

**2024**  
**Ethics Seminar**  
**Student Manual**

**Williamsburg Area Association of REALTORS®**



# NAME THAT ARTICLE!

Review the conduct below and select the correct Article from the 2024 Code of Ethics

1. Sue contacted a cooperating broker's exclusively represented seller client directly after the seller rejected her buyer client's offer.
  - Article 3
  - Article 17
  - Article 6
  - Article 16
  
2. Barry refused to answer questions of the hearing panel at a professional standards hearing
  - Article 16
  - Article 14
  - Article 4
  - Article 1
  
3. Frank completed an appraisal for the property he was managing without disclosing to the purchaser or the owner that he both managed the property and was appraising the property
  - Article 3
  - Article 4
  - Article 5
  - Article 6
  
4. Sally suggested to a buyer that one of her listings was priced too high and revealed that the seller was motivated to sell
  - Article 2
  - Article 7
  - Article 1
  - Article 8
  
5. Ron accepted a commission from the seller and a separate finder's fee from the buyer without either party's knowledge
  - Article 9
  - Article 8
  - Article 7
  - Article 6
  
6. Tim represented that the house he exclusively listed was connected to the city sewer system when in fact it had a septic system
  - Article 1
  - Article 2
  - Article 3
  - Article 4

7. Tammy accepted a listing where the seller instructed her, and she agreed, to only show and market the property to people of the same race as the seller
- Article 11
  - Article 12
  - Article 10
  - Article 13
8. Tony fails to extend a home sale contingency for his buyer and, upon the buyer's home selling, the seller refuses to honor the contract because no written contingency extension exists
- Article 1
  - Article 9
  - Article 13
  - Article 15
9. Sam refuses to arbitrate an arbitration request classified by the association as mandatory, instead filing litigation over the dispute
- Article 14
  - Article 15
  - Article 16
  - Article 17
10. James registered and is using a domain name that is similar to a competitor's company name with a slight misspelling.
- Article 4
  - Article 6
  - Article 12
  - Article 8
11. Sharon failed to disclose to the seller that the purchaser was her mother
- Article 2
  - Article 4
  - Article 6
  - Article 8
12. Keith recommended his lawn care service to real estate clients without disclosing his interest in the business
- Article 2
  - Article 10
  - Article 9
  - Article 6

13. Barry created a contract addendum for a 1031 exchange and advised the seller that it was a waste of money to have it reviewed by their attorney
- Article 4
  - Article 14
  - Article 13
  - Article 2
14. Carol, with no commercial experience, assisted a buyer in a commercial transaction without informing the buyer about her lack of experience or obtaining assistance from someone with commercial expertise
- Article 3
  - Article 6
  - Article 9
  - Article 11
15. Adam did not initially tell a broker seeking cooperation that there was an accepted offer on his listing that was contingent upon another buyer's home selling; Adam only disclosed the accepted offer when the cooperating broker submitted an offer.
- Article 15
  - Article 2
  - Article 3
  - Article 16
16. David didn't think a buyer's offer would be accepted right away so he placed the deposit in his own personal account.
- Article 9
  - Article 8
  - Article 7
  - Article 6
17. Sydney tells a potential seller that a competing company never qualifies buyers and the majority of that company's transactions fall through.
- Article 1
  - Article 5
  - Article 10
  - Article 15

# CODE OF ETHICS AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

Effective January 1, 2024



Where the word REALTORS® is used in this Code and Preamble, it shall be deemed to include REALTOR ASSOCIATE®s.

While the Code of Ethics establishes obligations that may be higher than those mandated by law, in any instance where the Code of Ethics and the law conflict, the obligations of the law must take precedence.

## Preamble

Under all is the land. Upon its wise utilization and widely allocated ownership depend the survival and growth of free institutions and of our civilization. REALTORS® should recognize that the interests of the nation and its citizens require the highest and best use of the land and the widest distribution of land ownership. They require the creation of adequate housing, the building of functioning cities, the development of productive industries and farms, and the preservation of a healthful environment.

