Simulator for real estate agents boosts success

By Special to the Daily News
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Lelan Beckley made his first land purchase, a farm parcel in central Illinois, at the age of 20. Since that first purchase 35 years ago, he and his brother, Byron, have bought and sold numerous rural parcels while operating their agricultural business near Champaign, Ill.

So when Beckley moved to Naples last year, he felt he had some experience in the real estate market and was ready to fulfill his plan of moving into full-time residential real estate sales.

Beckley is one of thousands of people in Southwest Florida each year who decide to try their hand at a real estate career. The biggest question these novices face is whether they will succeed and how can they improve their chances of becoming successful.

"Real estate is one of the few careers where there can be such a huge difference between the very successful agents and those who barely make a living, or leave the industry defeated, said Phil Wood, president of John R. Wood Realtors in Naples.

That's why Wood's firm is now using Real Estate Simulator to help its potential agents find answers to these important questions. In the same way that a flight simulator allows pilots to experience flight without leaving the ground, Real Estate Simulator allows potential agents to experience the challenges of a career in real estate before they decide to invest the years it takes to build a successful career.

Beckley took the simulator before he joined the Wood firm in April.

"The simulator gives you scenarios in a variety of real estate situations and then provides feedback as to where you stand compared to other Realtors," he said. "I reviewed my feedback from a positive standpoint. Although I scored satisfactory or above in all areas, the simulator still provided ways I could improve in each specific area."

Real Estate Simulator uses video over the Internet to reproduce a series of common and challenging situations that agents encounter on a daily basis. In each situation, the agent must interact with a fictitious customer on the screen who talks to them. The agent must then select what that they think is the best response for that situation. Each response by the agent triggers a new reaction from the customer and the situation continues. The situations range from the nerve-racking and rejection-filled cold-call on a new prospect, to tense contract negotiations with an anxious married couple.

Although Joyce Brownlee has five years of real estate experience, she too took the simulator prior to joining John R. Wood as an agent in June.

"I thought it was great and very helpful in showing me some of my weaknesses," said Brownlee, who previously sold real estate in Cape May, N.J.. "As an experienced agent coming on board with a new company like John R. Wood, the simulator gave my trainer, Jeri Cobb, information to help her get to know me personally. It showed her my work ethic, how I manage my time and myself. I would not want to see it eliminated from this program."

At the end of the assessment, Real Estate Simulator compares the agent's responses with those of the industry s top performers and provides the agent with a general score of how well they did, and a detailed and comprehensive report of the agent's strengths and weaknesses over the entire selling process.

"We currently have over 200 agents at our company and more coming on board every day to work from the four offices we operate now, and the two new offices we will be filling," said Cobb, director of career development at John R. Wood Realtors. "The simulator is critical to the future success of these agents because it tells them where they need to improve. We will work with them to focus their training in these areas, as well as to help them leverage their strengths.

"The Real Estate Simulator has been used by thousands of agents across North America," said Kim Ades, president of Upward Motion, who developed the program. "We have found a strong correlation between the performance of top agents and the high scores on the simulator."