# Technology,
## People **and** Vision:
## A Recipe for Real Estate Success

*By Beth Bresnahan*

I t's day one of business—and the phones aren't ringing. Specifically, agents aren't yet calling to sign up with Touchstone Real Estate Group in Bakersfield, California. But that's just fine for its senior vice-president and broker, Kevin Keller.

Where other broker groups might panic at the apparent silence, Keller is not. For the last several months, he's been carefully planning for this day and the challenges that lay ahead. His vision is clear, his determination unshakable: "Touchstone will be the Ritz Carlton of real estate groups—a model for companies throughout the industry."

## Balancing the New and the Traditional

How will Keller and his team achieve this ambitious goal? Touchstone is adopting leading-edge practices and technologies that he's invented, discovered and refined during 26 years of managing and building real estate success.

At the same time, Touchstone will distinguish itself—in an industry where competitiveness can quickly turn nasty—by going back to basics: Kevin is focusing on agents. "We're committed to improving the lives of our agents. They generate the revenues." Keller stresses, "So, we're going to make sure they have the tools, resources and skills needed to be successful."

## The Reality in Realty

Kevin's considerable experience tells him that the path to real estate success actually starts with hiring the right agents. A great deal of any real estate group's effort is spent on recruiting, screening and training agents. The industry average is somewhere around 50% turnover. That means that half of the agents hired, trained and put in front of existing or prospective clients aren't going to be around in a year. In fact, that expectation has led some firms to take a mass production approach to agents. The reasoning is simple: get more people in the system because so many people won't survive.

However, the impact of this approach on the top and bottom lines is drastic. If a real estate group is only operating at 50% of its potential, the firm won't reach aggressive revenue targets that could otherwise be achieved. And, unless costs are both predictable and kept low, cash flow problems will result.

## Rethinking Recruitment

Keller confides: "Touchstone is making an investment in recruitment today that every real estate group could easily make. Last year, something caught my eye in National Relocation & Real Estate magazine. It was a story about a technology called Real Estate Simulator—developed by a firm called Upward Motion—that helps accurately identify and measure the strengths and weaknesses of real estate agents' skills. I was intrigued." Keller dropped by Upward Motion's display booth at the most recent National Association of Realtors Conference in San Francisco.

After that he was hooked. In fact, he bought the Simulator on the spot. "It didn't take long to see that the Real Estate Simulator would soon be an industry standard. It's going to help us reduce our recruitment expenses as well as focus our training and retention dollars." Keller adds, "I knew that it would work because it didn't feel like a program. It felt like the real world."

That feeling results because the program draws upon thousands of hours of actual real estate selling scenarios. This likely contributes to why Keller's prophecy seems to be coming true: the Real Estate Simulator has been embraced by brokers of all sizes across the United States.

## Day Sixty

By day 60, Keller expects that his team of agents will be the "cream of the crop" largely due to the efficiency and effectiveness of Real Estate Simulator. Keller comments, "The program will allow us to choose the best agents, identify areas where their skills can be honed and constantly keep our agents sharp. In the process, we'll have saved considerable time and money interviewing and training. We'll keep our agents longer and happier." And for Keller that means Touchstone will likely be profitable sooner than anyone might have imagined back on day one.