Such interests impose obligations beyond those of ordinary commerce. They impose grave social responsibility and a patriotic duty to which REALTORS® should dedicate themselves, and for which they should be diligent in preparing themselves. REALTORS®, therefore, are zealous to maintain and improve the standards of their calling and share with their fellow REALTORS® a common responsibility for its integrity and honor.

In recognition and appreciation of their obligations to clients, customers, the public, and each other, REALTORS® continuously strive to become and remain informed on issues affecting real estate and, as knowledgeable professionals, they willingly share the fruit of their experience and study with others. They identify and take steps, through enforcement of this Code of Ethics and by assisting appropriate regulatory bodies, to eliminate practices which may damage the public or which might discredit or bring dishonor to the real estate profession. REALTORS® having direct personal knowledge of conduct that may violate the Code of Ethics involving misappropriation of client or customer funds or property, willful discrimination, or fraud resulting in substantial economic harm, bring such matters to the attention of the appropriate Board or Association of REALTORS®. (Amended 1/00)

Realizing that cooperation with other real estate professionals promotes the best interests of those who utilize their services, REALTORS® urge exclusive representation of clients; do not attempt to gain any unfair advantage over their competitors; and they refrain from making unsolicited comments about other practitioners. In instances where their opinion is sought, or where REALTORS® believe that comment is necessary, their opinion is offered in an objective, professional manner, uninfluenced by any personal motivation or potential advantage or gain.

The term REALTOR® has come to connote competency, fairness, and high integrity resulting from adherence to a lofty ideal of moral conduct in business relations. No inducement of profit and no instruction from clients ever can justify departure from this ideal.

In the interpretation of this obligation, REALTORS® can take no safer guide than that which has been handed down through the centuries, embodied in the Golden Rule, "Whatsoever ye would that others should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Accepting this standard as their own, REALTORS® pledge to observe its spirit in all of their activities whether conducted personally, through associates or others, or via technological means, and to conduct their business in accordance with the tenets set forth below. (Amended 1/07)

## Duties to Clients and Customers

### Article 1

When representing a buyer, seller, landlord, tenant, or other client as an agent, REALTORS® pledge themselves to protect and promote the interests of their client. This obligation to the client is primary, but it does not relieve REALTORS® of their obligation to treat all parties honestly. When serving a buyer, seller, landlord, tenant or other party in a non-agency capacity, REALTORS® remain obligated to treat all parties honestly. (Amended 1/01)

- **Standard of Practice 1-1**

REALTORS®, when acting as principals in a real estate transaction, remain obligated by the duties imposed by the Code of Ethics. (Amended 1/93)

- **Standard of Practice 1-2**

The duties imposed by the Code of Ethics encompass all real estate-related activities and transactions whether conducted in person, electronically, or through any other means.

The duties the Code of Ethics imposes are applicable whether REALTORS® are acting as agents or in legally recognized non-agency capacities except that any duty imposed exclusively on agents by law or regulation shall not be imposed by this Code of Ethics on REALTORS® acting in non-agency capacities.

As used in this Code of Ethics, "client" means the person(s) or entity(ies) with whom a REALTOR® or a REALTOR®'s firm has an agency or legally recognized non-agency relationship; "customer" means a party to a real estate transaction who receives information, services, or benefits but has no contractual relationship with the REALTOR® or the REALTOR®'s firm; "prospect" means a purchaser, seller, tenant, or landlord who is not subject to a representation relationship with the REALTOR® or REALTOR®'s firm; "agent" means a real estate licensee (including brokers and sales associates) acting in an agency relationship as defined by state law or regulation; and "broker" means a real estate licensee (including brokers and sales associates) acting as an agent or in a legally recognized non-agency capacity. (Adopted 1/95, Amended 1/07)

- **Standard of Practice 1-3**

REALTORS®, in attempting to secure a listing, shall not deliberately mislead the owner as to market value.

