

THE REMY FORTIER LETTER

STORIES NEWS ADVICE WITH REMY FORTIER

VOLUME 2 JULY 2016

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

How One Phone Call from a client stopped me from quitting

A Husband and Wife, retired grandparents, were facing foreclosure.

Living on a fixed income, they had few options. The mortgage crisis in 2009 had caused property values to drop. An adjustable rate loan meant their payments kept getting higher and higher. A negative amortization loan is like a monster, the more you feed it the bigger it gets.

They owned a small house that they loved, yellow with white trim, and healthy rose bushes blooming like crazy in the front yard.

Home values had slashed and the adjustable rate had went up, doubling their monthly payment. **Now they owed more on the house than the house was worth and were about to lose it to foreclosure.** Like many others they were searching for

help. After hearing an ad on radio station advertising help with loan modifications for thousands of dollars up front, they paid because the company promised relief by reducing the loan amount and monthly payments. But after making the initial payment they never heard from the company again. When I went to their home the wife was in tears. There was an auction date to sell their house on the courthouse steps. I know many reading this can relate to the pressure of that situation. Waking up every day wondering how long you will have the roof over your head....

Saving homes and stopping foreclosures became a quest for me at the start of my career.

I hadn't ever planned on doing that work but those were the times. The work

was very tough but also rewarding. Nothing fulfills me more than making a difference in someone's life. When it gets tough like that, I need to connect with what fulfills me. I've learned it often only takes one person to remind you of your WHY.

In 2005 I was General Manager for a Real Estate and Loan company in Newark. The Bay Area market was hot. The agents we hired had fancy cars and designer everything. The broker/owner of our firm had been in this business since the early 1970's, and owned his own firm since the early 90's. My broker, who I learned everything I needed to know about the real estate and loan business from, was a serious man and never flashy.

My first reason for working for him was to learn about running a successful business. (Prior to that I had learned plenty at my last job about how to run a sinking ship.) Each morning I would sit in front of his desk absorbing as much as possible as we went over our agenda and to do lists. My job essentially was to control the gluttony of the agents.

Easy money bred laziness. There were lawsuits against irresponsible agents. Agents I helped to fire if they revealed themselves as unethical. They'd do things like forge a client's signature because they were too lazy to go meet the client. Or hold on to a deposit check too many days

because they didn't want to take it to the escrow office. Errors of negligence more than any intent to do harm. Looking back, this came from hiring too fast and too many agents without being picky enough about who we allowed to join our company. It always ended with the owner and myself in a room with an angry client and a mediator and him writing a large check to someone for a settlement.

We were making money, growing and expanding. Opening new branches and adding a mortgage company. I got a crash course in the mortgage business. This was when 'Neg Am' loans were popular. A negative amortization loan was the main loan culprit in the mortgage crisis. Anyone who wanted a loan got one. Who cared that the rates weren't fixed? Who cared that the loan got bigger as you made payments instead of smaller? Who cared that a payment could triple down the road? The property value was rising so fast no one cared.

Except my boss. I sat at his desk every morning and listened to him predict what no one else saw coming. He worried about our clients. He knew many agents were not qualified to properly explain the Neg Am loans. So together with our head loan processor, the owner, and myself we wrote a lesson plan. A boot camp on what these loans really were and how to properly

explain them to our clients. I wrote the quiz for the end of the class. Any Loan Officer that could not pass that quiz wouldn't be allowed to process their loans or get paid.

The agents didn't take it serious, didn't bother to show up to class... until they didn't get paid. Then my class attendance skyrocketed. In the midst of all of this my boss would tell me again and again **"Remy get your license. You are literally teaching the class. You could do this better than any of them"**

Ethics. That was my boss's commitment. He cared about people. A year later the crash began. Most loan companies in our area went out of business. We took a hit but we never closed. I know the only reason for his survival during that time was how he had always conducted his business.

I finally listened and got my license. It wasn't hard - I'd been recruiting new agents for 2 years, teaching licensing classes and real estate exam prep. Then... less than 3 months from the date I got licensed - the market took a nosedive.

