every time you are not at an appointment rather than letting it go to voicemail. Once you become adept at this dialogue and selling your services, you’ll see how always answering the phone gives you a huge opportunity for business! The next few pages are the Pre-Appointment Form examples for various clients that you can download in Week One >>Forms, as well as some tips for each….
## Seller Pre-Appointment Order Sheet

By: Name and Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Realtor:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Company:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Owner:</th>
<th>Phone/Cell:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Email:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phone/Cell:</th>
<th>Email:</th>
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</thead>
</table>

### General Overview of House

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sq Footage:</th>
<th>Vacant:</th>
<th>Occupied:</th>
<th>Year Built:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How long in home:</th>
<th>Builder if recent:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Bedrooms:</th>
<th># Bathrooms:</th>
<th>Living Room &amp; Family Room?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has the home been listed prior to staging?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many days has it been on the market?</th>
<th>What was the list price:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think it was priced right?</th>
<th>____________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Any reductions?</th>
<th>Any offers?</th>
<th>How many?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pictures or link available to email to me?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What were the comments made by the Realtors/Buyers previewing the property?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List price (approx.):</th>
<th>Date to list:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is there a target market for this area (demographics)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What about the home did you like when you first purchased?</th>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What (if any) are the problem areas (buyer hesitations)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why are you moving?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you happy about the move and where are you going?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you done any research on home staging? How did you hear about us?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### General Overview of Your Company – Hopefully Done in Initial Phone Call

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What to expect from your consultation and research prior:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pricing and service options:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Everyone present at initial consultation and why:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request they go to <a href="http://www.zillow.com">www.zillow.com</a> to look up home and research those that have sold.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Payment Schedule and Agreement:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Details:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appt. Reconfirmed?</th>
<th>Deposit Given/Prepaid?</th>
<th>Credit Card Info:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Realtor Pre-Appointment Order Sheet

By: Name and Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Realtor:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Owner:</td>
<td>Company:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone/Cell:</td>
<td>Phone/Cell:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td>Email:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional:</td>
<td>Best form of contact?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General Overview of House**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sq Footage:</th>
<th>Vacant:____ Occupied:_____ Year Built:______________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long in home:_____________ Builder if recent:___________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Bedrooms: ________ # Bathrooms: _________ Living Room &amp; Family Room? ______________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the home been listed prior to staging? Yes_______No________ (If Yes, answer below)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many days has it been on the market? _________ What was the list price:__________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think it was priced right? _________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any reductions? ____<strong><strong><strong><strong><strong><strong><strong><strong><strong>Any offers? _____ How many?</strong></strong></strong></strong></strong></strong></strong></strong></strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures or link available to email to me?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the comments made by the Realtors/Buyers previewing the property?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| List price (approx.): ______________ Date to list? ______________ |
| Is there a target market for this area (demographics)? |
| What (if any) are the problem areas (buyer hesitations)? |
| Why are the sellers moving and will they be present during the consultation? |

| Are they happy about the move and where are they going? |
| Have you worked with any stagers in the past? What was your experience? |

| How can I better serve your business? |

**General Overview of Your Company – Hopefully Done in Initial Phone Call**

| What to expect from your consultation and research prior: |
| Pricing and service options: |
| Everyone present at initial consultation and why: |
| Request they go to [www.zillow.com](http://www.zillow.com) to look up home and research those that have sold. |
| Payment Schedule and Agreement: |

| Additional Details: |
| Directions: |
| Appt. Reconfirmed? ☐ Deposit Given/Prepaid? Credit Card Info: |
Agent Questions

When an agent is involved, you have the added bonus of the knowledge they can impart as well as the potential for creating a repeat customer. It is critical that you acknowledge their expertise and involve them as an ally in the process.

By asking good questions and building your relationship with the real estate agent as a win-win without undermining them, you will create a partner for life! Many times the agent has allocated home staging services in their budget and will cover some or all of this expense. Here are some important questions to ask:

- Have you heard of home staging or used any professional home stagers in the past? Why or why not?
- Is this house your listing?
- What are your thoughts on the home?
- How long have you been in the business?
- Do you have a website I can view the photos on?
- Is there an Open House date already scheduled?
- What can you tell me about the owners of the home?
- How long have they lived in the home?
- How old is the home?
- What is the “buyer demographic” of the home? (Who typically buys in this neighborhood?)
- What style is it?
- Any trouble spots?
- What feedback have you received from other buyers or agents?
- Do you have pictures of the home on a website or that you can email me?
- What home staging services do you think are needed?
- Will you be absorbing the cost of the staging services yourself or do I need to make a presentation to the home sellers?
- When can we preview the property?
- Will the seller be present during the preview?
- Are the sellers the "Do It Yourself" types or will they want full service staging?
- Have you discussed a home staging service with the sellers already?
- If so, what has been their reaction thus far?
- Are there any deadlines or additional factors of which I should be made aware?

Make this conversation spontaneous, depending upon how much time the real estate agent has and how much information they are willing to share. The most important thing is that you meet your primary objective: getting a consultation and having your general questions answered. Let the agent know your services and pricing ahead of time so that they are prepared to compensate you during the consultation or pass the information along to the home seller.
Redesign Pre-Appointment Order Sheet

By: Name and Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Owners:</th>
<th>Email Addresses:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Contact Preference: (circle all that apply)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work  Home  Cell  Email  Text  Day  Eve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Phone:</td>
<td>How did they hear about us?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell Phone:</td>
<td>Additional:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Phone:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General Overview of House**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sq Footage:</th>
<th>Age of Property?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Bedrooms:</td>
<td># Bathrooms:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long have you lived in your home?</td>
<td>How long do you plan to live in your home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you say is the general “style” of your home?</td>
<td>How would you describe your style?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your “design priorities” and the scope of the project?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General Overview of Your Company**

> Discuss benefits of how you work:
  1. Honing in on client style, lifestyle, home style, color preferences, passions/interests
  2. Extending preferred pricing on furnishings, flooring, window coverings and accessories
  3. Start with what you have and love and expand from there
  4. Focused on results that reflect the needs and lifestyle of your family
  5. Phasing the project if necessary to meet client budget

> Discuss Client Design Profile (emailed to client), Pinterest Account and Design Ideabook
> Discuss initial consultation description/expectation/price and payment options:

> All decision makers present at initial consultation and why:

| Date of Consult: |

**Additional Details:**

| Directions: |
| Appt. Reconfirmed? | Deposit Given/Prepaid? | Credit Card Info: |


A Note About Consultations for Redesign or Home Styling Clients

In Week Three I outline the Redesign or Home Styling process that I think will give you lots of bang for your buck IF you have all your ducks in a row in terms of shopping resources, vendors and trades sources. Having said that, you can use much the same process I outline in this Guide to keep your Home Styling Consultation simple and similar.

Let’s face it, every service begins with the consultation and can expand from there to a staging day or design project, or simply end there depending upon if you client is a do-it-yourselfer. Later on, I’ll discuss how to better upsell your project services but remember, at the initial phone call, we are just selling the consultation.

Critical Initial Internet Research

You already have a lot of information even if you only got the answers to the general questions. You can make yourself extra prepared, credible, and potentially more income by following the next few Internet research steps before you go to the consultation.