- **Standard of Practice 1-4**  
REALTORS®, when seeking to become a buyer/tenant representative, shall not mislead buyers or tenants as to savings or other benefits that might be realized through use of the REALTOR®'s services. (Amended 1/93)
- **Standard of Practice 1-5**  
REALTORS® may represent the seller/landlord and buyer/tenant in the same transaction only after full disclosure to and with informed consent of both parties. (Adopted 1/93)
- **Standard of Practice 1-6**  
REALTORS® shall submit offers and counter-offers objectively and as quickly as possible. (Adopted 1/93, Amended 1/95)
- **Standard of Practice 1-7**  
When acting as listing brokers, REALTORS® shall continue to submit to the seller/landlord all offers and counter-offers until closing or execution of a lease unless the seller/landlord has waived this obligation in writing. Upon the written request of a cooperating broker who submits an offer to the listing broker, the listing broker shall provide, as soon as practical, a written affirmation to the cooperating broker stating that the offer has been submitted to the seller/landlord, or a written notification that the seller/landlord has waived the obligation to have the offer presented. REALTORS® shall not be obligated to continue to market the property after an offer has been accepted by the seller/landlord. REALTORS® shall recommend that sellers/landlords obtain the advice of legal counsel prior to acceptance of a subsequent offer except where the acceptance is contingent on the termination of the pre-existing purchase contract or lease. (Amended 1/20)
- **Standard of Practice 1-8**  
REALTORS®, acting as agents or brokers of buyers/tenants, shall submit to buyers/tenants all offers and counter-offers until acceptance but have no obligation to continue to show properties to their clients after an offer has been accepted unless otherwise agreed in writing. Upon the written request of the listing broker who submits a counter-offer to the buyer's/tenant's broker, the buyer's/tenant's broker shall provide, as soon as practical, a written affirmation to the listing broker stating that the counter-offer has been submitted to the buyers/tenants, or a written notification that the buyers/tenants have waived the obligation to have the counter-offer presented. REALTORS®, acting as agents or brokers of buyers/tenants, shall recommend that buyers/tenants obtain the advice of legal counsel if there is a question as to whether a pre-existing contract has been terminated. (Adopted 1/93, Amended 1/22)
- **Standard of Practice 1-9**  
The obligation of REALTORS® to preserve confidential information (as defined by state law) provided by their clients in the course of any agency relationship or non-agency relationship recognized by law continues after termination of agency relationships or any non-agency relationships recognized by law. REALTORS® shall not knowingly, during or following the termination of professional relationships with their clients:
  - 1) reveal confidential information of clients; or
  - 2) use confidential information of clients to the disadvantage of clients; or
  - 3) use confidential information of clients for the REALTOR®'s advantage or the advantage of third parties unless:
    - a) clients consent after full disclosure; or
    - b) REALTORS® are required by court order; or
    - c) it is the intention of a client to commit a crime and the information is necessary to prevent the crime; or
    - d) it is necessary to defend a REALTOR® or the REALTOR®'s employees or associates against an accusation of wrongful conduct.

