

Real Aptitude

Web test helps assess sales applicants

By **ETHAN ZINDLER**
STAFF WRITER

HYANNIS -Talk about awkward. You're a real estate broker with a client, "Mr. Henderson."

Mr. Henderson and his wife need to buy a new home, quick. Requirements: three bedrooms, a two-car garage and a basement for \$300,000 or under.

The next day, you show Mr. Henderson a home that fits those requirements exactly and he seems pleased. All he asks is that his wife have a look.

When Mrs. Henderson arrives a few days later, she hates the place.

"Without me you are totally lost," she says to a cowering Mr. Henderson.

Worse, what she wants can't be had for less than \$330,000. Something and somebody has got to give.

That's one of several scenarios depicted in Real Estate Simulator, featured on the Cotton Real Estate Web site at www.cottonre.com/JoinOurTeam.asp. The simulator puts users in the shoes of salespeople and asks them to advise potential buyers by selecting from a multiple-choice list of things they might say in such a situation.

The company uses the simulator -which also includes personality and aptitude tests -to assess its increasing numbers of job applicants.

It also uses it for in-house training. Yesterday, Cotton staff gathered at the company's office to go over the test and their collective results.

"It's a great self-evaluation tool for seeing where your strengths and weaknesses are," Jack Cotton told his salespeople.

As job losses mounted both

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during the recession and so-called "jobless recovery" that has followed, thousands have flocked to new careers in real estate.

In just the last year, the National Association of Realtors (NAR) saw its membership jump by 102,000, or 12 percent, the group says.

"Eight percent of NAR members are newcomers to the industry, which accounts for 77,000 of our new members," said NAR Chief Economist David Lereah recently via press release.

Another 5 percent of NAR members, about 48,000, have been in the business for just one to two years.

Small wonder that so many have chosen real estate as their

new career. Home sales have skyrocketed, thanks in part to rock-bottom interest rates. This year, more single-family homes in the United States will be sold than in any previous year in history, according to data released by NAR in October.

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Among those who have been in touch in recent months is Lisa Worthen, a longtime flight attendant with American Airlines, currently on furlough from the carrier.

"Lisa actually smoked the test," said Cotton, adding that those who transition from the nursing, airlines and teaching professions have been shown to make the best real estate agents.

Worthen said her prior skills have translated well to real estate. "I like talking to strangers," she said with a laugh.

She said the fast pace and the need for constant organization are both right for her as well.

Overall the influx of new workers into real estate has been good for the profession, Cotton said.

Many brought with them strong skills and good experience from the corporate world and elsewhere.