



MARKETING & SALES

Originators: Top 3 Traits for Selling Reverse Mortgages

By **Chris Clow** | December 10, 2019

Confidence, honesty and the strength of personal branding can be pivotal components for those who work to sell reverse mortgage loans every day, and these three elements have been key for the success of originators in different parts of the country.

This is according to a panel discussion of reverse mortgage sales professionals that took place at the National Reverse Mortgage Lenders Association (NRMLA) Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tenn. in November.

In a vibrant discussion on the tactics and philosophies that most effectively work for them and their affiliated salespeople, the panelists shared what they have found most allows them to operate in a successful climate when communicating potential benefits of a reverse mortgage to prospective borrowers. It is these elements, in their own ways, that help to convert potential borrowers into active clients, they say.

Confidence in the job and the product

An affinity for the reverse mortgage product – and even a fondness for the term “reverse mortgage” – has been very helpful in fueling the business of Ken Krajewski, Managing Director and Head of Reverse Mortgage Lending at CIBC Bank USA, Rochester, Mich.

“I’m really proud to tell people about what I do,” Krajewski says. “I don’t dislike the name, and I like doing this job so that I can immediately respond to snarky comments and begin dispelling any negative perspectives on the product.”

One thing that the industry has done is make an effort to tell prospective borrowers that loan officers are not trying to sell them a financial product, which is a disservice to those same loan officers, Krajewski says.

“[The industry says that] we’re consultants and educators only, as opposed to salespeople,” he says. “That part about being a salesperson misses the most vital step in what I do. In terms of the four stage sales cycle, the fourth stage is the most missed part of the cycle, and that’s simply asking for business.”

Because there are many people who both want and need the potential benefits of a reverse mortgage, a loan officer can miss out on both making a sale and making a difference in a client’s life by not taking a more active role in trying to actually make a sale.

“There are a lot of people that want and need this product, but we don’t actively move them into making that decision,” he says. “I like using certain techniques to let them know that it’s okay to engage in a reverse mortgage transaction.”

Part of the reason that reverse mortgage salespeople should be as confident as possible in the products that they sell is because it has the ability to change peoples’ lives, Krajewski says. Upon first entering into the business 10 years ago, Krajewski describes a tactic he used to fill out potential referral partnerships, which he describes as “pillars” to his business. On top of the confidence that he puts into the work that he does, Krajewski also describes why casting a wide net to potential referral partnerships has significantly benefited his business over the past several years.

“I work for a bank, so there’s lots of compliance involved. 10 years ago, I tried to find 100 people who might help me sell reverse mortgages, and now those ‘pillars’ are pivotal to my business,” he says. “What I do is cast a very wide net in my community in southeast Michigan, having conversations with Realtors and financial planners. I just need to educate, put a business card in their hands, and wait to get a call. Casting that wide net has been very successful for me.”

The power of honesty

Because they primarily deal with the senior demographic, a reverse mortgage loan officer has to value no-nonsense honesty in conversations with prospective borrowers. This is according to Loren Riddick, National Director of Reverse Mortgage Lending at Thrive Mortgage in Alcoa, Tenn.

“It’s got to be about relationships. We’ve got to talk about straight talk,” Riddick says. “Sports, religion and politics are stuff you’re not supposed to talk about. But, if you don’t believe in good and evil, there’s something wrong with you. We all know that we’re doing something good. There’s a fire in our belly of doing the right thing every time. If we believe in this program, then why don’t we talk to everyone we know and care about? I believe that with all my heart.”

His belief in the program, he says, extends from the idea that there could be a wrong committed against a potential borrower if they’re not aware of the possibilities that can be brought to their lives with a reverse mortgage.

“Oftentimes, I will tell a client that I’m sharing [reverse mortgages with them] because I don’t want it on my conscience that I didn’t tell [them] about it.”

One of the stories used to illustrate this was from Riddick sharing the potential benefits of a reverse mortgage, or “the word of reverse” as he calls it, with his former football coach.