1. **Research the "client" real estate agent’s website.**

   Any time a real estate agent is involved in the sale of a home you are staging, it is in your best interest to consider them an important client -- even if they are not paying for the services or didn't make the initial call.

   **Tip:** The real estate agent has the potential to feed you repeat business, as well as become a direct client, which makes your marketing budget go a long way.

   Get to know the real estate agent ahead of time by going to www.Google.com. Insert the real estate agent’s name in quotes and add the city (“John Doe” AND “San Diego”). The results will include the real estate agent’s website, Facebook page (which you will want to “friend”), as well as any other sites this real estate agent is listed in.

   If you can’t find them this way, then go to www.realtor.com. Under “Find A Realtor,” enter your location and scroll by real estate agent’s name to find their corresponding website.

   When you go to their website, you can research how busy the real estate agent is by viewing their current listings. You can take note on general locations and price ranges this real estate agent covers. In other words, what is his/her niche market. You can also start to see additional personality traits which help you get to know your real estate agent client better.

   The more you know, the better prepared and more credible you will be. If this real estate agent has the potential to refer quite a bit of business, you will want to have a mutually beneficial "referral plan" in place for heavy hitter agents when you meet
this real estate agent. If you see quite a few listings that look in need of staging, you may want to mention specific ways you work with real estate agents to transform listings.

**Tip:** There are several handouts in our *Week One Staging Business Forms* section that you can use to "break the ice" with the real estate agent.

2. **Research the "client" real estate agent in general.**

The reason we had you look up the real estate agent on Google rather than go directly to real estate agent.com is because there is a lot of potential additional information you can find out about your new client real estate agent that will help you build that relationship.

Look at your Google results. If a wine association listed the real estate agent as a member, it might behoove you to send a nice bottle of wine. If the agent is part of a local realty office or association, you can ask to be allowed to give training or speak at their next meeting. Realtors are always looking for better ways of doing business, as it is a highly competitive business they are in.

3. **Research the home in question.**

While you are reviewing the real estate agent as a potential partner, click on **Featured Listings** or **My Listings** on their website to find the home you will possibly be staging. You will find a more detailed listing of the home (if it has already been listed) and pictures you can print out and study beforehand. Take notes. Mentally put together the layout of the house. I like to try and diagram it based on the various photos given.

**Website:** Go to the *HSR Library* and look for ideas you can print out and bring to your appointment in our *Staging Tips and Tricks* section.

From the *Member Home Page*, click on *HSR Library*.

Scroll down to find the *Photo Galleries* section and print out photos of example “looks” you will be trying to achieve in the home.

**Important:**

*HSR photos* are only to be used as examples in your reports and not for marketing or portfolio purposes for copyright reasons! See *Home Staging Resource Terms* on the website for this.

How impressed do you think the home seller and real estate agent will be by your printed photos, ideas and overall preparation over your competition? You may be able to jot down an initial proposal based on your information.
4. Research the neighborhood

Go to [http://www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com) and enter the address into the search bar. Review the cross streets and surroundings of the home. If it’s close to schools, then very likely your buyer demographic will be a family with school age children. If it’s close to a pedestrian walking city area, then the retired couple may be your buyer demographic. Zoom into the home and get more specifics on the yard. Place your mouse over the orange stick figure (little man) and drag them to the street in order to get a frontal view of the home and walk the neighborhood.

**Tip:** Another excellent website for researching and area demographic is found at [www.zipskinny.com](http://www.zipskinny.com). Search zip codes to find average education, income, age, race, gender and much more!

5. Research and understanding the “Buyer Demographic” – Six Critical Cues

An essential part of staging is the “who” we are designing for! Every neighborhood has a general “buyer demographic” that is worth researching and becoming familiar with before even entering into the home. You probably already asked the agent but don’t always take their word for it and do your own research. There are four demographic cues to research:

1. **Location Style Cue** - Many times the nature of the area in general determines the buyer demographic whether it’s metro, coastal, rural or suburban, you can tell a lot about your potential buyers by noting the “style” of the area and taking your design cues from it.

2. **Business Lifestyle Cue** - Another key factor is how close the home is to business centers in the area. If its 30 min. away make sure to stage an office in the home assuming telecommuting is probably part of the household business lifestyle.

3. **Activity & Purchasing Lifestyle** - You can also tell a lot about an area by the nature and style of businesses that surround it. In my small suburb, there are four different whole foods/specialty markets, several upscale restaurants and five wine shops in a 1 mile radius. What does that tell you about my buyer demographic? Yes you guessed it, white collar, highly educated, health conscious with high incomes. It might make great sense to stage a “wine bar” in the home or give a vision of a potential wine cellar closet area.

4. **Education Cue** - Another helpful hint would be to go to [www.greatschools.com](http://www.greatschools.com) research the local school scores and see how it compares to the county as a whole. If you find that the home in question is in an area with the best school scores, that tells you that the buyer demographic is a family where staging kids rooms is essential.
5. **Grouping Cues** - Some things you wouldn’t know about an area unless you had lived there for a long time. Many times certain types of groups of people gravitate toward each other in a neighborhood or suburb dictating the typical buyer demographic. Take San Diego for example which is the area I live in. A section of San Diego called Hillcrest has a very large gay population while another area called Mira Mesa has a large Asian pacific population. Do you think that this knowledge would have an important influence on your staging? Absolutely, so get to know your county and all the various suburbs in order to become the expert in reading and staging for the buyer demographic!

6. **Real Estate Cues** – Of course it’s always a good idea to take a look at the other homes for sale in the area that you are staging in order to assess the competition and typical pricing. While you're looking at the homes, you can get cues about the people who live there by looking at the style, furnishings, room purposes and yards of these homes.

6. **Research the history of the home and home seller.**

Did you know that if the home has not been listed you can still find pictures of the home by employing two Internet strategic methods?

1. Go to [http://www.zillow.com](http://www.zillow.com) or better yet [http://www.redfin.com](http://www.redfin.com) (if they cover your area) and enter in the address of the home. Zillow will give you full details of loan history and owner history. Zillow will many times have photos of the home posted from past times the home was on the market.

2. Go to [http://www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and enter in the address of the home. Many times you will find a real estate agents old featured listing page on the home from past sales.

7. **Research potential product sales.**

At the Home Staging Resource, we think it’s important to run a business by seeking other avenues of revenue streams to everyone’s mutual benefit. For instance, you can rent out art to clients and have your art showcased in a Shutterfly album with pricing.

In our Week Three Staging Videos, we suggest bringing accessories to every staging day so that you can give the client a visual on what to purchase. It will also allow you to take beautiful photos for the real estate agent’s marketing campaign. These tried and true accessories can also be resold to the home seller, saving them time and making you additional money. Don’t “push” these accessories on the client, but do let them know they can be purchased, as well as the price.