Information concerning latent material defects is not considered confidential information under this Code of Ethics. (Adopted 1/93, Amended 1/01)
- **Standard of Practice 1-10**  
REALTORS® shall, consistent with the terms and conditions of their real estate licensure and their property management agreement, competently manage the property of clients with due regard for the rights, safety and health of tenants and others lawfully on the premises. (Adopted 1/95, Amended 1/00)
- **Standard of Practice 1-11**  
REALTORS® who are employed to maintain or manage a client's property shall exercise due diligence and make reasonable efforts to protect it against reasonably foreseeable contingencies and losses. (Adopted 1/95)
- **Standard of Practice 1-12**  
When entering into listing contracts, REALTORS® must advise sellers/landlords of:
  - 1) the REALTOR®'s company policies regarding cooperation and the amount(s) of any compensation that will be offered to subagents, buyer/tenant agents, and/or brokers acting in legally recognized non-agency capacities;
  - 2) the fact that buyer/tenant agents or brokers, even if compensated by listing brokers, or by sellers/landlords may represent the interests of buyers/tenants; and
  - 3) any potential for listing brokers to act as disclosed dual agents, e.g., buyer/tenant agents. (Adopted 1/93, Renumbered 1/98, Amended 1/03)
- **Standard of Practice 1-13**  
When entering into buyer/tenant agreements, REALTORS® must advise potential clients of:
  - 1) the REALTOR®'s company policies regarding cooperation;
  - 2) the amount of compensation to be paid by the client;
  - 3) the potential for additional or offsetting compensation from other brokers, from the seller or landlord, or from other parties;
  - 4) any potential for the buyer/tenant representative to act as a disclosed dual agent, e.g., listing broker, subagent, landlord's agent, etc.; and
  - 5) the possibility that sellers or sellers' representatives may not treat the existence, terms, or conditions of offers as confidential unless confidentiality is required by law, regulation, or by any confidentiality agreement between the parties. (Adopted 1/93, Renumbered 1/98, Amended 1/06)
- **Standard of Practice 1-14**  
Fees for preparing appraisals or other valuations shall not be contingent upon the amount of the appraisal or valuation. (Adopted 1/02)
- **Standard of Practice 1-15**  
REALTORS®, in response to inquiries from buyers or cooperating brokers shall, with the sellers' approval, disclose the existence of offers on the property. Where disclosure is authorized, REALTORS® shall also disclose, if asked, whether offers were obtained by the listing licensee, another licensee in the listing firm, or by a cooperating broker. (Adopted 1/03, Amended 1/09)
- **Standard of Practice 1-16**  
REALTORS® shall not access or use, or permit or enable others to access or use, listed or managed property on terms or conditions other than those authorized by the owner or seller. (Adopted 1/12)

## Article 2

REALTORS® shall avoid exaggeration, misrepresentation, or concealment of pertinent facts relating to the property or the transaction. REALTORS® shall not, however, be obligated to discover latent defects in the property, to advise on matters outside the scope of their real estate license, or to disclose facts which are confidential under the scope of agency or non-agency relationships as defined by state law. (Amended 1/00)

- **Standard of Practice 2-1**  
REALTORS® shall only be obligated to discover and disclose adverse factors reasonably apparent to someone with expertise in those areas required by their real estate licensing authority. Article 2 does not impose upon the REALTOR® the obligation of expertise in other professional or technical disciplines. (Amended 1/96)
- **Standard of Practice 2-2**  
(Renumbered as Standard of Practice 1-12 1/98)
- **Standard of Practice 2-3**  
(Renumbered as Standard of Practice 1-13 1/98)
- **Standard of Practice 2-4**  
REALTORS® shall not be parties to the naming of a false consideration in any document, unless it be the naming of an obviously nominal consideration.
- **Standard of Practice 2-5**  
Factors defined as “non-material” by law or regulation or which are expressly referenced in law or regulation as not being subject to disclosure are considered not “pertinent” for purposes of Article 2. (Adopted 1/93)

## Article 3

REALTORS® shall cooperate with other brokers except when cooperation is not in the client’s best interest. The obligation to cooperate does not include the obligation to share commissions, fees, or to otherwise compensate another broker. (Amended 1/95)

