

Realtor group offers potential agents aptitude test

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Turnover in the real estate profession is rather high. About a third of the industry turns over every year, says Corrine Shearer, education director for the Pennsylvania Association of Realtors (PAR) in Harrisburg.

The problem, Shearer says, is that people “come in and get washed out pretty quickly. Meanwhile, brokers are making an incredible investment only to find out the person is not really suited to selling real estate.”

Given this problem, the Pennsylvania Association of Realtors Institute is offering a computerized suitability test to help potential salespeople determine whether real estate is for them.

The test also can be used as a recruiting tool and to help establish agents improve their selling skills, says Kim Ades, president of Upward Motion, the human resources firm based in Toronto, Canada, which developed it.

The test, called the Real Estate Simulator, can be taken via the Internet or on CD-ROM. It takes most people between 40 and 60 minutes to complete, Ades says.

The program is available for about \$50 for an individual or at a discount to brokers and others who buy it in larger quantities for multiple agents.

The test uses videos to confront the individual with realistic situations. For example, one video clip is of a young man interested in purchasing a condo. The person taking the test is asked how he or she would respond to the young man’s questions and comments. The test taker chooses one of several options; each response triggers another from the potential client, creating a continuous interactive conversation.

The scenarios are based on real-life situations that many real estate agents face, Ades says.

As the person moves through the simulation, his or her choices are automatically compared to those of top performers in the industry. At the end, the system generates a personal report.

The results are confidential and kept secure by a double login procedure. Only those who have administrative privileges are permitted access to the results.

Ades says her company has found a strong correlation between the performance of top agents and the best scores on the test. “That indicates the assessment has a strong degree of validity,” she says.

The assessment was developed under the guidance of Igor Kotylar, chief executive officer of Upward Motion, who has a doctorate in behavioral studies, and a number of real estate brokers and agents.

To develop the test, Kotylar started by interviewing successful real estate agents and reviewing real estate sales literature. Once he identified critical jobs activities performed by real estate agents and the critical skills exhibited by successful agents, he scripted story lines and typical response options.

Focus groups, composed of real estate agents, examined the stories and responses for realism and relevance.

Once the program was complete, it was tested and the response was overwhelmingly positive, Ades says.

Kotylar believes the test is an accurate predictor because “it simulates how you would behave in typical situations that real estate agents encounter every day.”

Ades says it’s not that one answer is better or more correct than the others, but the answers the test-taker choose will show his or her personality and abilities.

It is also useful as a recruiting tool and is showing brokers where their existing agents could use more training she says. The test measures the taker’s personality and general aptitude.

Upward Motion, founded in 1995, has build a similar tool for corporate sales and is working with Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce on a call center multiple-choice simulation test.

Ades says such simulation technology is changing the way human resource professionals and others who are in charge of their company’s hiring practices do their jobs.

Real Estate Simulator was introduced at the American Real Estate Society (ARES) annual conference in Naples, Fla., in April.

PAR, which was more than 25,500 members, is the first state associating in the country to offer the simulation test to its members and to individuals who may be interested in a career in real estate.

Shearer says the response from real estate agents in the state has been positive.

Noelle Barbone, manager a Weichert Realtors in Paoli, says the product “has the ability to truly affect the way we position agents for success in the real estate industry.”

Rosemary Scardina, chief executive officer of the Lehigh Valley Association of Realtors, says she hadn’t heard from any LVAR members who were interested in obtaining the program. However, she says, “they would have been calling PAR and not me.”

Scardina says she supports the program because she’s strongly in favor of “any type of program designed to assist agents in their development.”

For more information visit www.parealtor.org or www.realestatesimulator.com.