

"The 9 Worst Mistakes Sellers Make at Open Houses"

By Leah Ingram

When my husband and I were shopping for a new house many years ago, we attended an open house in a nearby neighborhood. We were surprised to see the homeowner present. He was an older gentleman who sat in the living room, and proudly shared with everyone who walked through where on the hardwood floors his dog, "Dingo," had marked his territory. Not surprisingly, the Realtor stood cringing in the corner.

If you're selling a home this spring, you probably know better than to point out pets' accidents. But do you know enough not to make other open house *faux pas*?

I asked real estate experts about the worst mistakes homeowners can make before and during open houses and home showings. Here are their top 9 gaffes:

- **Questionable smells.** When Kinnaird Fox of [Fenwick Keats Real Estate in New York City](#) was selling her own home, she cooked fish for dinner one night, then immediately regretted the decision. "Even the best Yankee candles and open windows couldn't repair this culinary mistake," she adds. Fish stories aside, strong odors meant to mask *other* odors can be a red flag to buyers and agents. Says [Bill Golden, a Realtor with Re/MAX Metro Atlanta Cityside in Atlanta](#), "If I can smell it, I can't sell it." So put away the scented candles, air fresheners, and the like. That said, do keep a bottle of Febreze on hand, just in case, suggests [Christopher Moseley, with Rutenberg Realty in New York City](#). Febreze seems to do a good job of masking odors, especially pet odors, without making it seem that you are doing just that.
- **Pets on the premises.** Speaking of pets and their odors, having real-life pets present during an open house or showing can easily backfire. Eric Benaim of [Modern Spaces, a real estate brokerage in Long Island City, NY](#), recalls working with sellers who would leave their dogs behind gates in the kitchen during showings. "The dogs were rowdy, messy, and scary, and kept the potential buyers from even viewing the kitchen," he remembers.
- **Strange sounds.** When I was selling my last house, I put Norah Jones on shuffle on our sound system before leaving for a showing or open house. I thought her music created a great vibe for our home. Turns out I could have been turning off potential buyers. "Buyers often assume that sellers are trying to cover up noise from a nearby road or playground, or something else they don't want you to focus on," says Golden of Re/MAX. "Plus, they might react negatively to your choice of music. Why introduce a potential negative where there is none?"
- **Not leaving.** It probably goes without saying that no seller should be around during a showing or open house. Recently, [Elizabeth Cianciatto of Re/MAX DFW](#) in Dallas took a buyer to see a home. "Just as we arrived, so did the seller, and [she] let us in the home," she recalls. "This seller began to walk with us through the home telling us about all the

upgrades and how wonderful her home was.” You can bet that the buyer didn’t want to stay and look at *that* house for too long.

- **Leaving in a hurry.** Sellers need to give themselves plenty of time to prepare their house (and themselves) to leave in advance of an open house. “Many times on a Sunday open house, owners make a last minute, frenzied attempt to clean the house at break-neck speed. Then there is the rushing out of the door and bumping into potential viewers of their homes,” says Moseley of Rutenberg Realty. “It is always an awkward position to be placed in.”
- **Blocking access to rooms.** If 100 percent of your [home isn’t staged and ready for an open house](#), then your home shouldn’t be on the market. Some buyers try to get around this by blocking certain rooms from being seen, and that just makes [Tara-Nicholle Nelson, Trulia’s Real Estate Expert](#), crazy. “There’s a reason it’s called an open house,” she says. “The objective is to grant buyers relatively free access to see and fall in love with your home. Don’t undermine your own open house by blocking buyers from a room, closet, basement, or area of the yard, unless safety absolutely dictates it.”
- **Leaving a mess.** You should have a checklist that you use before you get out of Dodge with every open house and home showing. This includes not leaving any messes anywhere, and cleaning up all evidence of your home’s residents—from dishes in the sink to your pet’s toys or the cat’s litter box. Have a Rubbermaid container or laundry basket ready where you can store all these no-nos, and then put them in your car so none of it is left behind for potential buyers to see.
- **Writing notes to buyers.** There is no need to leave notes to point out various features around the home. “While a seller may think it is helpful to explain a feature to the buyer,” says [Coldwell Banker Realtor Cara Ameer](#) in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL, “it can be distracting to someone coming through to see a note taped on the wall explaining various features of the home (i.e. ‘this chandelier was handmade and imported from Spain’ or ‘check out the electronic control panel to the pool here’).”
- **Not turning on lights.** Don’t leave potential buyers in the dark—literally. “It’s essential that lights are turned on, window blinds and curtains are open, and the temperature is at a comfortable level,” says Golden of Re/MAX Metro Atlanta Cityside. “Buyers don’t like coming into dark spaces, and tend to have a much more positive reaction when homes are light and bright.”

Finally, adds Golden, “One of the most important things to remember, in terms of showings, is that exposure is key to selling your home. Be flexible and try to allow showings whenever requested,” he says. “I realize that you have to live your life, and there are times that may not be possible, but you don’t want to risk having the buyers skip your home because you didn’t let them in when it was convenient. They’ll simply move on to the next listing.” Good advice, indeed.