- **Standard of Practice 3-1**  
REALTORS®, acting as exclusive agents or brokers of sellers/landlords, establish the terms and conditions of offers to cooperate. Unless expressly indicated in offers to cooperate, cooperating brokers may not assume that the offer of cooperation includes an offer of compensation. Terms of compensation, if any, shall be ascertained by cooperating brokers before beginning efforts to accept the offer of cooperation. (Amended 1/99)
- **Standard of Practice 3-2**  
Any change in compensation offered for cooperative services must be communicated to the other REALTOR® prior to the time that REALTOR® submits an offer to purchase/lease the property. After a REALTOR® has submitted an offer to purchase or lease property, the listing broker may not attempt to unilaterally modify the offered compensation with respect to that cooperative transaction. (Amended 1/14)
- **Standard of Practice 3-3**  
Standard of Practice 3-2 does not preclude the listing broker and cooperating broker from entering into an agreement to change cooperative compensation. (Adopted 1/94)
- **Standard of Practice 3-4**  
REALTORS®, acting as listing brokers, have an affirmative obligation to disclose the existence of dual or variable rate commission arrangements (i.e., listings where one amount of commission is payable if the listing broker’s firm is the procuring cause of sale/lease and a different amount of commission is payable if the sale/lease results through the efforts of the seller/landlord or a cooperating broker). The listing broker shall, as soon as practical, disclose the existence of such arrangements to potential cooperating brokers and shall, in response to inquiries from cooperating brokers, disclose the differential that would result in a cooperative transaction or in a sale/lease that results through the efforts of the seller/landlord. If the cooperating broker is a buyer/tenant representative, the buyer/tenant representative must disclose such information to their client before the client makes an offer to purchase or lease. (Amended 1/02)
- **Standard of Practice 3-5**  
It is the obligation of subagents to promptly disclose all pertinent facts to the principal’s agent prior to as well as after a purchase or lease agreement is executed. (Amended 1/93)

- **Standard of Practice 3-6**  
REALTORS® shall disclose the existence of accepted offers, including offers with unresolved contingencies, to any broker seeking cooperation. (Adopted 5/86, Amended 1/04)
- **Standard of Practice 3-7**  
When seeking information from another REALTOR® concerning property under a management or listing agreement, REALTORS® shall disclose their REALTOR® status and whether their interest is personal or on behalf of a client and, if on behalf of a client, their relationship with the client. (Amended 1/11)
- **Standard of Practice 3-8**  
REALTORS® shall not misrepresent the availability of access to show or inspect a listed property. (Amended 11/87)
- **Standard of Practice 3-9**  
REALTORS® shall not provide access to listed property on terms other than those established by the owner or the seller. (Adopted 1/10, Amended 1/23)
- **Standard of Practice 3-10**  
The duty to cooperate established in Article 3 relates to the obligation to share information on listed property, and to make property available to other brokers for showing to prospective purchasers/tenants when it is in the best interests of sellers/landlords. (Adopted 1/11)
- **Standard of Practice 3-11**  
REALTORS® may not refuse to cooperate on the basis of a broker’s race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity. (Adopted 1/20, Amended 1/23)

## Article 4

REALTORS® shall not acquire an interest in or buy or present offers from themselves, any member of their immediate families, their firms or any member thereof, or any entities in which they have any ownership interest, any real property without making their true position known to the owner or the owner’s agent or broker. In selling property they own, or in which they have any interest, REALTORS® shall reveal their ownership or interest in writing to the purchaser or the purchaser’s representative. (Amended 1/00)

- **Standard of Practice 4-1**  
For the protection of all parties, the disclosures required by Article 4 shall be in writing and provided by REALTORS® prior to the signing of any contract. (Adopted 2/86)

## Article 5

REALTORS® shall not undertake to provide professional services concerning a property or its value where they have a present or contemplated interest unless such interest is specifically disclosed to all affected parties.

## Article 6

REALTORS® shall not accept any commission, rebate, or profit on expenditures made for their client, without the client’s knowledge and consent.

When recommending real estate products or services (e.g., homeowner’s insurance, warranty programs, mortgage financing, title insurance, etc.), REALTORS® shall disclose to the client or customer to whom the recommendation is made any financial benefits or fees, other than real estate referral fees, the REALTOR® or REALTOR®’s firm may receive as a direct result of such recommendation. (Amended 1/99)

- **Standard of Practice 6-1**  
REALTORS® shall not recommend or suggest to a client or a customer the use of services of another organization or business entity in which they have a direct interest without disclosing such interest at the time of the recommendation or suggestion. (Amended 5/88)

## Article 7

In a transaction, REALTORS® shall not accept compensation from more than one party, even if permitted by law, without disclosure



to all parties and the informed consent of the REALTOR®'s client or clients. (Amended 1/93)

## Article 8

REALTORS® shall keep in a special account in an appropriate financial institution, separated from their own funds, monies coming into their possession in trust for other persons, such as escrows, trust funds, clients' monies, and other like items.