**Note:** My life before home staging was as an expert Internet researcher in the field of research, marketing and sourcing. Corporations would pay me thousands of dollars to show them how to use the Internet to further their business. I spoke at conferences worldwide and am a published author on the subject. Since following my decorating passion into home staging, I’ve been able to use
What to Bring to the Initial Consultation

The consultation is the springboard for all of the additional business you are going to get from this home seller. It's imperative you are always over-prepared and have a plan for the structure of your consultation, as well as are open to more hours of staging if need be. For instance, if the client immediately decides to have you do an a half-day of staging and you have the time, be prepared to do the work right away if you're able. Driving to and from a client's home is a time waster, so if you can avoid extra trips, do so.

I like to keep a large beautiful wicker bin that doubles as a prop, if needed. It holds my transform a room props, tie-garbage bags filled with pillows/pillow covers and throws of different colors and textures, a small roller suitcase for my Staging Toolbox, cleaning supplies, camera, and Staging Portfolio (which has my day timer, iPad and important forms).

Let's take a look at these items, one-by-one.

1. Staging Portfolio

Here is what I suggest you keep in your Staging Portfolio. This is also discussed in the Portfolio Section of the First 50 Things to Do List.

   **Website:** All of the forms mentioned in this section are available for downloading and modifying in the Staging Business Forms section in Week One of the HSR Members Area.

2. Consultation Checklist

Our quick checklist to make sure you have brought everything and have covered all the bases in the consultation. Until the consultations become second nature to you, the Consultation Checklist will be an invaluable reminder throughout the consultation so you don't forget any important steps.

3. Phone Order form and Interview form

Bring in the questions you already had answered over the phone along with your notes. This should include the address, phone, and a map to the house so you can find it easily.

4. Your Staging Process and Plan
Introduce the home seller to your process as well as the goals for the day. I like to let them know that we will spend time:

- Getting to know a bit about each other
- Talking about my staging process
- Walking through the house with our "buyers’ eyes"
- Walking through the house a second time with our Staging Report in hand
- Building an investment strategy based on what transformations we can make that the home seller can live with and will result in greater returns and a faster sale.

Only you can build your staging process and philosophy. We give you an example plan and our trademarked FEEL HOME philosophy as a foundation. You will want to think long and hard about how you want your consultation to flow or just follow the standard process we give you in this Guide for Successful Consultations.

5. **Your Profile, Certificate and Before-and-After Pictures**

Let your clients know a bit about you and your training as a way to break the ice and build confidence in your expertise. Some people are visual and like to read while you talk. Having a Profile Sheet and your HSR Certified Professional Home Stager Designation and Certificate available helps prepare you for your consultation.

You should also have 8x10 prints of your before-and-after photos available for the client’s review, if they so choose. A great way to showcase these is in a full-page, Shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com) album. Seeing is believing. If you see skepticism in your client's eyes, displaying your portfolio is critical.

6. **Sell sheets: 3-Keys to Selling Your Home, Top Ten Reasons, Why You Have Made a Great Decision in Staging Your Home, Let's Talk Buyers and any recent statistics**

These informational sheets are always helpful in your ongoing quest to educate individuals on the benefits of home staging.

*Tip:* The Why You Have Made A Great Decision... sheet is particularly helpful as a give-away to the client during an initial consultation. It uses statistical facts to prove the staging point. Feel out the client to determine whether this info is necessary.

7. **Pricing and Service sheet and Proposal/ Invoice sheet**

You should always end your consultation with a proposal for work, including what additional services you recommend they purchase. Make sure you have services to cover every need and tailored to each client.
8. Vacant Home Staging Plan and Process

Staging vacant homes is a different beast altogether which we will go over in the Vacant Staging Guide in Week Two. If you’re having the client pay the furniture rental store directly, it can usually be bid over the phone based on square footage of the home.

Your forms should include the proposal, timeline and process.

9. Liability Form, Invoice, Service Agreement, Photo Release Forms

These are suggested agreements and forms you use before starting any work. They protect you by getting everything in writing and indemnified in case you break something valuable.

Tip: We recommend you have a lawyer write these up for you, as every state is different. We provide some example forms to give you an idea of what is needed, but you will need to consult with a lawyer for your own state’s laws.

10. Client Feedback and Referral Forms or Better Yet, an Email Follow-up

Always learn what you did well and areas you could have improved. Always ask for referrals, which will be the cornerstone of your business. You can do this by asking the clients to fill out a Feedback Form of some kind that will also double as a Client Testimony in your portfolio. It may be easier to do this in an email follow up, so you have it in print.

Staging Tool Box

We have told you what to include in your portfolio. Now let’s talk about what tools you should have on hand to assist you in your day-to-day staging.

As I mentioned before, I like to use a roller suitcase for portability and functionality since it allows me to see all of my tools at once. You can easily purchase an inexpensive rolling cart at Costco. Here is a list of tools I suggest you bring in your staging toolbox:

- **Toolbox**
  
  Have home repair tools on hand like a 25’ measuring tape, electric drill, staple gun, screwdrivers, screws, nails, pliers and a hammer.

  Tip: You can find these kinds of "DIY" Home Repair toolboxes ready-made for you at hardware stores or your local Target (my personal favorite!).

- **Dry Wall Hooks/Monkey Hooks or picture hanging supplies box**
  
  I can’t say enough about the Dry Wall Hooks in our Members Discount Section (they even offer free samples!). No tools required, just press the hook into the wall by hand. I have used these to hold very heavy mirrors, etc.! These hooks are also at Target. You
can find picture-hanging supply boxes ready-made for you at Target, as well. They should include wire and various picture-hanging screws. Bring putty and a putty knife to easily fill any large holes created.

- **Paint Color Wheel**
  Have regular suggestions in individual paint card forms you can give to clients as reference. Use a color wheel to assist you for variety.

  **Website:** See our *Comprehensive Color Guide* in the Members Area under *Design Modules* for my favorite colors and a Benjamin Moore connection for free samples/wheel

- **Stud Finder and Level**
  This is important in order to keep those heavier wall hangings secure and even. If you use the dry wall hooks you can forego the stud finder, but you’ll always want a level.

- **Different colored tape or stickers**
  You can buy a pack of various tape colors. Once you decide on a service, walk through the home and place these stickers on items that should be packed away, so that you can get the most out of your staging day. Using the *HSR Action Plan*, you can identify what should be discarded or displaced. Give a little homework to the home seller before the staging day. Also bring painter’s tape and masking tape.

- **Furniture Sliders**
  You can buy different sizes of these at Target or your home improvement superstore. They are a great help in moving furniture! I’ve used these and moved armoires all by myself!

- **Scissors, glue, large safety pins and tape, two-sided fabric tape for covering pillows**

- **Space Bags** ([www.spacebags.com](http://www.spacebags.com)) – Another Target favorite for me, because these vacuum-sealed bags allow me to bring several pillows, towels and linens and store them efficiently.

- **Hand-Held Steamer**
  Having a hand steamer you can use to smooth out bedding and curtains is critical.

- **Light bulbs to sell**
  Many rooms have been made more beautiful by simply changing to a brighter bulb.
Cleaning Supplies

Although you’re certainly not expected to do any cleaning, it never hurts to have some easy cleaning supplies on hand for top-notch photos. Again, this is for the client to use to clean since you’re not a cleaner!

