

# Real estate: It's an education

**W**ithout doubt, the real estate industry is a true profession. Many salespeople call themselves professionals in many other fields, but few can aspire to the professional status that real estate has afforded so many of us.

In my own case, real estate has provided me with an opportunity that was not available to me as a youth, due to my own choosing. The other night, I was thinking of the honor of working with and teaching third-year law students at Osgoode Hall, at York University. Here I was, a Grade 10 throw out, who has become a mature real estate professional.

My own story is not unique. I was the kind of kid that you wouldn't want your kids to play with—in lots of trouble in school and hating what I felt were prison conditions. Those of you who grew up in the confines of the uptight '50s and '60s can remember the regimented school system. At 17, I was finished with school—or

## THE LEBOW REPORT



BY BARRY A. LEBOW

so I thought. I did many things over the next years.

I worked in stores, later became a gopher for a ladies' wear wholesaler, and when the buyer of 20 years quit, at 18 I became a buyer. By 19, I wanted to be where the action was and became a very young commercial traveler, selling ladies' wear.

In 1967, Israel was at war and I was stirred. The media of day convinced the world that Israel would be wiped out and I couldn't

sit back, so I left Canada. Arriving just after the Six Day War, I served in the Israeli Tank Corp. After a year, a new maturity was developed that only a wartime army can impart. I married my corporal (yes, she was a woman and we are still together, 26 years and two kids later) and later due to health problems I was discharged and came back to Canada with no education, little money and a wife. I immediately went back on the road, as a travelling salesman, but something was missing.

Luck stepped in. A man whom I admired told me straight: "I've been in the fashion industry for over 20 years and if I were you, I would go back to school and learn a profession." The very next day someone told me about real estate. After a week of school, one had to pass an exam, and then make some big dollars.

Well, I quit my job. I went to school, after vowing never to return to a classroom. This was really unusual, though, because I

really loved it. Tom Dowling, a Realtor and appraiser from Burlington, Ont. was the most enthusiastic teacher I had ever encountered. He didn't just teach the basics, he injected us with his enthusiasm. I felt excited for the first time in years. I eventually got my license and went to work for a broker who specialized in new houses and resale backups.

At 22, after one year in the business, I had sold 100 houses and made more money than I could have in five years in the fashion industry. I was hooked. At the same time, I had the luck to meet some of the better salespeople and brokers in the city. Some had FRI after their names and I was intrigued. Ontario in 1969 was just starting new courses for brokers and I was one of the first students at the courses. Many of Canada's now-leading real estate people were in class with me at that time.

I was learning and absorbing. There were not enough books on real estate to satisfy my appetite. Eventually I took courses at many institutes, earning many professional designations. I was espe-

cially proud of becoming a teacher with the Ontario Real Estate Association and later the Ontario Mortgage Brokers Association.

With virtually no high school education, I was now teaching. What a wondrous opportunity the real estate industry bestowed upon me.

After running away from school in my youth, I have not been out of the classroom for more than six months since 1968. Yes, as I write I have two more courses ahead of me within the next year and I am still teaching mortgage brokers.

Can anyone tell me about any other sales career that can give one the education that real estate can afford? I have looked around and cannot find any. Oh sure, some have courses, but not to the extent of real estate. The one negative about too much education is that one becomes intellectually retarded. You can easily become a cynic who sees all of the negatives and few of the opportunities. Education should enhance, not disable one's career.

I have worked on many committees, with various organizations and groups, from the real estate board, to directorships of

other organizations. I have learned more from the people with whom I associated than any school could have ever provided. If you want a lot out of real estate, phone your local board or association and volunteer for a committee.

It will change your life and if you have no time, make it. It has been my experience that some of the top professionals are the most active members.

So, here I am at 46, already having spent over 25 years in real estate. As an appraiser at this point in my career, life is not as exciting as when I was on the street selling, but it is probably time to move on again. The beauty of having the education in real estate is that one can change careers and never leave his industry.

For you, the reader, take courses, learn to teach, sit on committees, become leaders in the field. Take advantage of one of the educational fields in the world - organized real estate.

Until next time.

*Barry A. Lebow, FRI, CRI, SCMF, CRA, is a professional land economist, arbitrator and mediator, and president of the Society of Mortgage Finance of Canada. ■*