## Article 9

REALTORS®, for the protection of all parties, shall assure whenever possible that all agreements related to real estate transactions including, but not limited to, listing and representation agreements, purchase contracts, and leases are in writing in clear and understandable language expressing the specific terms, conditions, obligations and commitments of the parties. A copy of each agreement shall be furnished to each party to such agreements upon their signing or initialing. (Amended 1/04)

### • Standard of Practice 9-1

For the protection of all parties, REALTORS® shall use reasonable care to ensure that documents pertaining to the purchase, sale, or lease of real estate are kept current through the use of written extensions or amendments. (Amended 1/93)

### • Standard of Practice 9-2

When assisting or enabling a client or customer in establishing a contractual relationship (e.g., listing and representation agreements, purchase agreements, leases, etc.) electronically, REALTORS® shall make reasonable efforts to explain the nature and disclose the specific terms of the contractual relationship being established prior to it being agreed to by a contracting party. (Adopted 1/07)

## Duties to the Public

## Article 10

REALTORS® shall not deny equal professional services to any person for reasons of race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity. REALTORS® shall not be parties to any plan or agreement to discriminate against a person or persons on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity. (Amended 1/23)

REALTORS®, in their real estate employment practices, shall not discriminate against any person or persons on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity. (Amended 1/23)

### • Standard of Practice 10-1

When involved in the sale or lease of a residence, REALTORS® shall not volunteer information regarding the racial, religious or ethnic composition of any neighborhood nor shall they engage in any activity which may result in panic selling, however, REALTORS® may provide other demographic information. (Adopted 1/94, Amended 1/06)

### • Standard of Practice 10-2

When not involved in the sale or lease of a residence, REALTORS® may provide demographic information related to a property, transaction or professional assignment to a party if such demographic information is (a) deemed by the REALTOR® to be needed to assist with or complete, in a manner consistent with Article 10, a real estate transaction or professional assignment and (b) is obtained or derived from a recognized, reliable, independent, and impartial source. The source of such information and any additions, deletions, modifications, interpretations, or other changes shall be disclosed in reasonable detail. (Adopted 1/05, Renumbered 1/06)

### • Standard of Practice 10-3

REALTORS® shall not print, display or circulate any statement or advertisement with respect to selling or renting of a property that indicates any preference, limitations or discrimination based

on race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity. (Adopted 1/94, Renumbered 1/05 and 1/06, Amended 1/23)

### • Standard of Practice 10-4

As used in Article 10 "real estate employment practices" relates to employees and independent contractors providing real estate-related services and the administrative and clerical staff directly supporting those individuals. (Adopted 1/00, Renumbered 1/05 and 1/06)

### • Standard of Practice 10-5

REALTORS® must not use harassing speech, hate speech, epithets, or slurs based on race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity. (Adopted and effective November 13, 2020, Amended 1/23)

## Article 11

The services which REALTORS® provide to their clients and customers shall conform to the standards of practice and competence which are reasonably expected in the specific real estate disciplines in which they engage; specifically, residential real estate brokerage, real property management, commercial and industrial real estate brokerage, land brokerage, real estate appraisal, real estate counseling, real estate syndication, real estate auction, and international real estate.

REALTORS® shall not undertake to provide specialized professional services concerning a type of property or service that is outside their field of competence unless they engage the assistance of one who is competent on such types of property or service, or unless the facts are fully disclosed to the client. Any persons engaged to provide such assistance shall be so identified to the client and their contribution to the assignment should be set forth. (Amended 1/10)

### • Standard of Practice 11-1

When REALTORS® prepare opinions of real property value or price they must:

- 1) be knowledgeable about the type of property being valued,
- 2) have access to the information and resources necessary to formulate an accurate opinion, and
- 3) be familiar with the area where the subject property is located

unless lack of any of these is disclosed to the party requesting the opinion in advance.