**Tips:**
- Carry your supplies in sealed containers or Ziploc bags.
- Get supplies in the form of easy wipes for windows/mirrors, walls, stainless steel, wood and general kitchen cleaning.
- Krud Kutter is a good heavy-duty cleaner you can also get in easy “wipe” form.
- PureAyre odor eliminator is also very good to have on hand, as well as Glade plug-ins.

Dust rags, gloves, sponges and scrubbers are all good to have handy. At the very least, have a good house cleaner you can recommend that will be able to whip the home into selling shape!

Here’s your general list of cleaning supplies:

- Windex Glass Cleaner or Windex Wipes – Works great on carpet stains, too!
- Murphy’s Oil Soap
- The Works (degreaser, lime and rust remover).
- Mr. Clean’s Magic Eraser -- Great for scuff marks on the wall.
- Krud Kutter -- Cleans everything.
- PureAyre Odor Eliminator -- Neutralizes pet or other foul odors.
- Lightly scented candles -- Lemon, cinnamon and vanilla.
- Folex -- Excellent carpet stain remover.
- Restore-A-Finish – Neutral -- Restores color to faded or scratched wood finishes.
- De-Solve It -- Adhesive remover.
- Restore 4* -- Great for rust removal and grout restoration.
- Lint Roller – For pet fur, etc..

**Note:** All of these products can easily be ordered at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). I recommend looking into getting an Amazon Prime account which provides you with free 2-day shipping, free movies and books for a yearly membership fee.
As we discussed earlier, it’s a good idea to bring common staging items to transform a room to give the seller a glimpse of the kind of things that you can do or to better showcase a room via photo. IF you are going to structure your Consultation process to include a “quick transformation” just to show seller’s the benefits of staging, then this section will be helpful to you.

Below are general staging items and separate items you can use to transform a room for the seller. Ideally, you’ll have seen some of the seller’s room photos beforehand, either by email or from your research, so you’ll know what to bring that will help the home seller visualize some of the changes that can be made.

In a proposal styled consultation, we suggest choosing an easy room to transform -- usually a bath, kitchen or bedroom -- if time allows.

- Take a photo of the room as a before shot.
- Rearrange the room and bring in some of your accessories and take an after photo.
- Remind the seller that over 95% of buyers search online before visiting the home.
- Show the client in the viewfinder of your digital camera the two room photos side by side.
- Ask them which photo they think would attract more online buyers.
- Explain how a staging day will transform the main areas of the home in just this way.

**General Common Staging Items**

**Website:** Check out the Photo Galleries on the HSR Website for ideas and inspiration.

From the Member Home Page, click on HSR Library.

Scroll down to find the Photo Galleries section.

Remember, these are visual props to assist your client in imagining the importance of investing in these small purchases that go a long way in helping sell the home!

- **Pillows, pillows, pillows!**
  Bring several different colors, textures and sizes in order to transform a “tired” couch, chair, outdoor furniture or bed. In the Staging Day Videos, you will see how we added our own pillows to each room in order to give the client a visual of what to purchase and to get a fantastic photo for marketing purposes. We use large white-tie garbage bags to carry them easily, and keep them organized. Pillow covers are easy to purchase at one of my favorite websites: [www.etsy.com](http://www.etsy.com)
• **Seashells, votives, tea lights, placemats, colorful cloth napkins, plate holders, hard back books and fake fruit**
  These items are great for staging emotional connection points and small enough to always have a few on hand! Go to your local library for a huge supply of hard back books on sale and remove the covers. A nightstand with a lamp, book and plant sets a relaxing bedroom mood.

• **White queen sheets**
  White sheets are excellent for impromptu table clothes, shower curtains, hotel bed making and drapes.

  **Tips:**
  - Bring hooks for drapes.
  - A fitted sheet gathers nicely under a small table.
  - Use three sheets to make a bed beautiful. Use sheet one to cover mattress. Put on a blanket and use sheet two to cover the blanket. Fold the lip at the top. Use sheet three to wrap around (and cover) a tired comforter and place at the foot of the bed, hotel-style.

• **White pillar candles**
  Various sizes lit next to each other add a dramatic centerpiece for the fireplace mantle, bathroom or bedroom.

• **A Bed in a Bag**
  Nothing transforms a bedroom like a new bed set piled high with pillows.

• **Matching fabric in threes or Pillow Covers (www.etsy.com)**
  I love to find three different fabrics that really work well together and use them in a room to fuel the seller’s imagination. This is easier than you think. Wrap up pillows like presents; recover chairs or simply pool some fabric on the center of a dining table or large coffee table as an anchor to your centerpiece. Be creative, but price minded and only buy fabric bargains.

  **Tips:** Fabric stores usually have designer discount programs, so always ask and display your business card as proof for a deeper discount!

• **Ribbon and rubber bands**
  These are handy for dressing up towels, pillows, napkins and drapes.

• **Quality fake or real plants**
  For a staging day, bring in a large plant you can move from room to room for all of your photos. Orchids are also a personal favorite that go well everywhere!

  Nothing you bring in should look cheap or flimsy. Don’t forget to walk through the home before you leave to make sure you didn’t leave anything!
Staging Day Video Accessory List

Below is the exact list of items we brought to our staging days in the Week Three Staging Day videos. Remember, we went in blind with no prior pictures of the home. We use these items because they usually universally match any home’s décor. We suggest that you use this list for your staging days, too.

View this list as you watch the Staging Day Video in order to see exactly what our items looked like. Focus on quality, continuity and varying texture as you purchase your accessories.

Remember, your focus is on creating beautiful after photos for their marketing and to give the sellers a critical visual of what they need to purchase to complete Phase Two of home staging.

Tip: Choose an accent color to weave throughout the home and unify its theme as you build out rooms for vacant staging. Pillows work wonders for this!

Rhythm: For great ideas on using accent colors to create rhythm in a home, login to our Members Area, click on Design Modules and read the Interior Design 101 section on Rhythm

- Pillows – Use Space Bags (at Target) or tie garbage bags for easy carrying
  - Four medium taupe pillows (two silk and two suede for texture)
  - Two red smaller chenille pillows – Great for accenting through a bland home
  - Two pale green small silk pillows
  - Two taupe small silk pillows
  - Two cream chenille small pillows
  - One chocolate fur pillow
  - Four turquoise and chocolate matching pillows – whatever is the current style/trend
  - Two white covered European pillows (IKEA) for beds – Most headboards are pithy so bigger pillows inexpensively form a better focal point
  - One fuzzy taupe throw
  - One chenille cream throw – Throws also work well on a formal dining table to anchor a centerpiece
  - One chenille red throw
  - One chenille navy throw (great for bedrooms)

- 1 large palm or plant (4ft high) - Remember, this travels room-to-room for our photos
- 2 small fake plants - Remember, this travels room-to-room for our photos
- 3 plate holders (Michael’s) - Use for kitchens to prop up a beautiful cook book
• **1 queen bed in a bag** (just in case) - Sheets can double as curtains that match
• **2 large canvas paintings** (one still life and one landscape) - In case the seller is in desperate need of a focal point
• **5 flat white sheets** (you can get a set of 6 at Sam’s Club for $50.) - Three sheets make a beautiful bed by wrapping the old comforter with a sheet draped at the bottom of the bed (hotel style)
• **1 bag of lemons** - I have a wonderful lemon tree that keeps me stocked!
• **4 neutral placemats**
• **4 bamboo placemats** - Use to anchor knick knacks as they double as staging trays as well
• **4 neutral napkins**
• **Baskets** as organizational tools to give as a gift to the client ($3.00/basket at Wal-Mart)
• **Tall floral arrangement** - I prefer sunflowers as they last a long time.

