

# Nobody wants to be an estate agent

Adam J Walker reflects on the woeful reputation of estate agency as a career.

One of my daughters, who is in her final year at university, recently asked me to speak at their careers fair. During the day, I listened to some great presentations from bankers, law firms, teachers, social workers and a variety of blue chip companies from every conceivable business sector all extolling the joys of a career in their sector. I was, however, the only estate agent there.

I started my session by asking if anyone had ever considered a career in estate agency. Not a single person raised their hand. I then asked them what they knew about estate agency and the answers that I got back were a parody of what estate agents really do. I couldn't have had a more hostile audience if I had been trying to sell them a career in prostitution. This made me feel terribly sad.

I have earned my living from the estate agency sector for thirty-five years during which time I have met tens of thousands of estate agents from hundreds of different companies. I think estate agency offers a fabulous career opportunity for young people of all levels of ability. It is interesting, varied, worthwhile and well paid. Above all, it is a meritocracy which gives capable people an opportunity to progress to the very top more quickly than almost any other career.

Despite this, I don't remember meeting anyone who has told me that they have always wanted to be an estate agent. Vets, teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, graphic designers, almost every other profession has its share of people who have wanted to pursue that career since they were three years old. But estate agency is full of people who just sort of drifted into it by accident. This strikes me as the most terrible shame and I believe that as a profession, we have a duty to sell the benefits of a career in estate agency far more effectively.

## RECRUITMENT

A few of my clients have made a start. Knight Frank has a graduate entry scheme which is oversubscribed many times over. I met some of their recruits on a recent training course and they were possibly the most outstanding group of trainees that I have ever met. Many of them had First Class Degrees from leading universities and all of them had a real passion for the property sector. I have no doubt that all of them will go on to do great things



“They would have been less hostile if I'd been suggesting a career in prostitution.”

in the industry.

Romans have a proactive recruitment programme and close links with local schools, colleges and the community. They also have an excellent training and induction programme designed to turn raw recruits into productive sales people quickly and efficiently. I have worked with Romans for many years and it has been a real privilege to see people who started out as trainees and have now progressed to run a major office of their own.

So what can you do to sell the benefits of a career in estate agency and why should you want to do so? There are many opportunities to get involved: local schools, colleges and universities are always looking for people to speak at their careers events.

You might also consider offering work experience placements to young people. These have been increasingly hard to arrange in recent years largely to do with the bureaucracy of health and safety regulations. However, they are terribly worthwhile for both employers and the young people.

An article in the local newspaper or a feature on local radio about the benefits of a career in estate agency would be good general PR for your firm and might be much more cost effective than a conventional job advertisement. Finally, don't forget the government Young Apprenticeships Scheme which gives young people a great opportunity to combine real work experience with part-time study for a relevant qualification such as an NVQ.

## BENEFITS

The benefits to your business can be enormous. An enthusiastic capable young person can have a positive impact on the morale and performance of the whole office. One of my clients recently took on an eighteen-year-old apprentice who generated more fee income during their first month than the senior negotiator!

The cost of employing a young person is far less than the cost of taking on an experienced estate agent and many young people will repay you for giving them a start in the industry through great loyalty to your business in years to come.

Adam Walker is a management consultant and business transfer agent who has specialised in the property sector for twenty-five years. [www.adamjwalker](http://www.adamjwalker)