I was still the general manager of the company. Even though the company wasn't shut down by bad loans like the rest

of our competition, the market crash meant hardly anyone was buying or selling homes. We couldn't sustain the staff or operations we'd had during the boom years. One by one I had to lay off 22 employees and then myself. **Suddenly I was a full time agent with no paycheck to fall back on in a market where top agents were scrambling to get out of the business.**

No one was surviving unless they were listing foreclosures for the mortgage banks directly.

By word of mouth alone people were calling me for help. They couldn't refinance because they owed

more than their houses were worth. Loan Modifications were new and very difficult to get approved. I started helping people navigate the modification process. If it worked I would charge a small fee. One by one I stopped the foreclosure sale dates, postponed them if I couldn't stop them. I would get family members to move in for more income when the modification didn't qualify. I sent the same applications in 2, 3, even 4 times to get them approved. I pleaded on the phone with nasty bank employees.

One couple I helped were the retired couple I mentioned earlier. Remember,



they had no options left when I met with them. They had little money to pay me. I did my best. It took 4 months of negotiating with the bank. I remember speaking with a negotiator (Person at mortgage company with decision making power) and asking him to have a heart. He laughed.

Mortgage companies had no heart.

Finally I got the loan modification through. Reduced their total loan amount owed and got a low fixed rate for 30 years.

The wife cut me a bouquet of beautiful roses from her garden and made me a necklace and earring set I still have.

During those first years of my career I had no money. I lived check to check doing loan modifications and short sales. Friends and family thought I was crazy to keep

at it. I would think to myself I should just get a job managing a Starbucks or something. I had no insurance and no sense of security. It was scary.

I remember one day sitting in my little apartment. The rent was late and I didn't know where it was coming from.

I've always taken a lot of pride in having a good job. Being independent and taking care of myself. It was humiliating to be broke.

I was looking at job postings online seriously debating if I could continue as I was. The phone rang. It was the wife whose loan I'd modified calling to tell me thank you again for saving their family home. She had a referral for me. Someone else, a school teacher, in the same situation she had been in. I confided in her and shared what I had just been considering. Giving up on my career and getting job somewhere. She said I couldn't do that.

That there were too few honest and

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I will never forget that call. I hung up with her and sat still for a while. You see, I am a fighter. I was born that way. I don't

give up. Not ever. I knew somehow that the good I was doing would build a foundation for the future business I would have someday. I knew the market would correct itself eventually and the people I was helping now would be there to support me.

Daymond John, entrepreneur from TV show Shark Tank, has a new book out. He has been making rounds on Podcasts I listen to, promoting the book. It's called

“The Power of Broke,” I just ordered a copy. But I don’t have to read it to know what that power is. For me, it’s a fire that can’t be put out. When I reminisce on my early career it humbles me. I am constantly reminded that relationships and how you treat people are what matter most.

Now 10 years after I started in this industry my business is still almost entirely referral based. Recently I looked at a list of all the houses I sold in 2015. 70% of them I can trace back through referrals from

homeowners I saved from foreclosures during the years of the market crash. I’m grateful for the lessons I learned early in my career. Keep doing the right thing, and never give up.

THE PODCAST HAS LAUNCHED!

The first episode is now available. A podcast is an internet radio show. You can listen on your smartphone, tablet or computer. Visit UnionCityAdviceGivers.com to listen to the show. We will have a new episode every week featuring interviews with local business owners and thought leaders, sharing their advice and stories.



SUPERVILLAINS OF REAL ESTATE

One of the most notorious and cunning salespeople in real estate – this month, you’re introduced - watch your back...

Last month I introduced you to *The Cheetah*, one of the many Supervillains of real estate. If you remember, this supervillain’s superpower was the *power of pursuit*. He is the one salesperson that can’t be outrun. He is too fast. He doesn’t read or understand social cues. And no, he will never get the hint, no matter how many times you give it to him.

This month I will introduce you to another of the real estate Supervillains. This series of articles is, of course, meant to be fun and entertaining – but there is too much *truth* contained in these descriptions to be considered fiction.

As a consumer it is important to understand, many commissioned-based salespeople lack integrity. This is not news to you, but I think a lot of people underestimate the threat. Especially when the seduction of their promises, weigh mightily on our desire for that outcome.

“Your home sold, faster, for more money!” said in various ways, for whatever reason, leads homeowners to make stupid decisions that no responsible homeowner would ever make, if in fact, rational thought was involved.