**Tip:** All of these accessories were purchased inexpensively at Target, Home Goods, Michael’s and Wal-Mart.
Quick Ways to do Twenty-Minute Transformations

**Build a Bathroom**

With a white fluffy rug, towels, queen sheet and candles, you can almost transform any bathroom into a luxurious spa.

- Remove all of the client’s things from the counter and wipe down.
- Arrange your white pillar candles.
- Stack your fluffy white towels on the counter instead.
- Use the queen sheet over the existing shower curtain to hide an unsightly tub, if necessary.

**Build a Tranquil Master Bedroom**

With a simple white coverlet, matching European pillows in cases, bed tray, coffee cup and coffee carafe, you can spark the home seller’s imagination.

- Remake the bed using the white coverlet.
- Fold the seller’s existing spread on the bottom of the bed.
- Add extra pillows from other rooms, if needed.
- Fluff up three rows of pillows.
- Clear off all dressers and side tables except for two matching lamps, a sleeveless hardback book and plant or clock.
- Use your white pillar candles as a centerpiece for the dresser and set up the bed tray, coffee cup, carafe and newspaper for instant appeal.

Below is a quick Consultation Check List as a reminder of all you want to bring to the Consultation…
Quick Consultation Checklist

Before the consultation, confirm you have the following:

- Client Order Form
- Client Internet Research - Real estate agent research, home photos, printed listing, early product recommendations and buyer demographic notes
- Call to reconfirm appointment, determine who will be attending, and driving directions
- Additional Interview Questions
- Arrive early and drive the neighborhood, pulling any additional home-for-sale flyers
- Portfolio - Business cards, testimonials, sell sheets, photos and proposal forms
- Liability forms, invoices, photo release, agreements, etc.
- Client feedback/referral form and Recommended Vendor list if the agent does not have one
- Staging Report, HSR Action Plan or General Action Plan to guide you and fill out front page
- Staging Toolbox - measuring tape, drill, picture hanging supplies, paint chips, etc. Refer to the Guide to Successful Consultations for full list of tool box necessities.
- Transform-a-Room Toolbox - Have an idea what room to transform ahead of time
- Cleaning supplies – Just to have handy, you’re not going to spend your time cleaning!
- Digital camera
- Map out your process, have the materials handy, and mentally go over it.

In Conclusion:

- Ask client if they have any questions or concerns.
- Give client Staging Report and go over it with them, asking what else they would want your help with. Ask if the consultation met their expectations.
- Consult your calendar for a day to complete the staging process if additional styling is needed. Assume the client will want this automatically for best photos.
- Ask to take photos now and if you can return when the work is complete (for DIY).
- Schedule day to follow up with client.
- Send “Thank You” card to home seller and real estate agent.
- Send Staging Thank You Follow Up Email to upsell your Redesign Services
The Complete Consultation Process Explained

Okay, so now that you've done the research and preparation, it's show time! Here's a brief outline of what your Walk and Talk Consultation process should look like and details about each portion will follow:

> Start with a sit-down with the client or client interview where you are listening mostly (10 min)
> Presentation and process (5 min)
> Initial Walk Through of the Home (20 min)
> Proposal for work if you are doing a Proposal Styled Consultation or launch into the Walk and Talk (1+ hours)
> Ask the client to sit and review the Staging Report while you go back through the home to take before photos (5 min)
> Make sure the client is clear on what to do and follow up on staging time in the home (5 min)

The Client Interview during the Consultation

We have emphasized the importance of getting in the door because in a face-to-face consultation, you will set the stage for an amazing first impression. Your primary goal over the phone was to build rapport by asking the right questions in order to get the consultation. Here you will focus on transmitting confidence, putting your clients at ease, listening and educating them on the benefits of home staging. You will spark their imagination, engage them in your FEEL HOME process, do a quick transformation (optional) and then close the deal if it's a "proposal styled" consultation OR move on to doing your Walk and Talk/Staging Report.

Your home sellers will be bracing themselves for some painful criticism. It's important to ease them into this by getting to know them first by asking questions and then educating them on your staging process.

Having this initial "getting to know you" discussion is critical to your read of the client and rapport building. By the end of the discussion, you should have a clear idea of whether they are "Do It Yourselfers," what their fears and hesitations are, and how emotionally involved they are with the house.

This is very important because selling a home can be a semi-traumatic event for some, which will require extra care. You should be asking a lot of questions and listening. By sitting down and letting the sellers know you want to take a few minutes to get to know them and become educated on their situation, you will instantly put them at ease.

Website: Check out the Pre-Appointment Order Forms for both Sellers and Agents. Review the Additional Agent Questions for great samples of questions to ask.

Here are some other examples of important questions you should ask:
1. How long have you lived in the home? This will give you an idea of the amount of emotional attachment.
2. Are you the first owners? As first owners, there is an additional pride and attachment.
3. Why are you moving and where are you moving? Empathize with displacement or job relocation.
4. Is there a critical time frame you are working under such as a 1031 Exchange or two-year mark? A 1031 Exchange is usually an investment property that must be transferred within a given deadline.
5. What do you like most about your home and what "sold" you when you originally viewed it?
6. What do you like least about the home and what were your hesitations when you originally viewed it?
7. Since you purchased the home, what have you done to it or added? It's important to know this so you don't inadvertently criticize the "work" they put in to the house.
8. Since you purchased the home, have you removed or replaced anything?
9. What has the response been of potential buyers and agents who have viewed your home?
10. Have you received any offers to date? What were the details of those offers?
11. What has been your greatest frustration about the home selling process thus far?
12. Have you found your new home? If so, what do you like most about it?
13. Did you look at many homes before you settled on that one? What did you think of them?

Recognizing the "Do-It-Yourselfer"

At this point you should have a good idea of what the sellers are like and their emotional attachment to the house. Next, ask a few of these questions in order to determine whether they would do the work themselves or not. This will help you assess whether to propose a Full Report or Staging Days in the proposal:

1. Do you enjoy doing physical work yourself?
2. What is your patience level and completion level with projects you have begun in the past?
3. Do you like to do projects yourself or have others do them for you?
4. Do you anticipate the need for renting furniture and accessories?
5. Is there anything else you can think of that would be helpful to me?
6. Have you ever used home staging services in the past? If not, do you mind if I go over it a bit with you?

Your Presentation

This is a perfect segue into your presentation. This is when you will emphasize certain things based upon the seller’s answers to the questions you have asked.

Tell the sellers a bit about yourself, your process (Let’s Talk About Our Process and Plan), the benefits of staging (Let’s Talk Buyers), and your staging philosophy (the FEEL HOME formula). Don’t take too much time on any of this which can just as easily be given in a hand out for them to read later or while you’re taking before photos.