“Coach Don Larson is from my hometown, taught me when I was in church and taught me as my minor league baseball coach, and he’s an amazing man,” Riddick says. “He’s very influential in the east Tennessee region where I’m from in Smoky Mountain. [...] I shared the ‘word of reverse’ with him, and he became a client.”

Riddick also demonstrated the power of a testimonial during his time in the presentation, when Coach Don Larson himself stood up to offer some thoughts on his reverse mortgage, and on Riddick’s service. When visiting Riddick in his office, Larson was asked whether reverse mortgages were “good or bad.”

“I didn’t know. I thought reverse mortgages were for desperate people, and I wasn’t desperate,” Larson said. “We have a \$350,000 home almost paid off, hardly any debt against it, but [...] he educated me. So I went home and told my wife about them, and she became interested. Three weeks later, we [got a reverse mortgage]. I’m sold on it, folks. It’s what we needed. We had equity tied up in our home, and it was dead. The only way we could get it out was to sell the house, so thank you.”

Not only did Larson become a borrower of a reverse mortgage, he also became a licensed loan officer and now sells them himself alongside Riddick. Riddick emphasized the effects that good relationships can have on sales by talking about employing people who can speak to seniors while relating to them on their level, before introducing his 76-year old senior client relations specialist, Elaine Gregory.

“I told Loren just a few weeks ago that I never dreamed that being this old would bring me such an exciting career,” she told the audience. “I’ve found that there are three things in this life you’ve got to have to stay young at heart: you’ve got to be and feel wanted and appreciated, and loved. The first thing I do when I talk to a senior citizen is talk to them about anything that may not even be a reverse mortgage at first. We might end up swapping cornbread recipes, because I know that they need what we have to give them.”

The ability to relate to a senior, who may be feeling anxiety about something that could deprive them of living in their home, can be pivotal in making a meaningful connection with them, Gregory says.

“The first thing you have to do is gain their trust, they have to feel that love and care. And I’ll tell you: when they come to our office, before they leave, they’ll feel it,” she says.

“Please remember, they’ve got to feel wanted, appreciated and loved. That’s true of anybody, but especially with senior citizens.”

The strength of branding

Giving a potential customer a perspective that they know who they’re dealing with before they even walk into an office for the first time can be a very important advantage to ultimately making a sales connection. This is according to Steven Sless, Reverse Mortgage Division Manager at Primary Residential Mortgage, Inc. in Finksburg, Md.

“I can tell you from experience: having a personal brand just makes everything that much easier,” he says. “When the consumers feel like they know and can relate to you, it breaks down trust barriers and puts them more at ease. If they feel like they know you and can relate to you even before they shake your hand for the first time, you win.” Leveraging new and old media is an important element of the reverse mortgage business that Sless oversees, but he is often asked how someone can begin heading down the track of establishing a brand in the first place.

A few keys to establishing a reliable and recognizable personal brand can come from a few early actionable steps that someone can take, Sless adds. The first is getting a high-quality photo, or “headshot,” that can be universally applied to an originator’s entire presence including a website, a business card, Facebook and Twitter profiles, and other leveraged social media platforms. Second, the LinkedIn platform specifically can produce fruitful connections, he says.

“Having your headshot and bio on your LinkedIn profile is key,” he says. [The premium] LinkedIn Sales Navigator is an amazing tool that nobody knows about can offer a window into a more professional version of LinkedIn. You can put all of your best referral partners or clients, any connection you want to nurture more. It’s a paid subscription, but it really helps to eliminate the noise that can come from the rest of LinkedIn.”

Controlling the narrative is also pivotal to the establishment and maintenance of a personal brand, Sless says.

“The message you put out every day, whether on social media or otherwise, words matter,” he said. “Are you educating, or showboating? It’s all about education, and using these tools is critical to building your own personal brand. Leveraging that brand is important, and can help you expand and leverage your sales pipeline.”