And specifically there is one Supervillain (of real estate) who’s notorious for his over-promising ways. He hails from billboards and the glossy covered pages of The Real Estate Book, Newspaper, and other real estate publications. *Dr. Ego* bluntly stated, is all about HIM.

Sigmund Freud once said, speaking of “Dr. Ego,” this is one race of people for whom psychoanalysis is of no use whatsoever. In his own omnipotent mind, he is the greatest, best, smartest, most knowledgeable, skilled expert that ever walked the planet.

This Supervillain is blissfully unaware of his shortcomings and weaknesses. However, as *brilliant* as this Supervillain believes he is, he’s quite easy to stump. He doesn’t even know the definition of the word “expert.” And, if you’d like to prove it to yourself, just ask him “What makes you an expert? Why should I do business with you?” This is, after all, a plausible question that any homeowner might ask.

Internally, if you could see inside him, you’d notice he starts to sweat. Squirms, and gets nervous... but, with blinded arrogance, will tell you everything about HIM, what makes HIM great – how HE’S a million-dollar producer, sold more homes than any other agent, how HE’S been in real estate longer than any other agent, how HE’S the best negotiator, the most skilled

marketer, the most brilliant tactician, how HE knows the real estate market and market trends BETTER than anyone else (he'll probably even show you some beautifully designed graphs and charts about HIM.)

This Supervillain doesn't understand it's not about him. That it is about YOU.

In addition, this Supervillain is the epitome of "fake it until you make it" and is always over-compensating. His clothes? He is always over-dressed. Suit, tie, ironed-shirt, and shoes, always shined. His car, probably leased, but it's top of the line. A Range Rover or something, whatever the "in" car of the week is, according to *I Can't Afford It* magazine.

This Supervillain prides himself on materialistic things – this is how he judges his value to himself – so he wears a nice watch, expensive, and is always pulling up his sleeve to make sure you see it. When talking to you, you'll notice he crosses his legs too, one over the other and leans back in his chair, taking on a sort of a slouched position. This is a villainous "move" that, for some reason, he believes makes him look confident, something he's practiced – another form of over-compensating.

But what makes this Supervillain so criminally dangerous is the fact his "Ego" is more important to him, than you, or ANY real estate goal that you wish to achieve.

So when things go bad, and they often do – rather than risk damaging his ego or tarnishing it even the slightest bit (something *Dr. Ego* can't live with or even admit is possible) this Supervillain will blame you. YOU overpriced your home. YOU didn't accommodate showings. YOU didn't follow *his* advice. YOU... YOU... YOU... It's all *your* fault. And, if you examine this Supervillain's hands, you'll notice that his index finger is about 30% longer than all his others fingers, from a lifetime of out-stretched finger pointing.

This Supervillain is bi-polar too. One day, he's your best friend. The next, he's throwing you under the bus – so be careful with this one! With this Supervillain, trust me, you need to watch your own back, yourself – *it's imperative*.

Dr. Ego is a team player, seemingly, and always has your back, right up until the point you need him most. Then, whatever is best for his ego, takes priority. One moment, he's your confidant. The next, his knife, motivated by the pure size and importance of his ego, is 6-inches deep in your back.

Next month, based on the positive feedback of last month's column, I'll share with you the character traits of another Supervillain that lives amongst us, causing homeowners Horror Stories.

In the meantime, stay smart. Do your homework. Protect yourself. ■

Monthly Pet Cuteness!

Send Pics to Remy@RemyFortier.com to have your pet featured!



This Month meet London a much loved Frenchie welcoming Emilio Maravilla Gonzalez into the world. Congratulations to new parents Mayra and Armando!!!



About the Author

In addition to operating *Union City Advice Givers* podcast and blog, where she seeks out and interviews the East Bay's brightest minds, business owners, Entrepreneurs and community leaders. Remy operates a successful real estate business where she shows homeowners how to extract up to \$30,000 or more of additional profit, through what she calls "The Value-Drive Approach To Sell Real Estate," the title of her latest book. Fortier is committed giver donating through food and clothing drives to those in need. Her business remains focused on three pillars of impact: Philanthropy, Business, and Growth.

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