After this, spend the greatest portion of the time educating them on emotional detachment so that they can view the home with buyers’ eyes. You will do this by going room-by-room and asking them our five first impression questions.
Give the sellers a good education on what buyers like and the importance of using simple marketing techniques to evoke emotional responses in buyers as they view the home. The home seller has past emotional connections to the home that we need to remove in order to create future emotional connections in the buyers.

We want the buyer to move from a visitor walking into the house to visualizing it as his or her own home. Buyers cannot do this without a little help. In fact, only 10% can look beyond the seller’s things.

As a home staging professional, you are trained to do this by using the FEEL HOME method which we go over in detail in the Week Three HSR Guide to Success.

**Note:** Refer to Let’s Talk About Our Process and Plan and Let’s Talk Buyers in the Additional Tools section of the Week One Training Manual.

### The Initial Walk-Through

It's always a good idea to let the seller give you an initial tour of their home so you will get a general overview of the number of bedrooms, baths, furniture and accessories before you get into the nitty-gritty of the Walk and Talk, picture and note-taking. This first inspection allows you to think while the client introduces each space.

**Tip:** Use the Staging Report or HSR Action Plan, which follows our eight-step FEEL HOME process. This is detailed in Week Three. The first page of both reports begins the entire staging process by having you fill out the first page in the consultation portion and getting the client’s “first impressions” while allowing you to assess.
It's important that you use the Staging Report, HSR Action Plan or another General Action Plan in the consultation; because it tells the home sellers that you are organized, have a process, and are nowhere near finished at the completion of the consultation. It serves as a carrot at the end of the stick and reminds the home seller that home staging is more than an hour-long process! For the Walk and Talk Consultation, it is a visual starting point for what we need to go over with the client.

**Tip:** The initial Walk-Through provides you with a head start on what to advise the client in the Walk and Talk which comes after.

In both reports, you have space to note the more interesting first impressions that the home seller gives you. You also have space to begin inventorying the home furnishings you have to work with, using our 3D method:

**Discard**

The *Discard* column is where you will put the things you are certain have no place in the home. When your clients decide on a service, go back through the home and put a sticker on those *Discard* items. This gives the home seller some home work before the actual Staging Day.

**Displace**

The *Displace* column is where you will itemize those pieces that don't seem to fit in the room but may look great elsewhere in the home.

Remember, one of the great benefits of using a professional home stager is that we are able to look at the home and its contents as a whole. The average homeowner decorates room to room. We **redesign** the entire contents of the space in order to put the home in its best light.

**Desire**

The *Desire* column is where you will list those items needed to complete the room. The hope is that you will find those items in the *Displace* column of another room. The *Desire* column is also the start of your shopping list. This shopping list be included in your Staging Report during the Walk Through and will be a great upsell to your clients since you are a professional shopper adept at knowing where to find items that will have impact in their home.

Give the home seller and real estate agent a mini-lesson in home staging. Tell them that you are looking at several aspects of the room during this walk-through. The primary questions you will be asking yourself are the same questions you would like the home sellers to ask themselves out loud and answer out loud as you travel room to room. These questions will greatly help them to see through “buyers’ eyes” and view their home as the marketing commodity it is so that we can stage the home to its fullest potential.
Here are some sample questions:

How do you think a buyer will feel and think about this room? Is it warm, cold, claustrophobic, messy, or sterile?

Is the scale of the objects in the room in proportion to one another? Offer the Goldilocks and Three Bears example or large couch with small picture above it example.

Will they be distracted by the contents? What pops out at you?

Is the overall feeling dark or light and bright?

Will buyers profile the home’s OR seller’s age, interests, taste, cleaning and/or organization habits? Old furnishings in a new home still make the home appear dated.

**Tip:** Some HSR Members have pasted a grouping of design provoking questions to the back of their postcards and then laminated it for Consultation use.

These questions educate and involve the seller in some of the major staging decisions while allowing them to be the bad guys. If a home seller knows that they can begin the critiquing process, it gives them great relief since no one likes to be constructively criticized and our home is an extension of us.

Home staging is only as successful as the ability of the home seller to understand and perpetuate the look that we’ve created for them. Keeping the home seller busy on this questionnaire allows you to do your job of inventorying and assessing. You have control over the consultation. This walk-through should involve the home seller doing the critiquing rather than picking your brain.

You’ve begun the home staging process in the consultation by filling out the first page of your Action Plan. With new “buyers’ eyes,” your client can see that you are a long way from complete. They have also had an education on why this is not something they can do themselves without your guidance.

For the initial tour, try to listen more than speak as if you are a guest in their home being shown around rather than one critiquing the home and giving out expertise for free. Be reassuring, positive, understanding and do not criticize their lifestyle. Compliment thoroughly while listening and taking notes. Throughout this tour assure them that a *staged to sell* home is not a lived-in home. Only buyers expect it to be perfect, which is why staging is so necessary to speed and price of sale. During this walk-through, you should be thinking through the answers to the above five questions and consider lighting, scale, flow, and focal points, while taking mental inventory notes.
Now that you’ve had a look at the home, it’s time to do the Walk and Talk with the client using the Staging Report. I recommend this report/action plan for the Walk and Talk because I think it’s easier to fill out and has example photos for them to follow (feel free to swap those out).

Website: Review the Art of the Walk and Talk Section
From the Member Home Page, click on Week One
Open the Art of the Walk and Talk section

I recommend you start at the curb and work your way through the front door as a buyer would during this walk through. Remind them that according to a 2014 Zillow survey of Realtors, enhancing curb appeal was the best thing a seller could do to invest in their home…the second best thing is hiring a professional home stager, so they are killing two birds with one stone having you there to review the curb appeal!

I also recommend you hand your clipboard with the Staging Report over the client and have them take their own notes (or not) while you can do the same (optionally) on another Staging Report to hand to agent (or keep for reference).

Here are some things to keep in mind as you move through the walk through…

- Ask for permission to move things and open cabinets and cupboards for accessories to use.
- Put colored stickers on items you think they should start packing to clear out the space
- Make sure to remind the client that it’s far easier to clear the items today (and possibly dispose of them, see my Less Is More hand out) than it is to unpack later
Remind them that often with a quick sale, they only have 30 days to pack, so getting started on it now, will save tons of stress later.

Remind them that you have the mutual interest in a fast and well-priced sale.

Let them know that “they can do all or none of your recommendations but you wouldn’t be doing your job if you didn’t advise them what the buyer demographic is looking for and ways to make the most from the sale.”

Remind them that “taking a price reduction does not “fix” the problem”

A key phrase to repeat during the walk through is that you are looking for “price eroding” items to remove – these are items that the buyer over estimates the price of changing (like paint).

Another key phrase is that, “we are in the game of removing objections to buyers." Repairs, improvements and modernizing shopping items will be essential.

Ask them to keep an open mind as well as consider the financial benefits while we make changes to the home.

Let them know you will be extra critical because that is exactly what buyers are like, but that you only have their best interests in mind. A good analogy to use is going to the dentist. It's a painful process but needs to be done in order to have good teeth. Another good analogy is putting money away for retirement. You would much rather have the money now, but know you are making an investment in your future...that is exactly what home staging is like, but you don't have to wait 40 years to reap the benefits!

Let them know you will only suggest those changes that you think will have a dramatic effect to their bottom line and most of those changes can be done simply using what they have. That's phase one of home staging.

Let them know you have a good camera and an eye for photography which should greatly increase the traffic to the home because of those online photos if they choose to have you return for MLS Styling or a Staging Day. This is another huge benefit to your service that you should be bragging about!

Remind them that if they go with a MLS Styling or Staging Day, you like to take lots of photos, because you will be studying them prior to the staging day in order to make the most of your time. You will also be taking lots of “after” photos so that their real estate agent can use them in their marketing, as 90% of homebuyers are online first.

In Conclusion

Once you’ve done a thorough Walk Through, make sure to sit the client down and have them review their notes if need be while you take photos. Remind them that it seems like a lot of work (that will be done anyway when they move), so getting a head start for fast and high-priced sale will be worth it. Sympathize and let them know you are there to help, so if they would like you to review the plan and come back for some MLS Styling or a day of staging if it's a big job, you’re happy to help. By this time, they are sold on your expertise and will be more inclined to just have you do the staging work yourself. In Week 3, I have packages that correspond with that idea outlined for you.
If you followed the phone scenario I outlined above, you should have already gotten paid, but if you only got a deposit, make sure to get their credit card for the remaining balance right then and there.

**MLS Styling or Staging Day**

If your client decides to have you do the work that is outlined in the report, then your detailed walk-through list and services and pricing should guide you along the way in terms of what needs to be done and what next step to take. In fact, once you have settled on a service, there is not really a conclusion to the consultation at all, but rather a beginning of a full staging project. Here’s what you’ll want to do…

- Make sure you receive an adequate deposit up front in order to hold the staging day (20+% is standard).
- If there is quite a bit of heavy furniture that will need moving ask who will be at the home to assist you during the Staging Day or better yet, have them move it ahead of time as home work.
- Make sure there is plenty of help and most importantly have both spouses there to provide “boundaries” during the staging time, so you don’t move a critical item.
- Have clear expectations established for the staging day and make sure to give them a Home Preparation Plan which will outline how the home is to be prepared BEFORE the Staging Day.
- If you plan on bringing in accessories as a “visual shopping list” for your clients during the staging day, make sure to let them know this.

Work with the seller’s schedule and deadlines when making follow-up sessions, depending on the service requested.

After any service make sure to ask if there is anything else you can do for them. Remind them that you are available for fine-tuning and move-in redesign services. Email them a *quick request for a testimonial* and ask for referrals to be listed on the bottom of the form. Make sure to use those testimonials on your website and printed materials!

Collect complete payment at the conclusion of any service. You are not a real estate agent who gets paid in escrow! Your services are complete and payment is expected like any similar vendor (painters, handyman, electricians, etc.). Agents will always ask if they can pay you at close of escrow because they compare your service to theirs, which is not the case. They get paid at close of escrow because their services are final then. Likewise, you should get paid at close of your service, in person like other vendors in your field.

Ask when you might be able to pop by for additional “after” photos to use as a reference. Realtors will also be VERY impressed with your conscientious follow-up in this regard!

Don't forget to encourage follow-up and questions while letting them know you are available to them. It should be apparent that you have a genuine interest in helping to work with them to get the most for their home in the quickest time possible. **Remember, it's much easier to sell to existing customers than get new ones, so go the extra mile ESPECIALLY for new clients!**

**Use the Staging Thank You Follow Up Email (Week One>>Forms)** to easily upsell your move-in redesign services and the benefits and cost saving you can provide in their new home!
Consultation Process for Redesign

I recommend a completely different consultation process when it comes to your Redesign clients. Why? Because this is a service that builds upon itself if positioned correctly to clients. I want you to have a process that allows you to provide the maximum amount of service to your design clients and I train on this process in a two-hour video with corresponding forms in Week Three!

Website: All About Redesign Section

From the Member Home Page, click on Week Three
Open the All About Redesign section.

Having said that, it’s not hard to tailor a Home Styling Walk and Talk session much like the above and charge similarly. I will outline this in the Week 3 Guide to HSR Success.

Now that you know, it's time to get back to our final 20 items on our "to do" list
Consultation Section of First Fifty To Do List

A goal without a plan is just a wish.  
Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1900 – 1944)

Important: Before completing this section, review the Guide for Successful Consultations in this manual and watch the On-Demand Consultation Videos in Week One of the Members Area which will prepare you for filling out these “To Do’s”

1. Know how to take a phone order, collect information, and qualify the lead.

Have you looked through our order sheets and tailored them to your business? Don't kick yourself after a client calls in for not asking questions pertinent to your preparation to the consultation. Make sure to use my phone script to better sell your Walk and Talk Consultation!

Website: A sample Pre-Appointment Order sheet for both sellers and agents is in the Staging Business Forms section of the HSR website. They were also in the Consultation Guide prior.

Use these questions to develop rapport and establish confidence when questioning a potential client. If you aren’t able to get the answers over the phone then simply have them finish the questionnaire at the time of your initial “sit down” during the consultation.

Tip: Have your forms handy for quick reference and note taking.

Make sure you get their phone number so you can do the following up rather than waiting by the phone for them to call you back!

2. Research as much as you can ahead of time using the internet.

Have a research process that really helps you to be prepared by following our steps in the Consultation Guide. Getting used to using the Internet to shop, research and gather information and expertise will be invaluable to your business!

In this day and age, you can find out a lot about your clients, real estate agents and homes by doing some simple research online. For instance, if a real estate agent calls you about a home they have listed; you can go to www.realtor.com and look up the home. Many times there are several photographs included in the listing.
Tip: An easy online tool you can use to find out quickly the demographic of an area you are unfamiliar with is at [http://zipskinny.com](http://zipskinny.com). You can even copy and paste the demographic information into the clients Staging Report in order to really impress them!

**Website:** Now is a good time to start reviewing the Open Houses in your area and preparing to do Open House Assessments once you’re ready to launch your business!

From the *Member Home Page*, click on **Week One>>Open House Assessments**

You can also look up the real estate agent’s website by going to [www.realtor.com](http://www.realtor.com) or Google. Enter the real estate agent’s name. On Google, make sure you put it in quotes and include the city. You can ascertain how many listings this agent currently has and review whether those listings look like they need to be staged by their photos.

**Tip:** By the way, if you ever questioned whether there is a need for professional home staging, just go to [www.realtor.com](http://www.realtor.com). Look at the photos of the homes listed. *Rarely* do they look professionally staged.

**Note:** The *Guide to Successful Consultations, corresponding video, Open House Assessments* and Week Two training covers Internet research in more detail.

3. **Know what to wear when going to a consultation.**

You want to project professionalism yet remain comfortable. You may be moving a few pieces of furniture. We suggest comfortable slacks, lightweight blouse, and jacket or button sweater. Layers are good for temperature changes. Make sure you wear comfortable shoes since you will be doing a lot of standing and walking.

4. **Have a Consultation Checklist (see above)**

**Website:** A *Consultation Checklist* can be found on the HSR website.

From the *Member Home Page*, click on **Week One**.

Under the *Guide to Successful Consultations* heading, scroll down to *Consultation Checklist*. It is available in both .pdf and Word format.

We provide an easy example. Make sure you are well-versed and prepared by reading it completely. Memorize the various items you will need to address with your clients.
5. **Have a "signature item" to give to clients during the Staging Day.**

"Give a little and you'll usually get a lot in return." While this is the Home Staging Resource mantra in our marketing tools, it also applies here as well.

A signature item will be very appreciated by your clients. It should help to beautify the home and should be a memorable reflection of you. Have fun with this and get creative. A particular flower, plant, basket, scented candle or centerpiece will go a long way in your client appreciation and referral efforts. It's a nice thing to do and important to let your clients know you appreciate their business. Personally, I love the orchids at Trader Joe's which cost only $10.00 and will look fantastic in any room!

6. **Bring "emotional connection point" props to liven up your client's imagination.**

I'll never forget the first time I staged a home and put together a tray with a bottle of wine and two wine glasses to go on their courtyard bistro table. The home sellers asked how they should use the cloth napkins I brought. I showed them a simple way to pull at the center of the napkin and fluff them into the glasses. The collective "ahhh" by the home sellers was hysterical! They visually "got it."

It may seem simple to you, but to most people, building these emotional points is very foreign. We suggest you have a box of ready-made materials (shells, twine, towels, accessories, candles, etc.) that allow you to display creative flair. This serves to educate the client on the importance of creating emotional connection points by visually showing them how to do it.

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**Tip:** Don't forget to view our *Emotional Connections* photo gallery for ideas. Remember, staging is visual merchandising and home marketing!

Bringing assorted pillows, throws, a plant and staging tray items serves to put the finishing touches on your "after" photos which will be sent to the real estate agent to draw in buyer traffic. The props also help to give a "visual" to the home sellers of the accessory "investments" they need to purchase to complete the look.

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**Note:** In Week Three, you will watch some *Staging Videos*. You will see the various props that were brought in for the staging day and used in each photo of the house.

7. **Purchase tools to bring to your consultations so that you are always prepared.**

Don't assume your home sellers will have a drill, measuring tape and picture-hanging screws readily available if you need to hang something. Have all of these commonly used staging tools handy in one place so that you're prepared for anything.
Tip: Put together a Stager’s Toolbox. Home improvement centers sell tool kits with basic tools like screwdrivers, hammers and wrenches. You can add other items that will be handy during consultations. We have a list in our Consultation Guide.

8. Be prepared to handle objections.

Staging is still not widely accepted, so you’re sure to run into plenty of objections along the way. We look at objections as “opportunities to educate.” Be positive about the objections you hear and use them to your advantage by answering correctly.

We list a few objections in our Staging FAQ’s on the HSR Website, as well as on each Member’s website they personally develop, so become familiar with them and prepare to educate. It never ceases to amaze us when real estate agents and home sellers say they’ll simply read a book and do it themselves. Home decorating, which staging is a form of, is a practiced art that only those with a natural skill can perform.

HSR believes that we believe you cannot train someone on the art of staging in a two – five day course! You either have it or you don’t. You have been training yourself on home decoration because of your inner passion and natural skill set for years, either formally or informally. Would a novice claim to become a professional photographer after a two-day course? Could one write a best-selling novel having never written a creative word in the past? Would one become a gourmet chef having never cooked before after a two-day course? Likewise, real estate agents and home sellers who have never studied or had a passion for the decorative arts should not expect to do this with much success. Trust in yourself and your ability but most importantly fake it till you make it!

Home staging is pure economics. Use an expert who stages and merchandises homes for a living to improve and market the product better. The house will sell faster and for more money. If you don’t improve upon the product and the demand for it goes down, as we’ve seen, the price must also go down.

9. Have a process and plan to stay in control by following our 3 Phases.

We outline a specific process for you to follow when you get to Week Three in our HSR Guide to Success but it’s always a good thing to keep in mind the general “order” of things when it comes to approaching occupied homes both in staging and redesign:

Phase One – Using what the client already owns to make the most of the space
Phase Two – Purchases in order of priority that serve as “investments” when staging
Phase Three – Cosmetic changes to each room that in staging will result in a sale or return on investment

These three phases to approaching both your staging and redesign clients will help to break down the process and educate your client.
10. Always speak in terms of staging or redesign potential in the home and work your magic while imparting your knowledge.

In order to keep from giving away the farm during a proposal styles consultation, focus on the architectural elements in the home and speak in terms of the potential they provide during our staging or redesign time. For instance, let’s say the focal point in the living room is a fireplace that is not being emphasized. I would approach the room and say, “the fireplace is gorgeous and I can’t wait to find items and rearrange your furnishings so that it really “pops” for buyers!”

**Website:** We discuss this approach in each one of our MLS Critiques in the Staging Videos section of the Members Area in Week Three, so refer to those videos for some great phraseology!

**Important:**
Try and avoid speaking about phase three, “cosmetic changes” with clients in the consultation to avoid “sticker shock”! Ease your clients into the idea of spending money or investing into the sale by starting with phase one first and in your time in the home!

Consequently, in a Walk and Talk Consultation, feel free to explain all the changes your recommend in the same terms in order to educate, build your credibility and get more “buy in” from the sellers.

**Website:** Each Design Module was written with your conversations in mind, so read them for phraseology ideas or go to our phraseology section the HSR Library too.

We are firm believers in educating and empowering your clients every step of the way during a staging day. There are no great mysteries or secrets to staging that you should be afraid to share. Some people have the eye for detail, balance, flow, scale and warmth. These people can immediately recognize the problems in the room and change them. By the way, that should be you! Others can feel that something is off, but lack the interest and ability to recognize and change the problems. Still others will have the eye, but lack the direction and expertise to guide them.

Recognize where your clients stand in this regard. Educate and train them along the way as you walk through their house. Not only will they feel they learned some valuable things, they will better recognize your expertise for what it is and value your services more. When you give a little, you get a lot in return.

**Tips:** Unless the client has paid for your expertise, do not give it out freely unless you are doing an “Open House Assessment” with an agent (see my Open House Assessment section in Week 1).
11. Continually develop an eye for detail, balance, flow, scale and warmth.

There are many ways you can develop this skill.

- Make sure to read through our Design Modules in the Member’s Area.
- Take part and review all the albums in Stagers Connect and www.Houzz.com
- Follow me on Pinterest and search pinterest for pinners who are doing great work in staging and redesign!
- Make sure to check into my blog at http://www.homestagingresources.com/
- Subscribe to decorating magazines and read decorating and design books.
- Visit model homes or “staged homes” in your area
- Review the galleries on the HSR Website for decorating and staging tricks and techniques.
- Review the HSR Library on the HSR Website for recommended reading sources that should be a part of your library of learning.
- Regularly watch HGTV. It is always filled with valuable and updated decorating expertise.

HSR Planning Checklist

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<th>HSR Planning Checklist:</th>
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<td>Complete Items # 30 - 40 of your HSR Planning Checklist.</td>
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