When an opinion of value or price is prepared other than in pursuit of a listing or to assist a potential purchaser in formulating a purchase offer, the opinion shall include the following unless the party requesting the opinion requires a specific type of report or different data set:

- 1) identification of the subject property
- 2) date prepared
- 3) defined value or price
- 4) limiting conditions, including statements of purpose(s) and intended user(s)
- 5) any present or contemplated interest, including the possibility of representing the seller/landlord or buyers/tenants
- 6) basis for the opinion, including applicable market data
- 7) if the opinion is not an appraisal, a statement to that effect
- 8) disclosure of whether and when a physical inspection of the property's exterior was conducted
- 9) disclosure of whether and when a physical inspection of the property's interior was conducted
- 10) disclosure of whether the REALTOR® has any conflicts of interest (Amended 1/14)

### • Standard of Practice 11-2

The obligations of the Code of Ethics in respect of real estate disciplines other than appraisal shall be interpreted and applied in accordance with the standards of competence and practice which



clients and the public reasonably require to protect their rights and interests considering the complexity of the transaction, the availability of expert assistance, and, where the REALTOR® is an agent or subagent, the obligations of a fiduciary. (Adopted 1/95)

• **Standard of Practice 11-3**

When REALTORS® provide consultative services to clients which involve advice or counsel for a fee (not a commission), such advice shall be rendered in an objective manner and the fee shall not be contingent on the substance of the advice or counsel given. If brokerage or transaction services are to be provided in addition to consultative services, a separate compensation may be paid with prior agreement between the client and REALTOR®. (Adopted 1/96)

• **Standard of Practice 11-4**

The competency required by Article 11 relates to services contracted for between REALTORS® and their clients or customers; the duties expressly imposed by the Code of Ethics; and the duties imposed by law or regulation. (Adopted 1/02)

## Article 12

REALTORS® shall be honest and truthful in their real estate communications and shall present a true picture in their advertising, marketing, and other representations. REALTORS® shall ensure that their status as real estate professionals is readily apparent in their advertising, marketing, and other representations, and that the recipients of all real estate communications are, or have been, notified that those communications are from a real estate professional. (Amended 1/08)

• **Standard of Practice 12-1**

REALTORS® must not represent that their brokerage services to a client or customer are free or available at no cost to their clients, unless the REALTOR® will receive no financial compensation from any source for those services. (Amended 1/22)

• **Standard of Practice 12-2**

(Deleted 1/20)

• **Standard of Practice 12-3**

The offering of premiums, prizes, merchandise discounts or other inducements to list, sell, purchase, or lease is not, in itself, unethical even if receipt of the benefit is contingent on listing, selling, purchasing, or leasing through the REALTOR® making the offer. However, REALTORS® must exercise care and candor in any such advertising or other public or private representations so that any party interested in receiving or otherwise benefiting from the REALTOR®'s offer will have clear, thorough, advance understanding of all the terms and conditions of the offer. The offering of any inducements to do business is subject to the limitations and restrictions of state law and the ethical obligations established by any applicable Standard of Practice. (Amended 1/95)

• **Standard of Practice 12-4**

REALTORS® shall not offer for sale/lease or advertise property without authority. When acting as listing brokers or as subagents, REALTORS® shall not quote a price different from that agreed upon with the seller/landlord. (Amended 1/93)

• **Standard of Practice 12-5**

REALTORS® shall not advertise nor permit any person employed by or affiliated with them to advertise real estate services or listed property in any medium (e.g., electronically, print, radio, television, etc.) without disclosing the name of that REALTOR®'s firm in a reasonable and readily apparent manner either in the advertisement or in electronic advertising via a link to a display with all required disclosures. (Adopted 11/86, Amended 1/16)

• **Standard of Practice 12-6**

REALTORS®, when advertising unlisted real property for sale/lease in which they have an ownership interest, shall disclose their status as both owners/landlords and as REALTORS® or real estate licensees. (Amended 1/93)

• **Standard of Practice 12-7**

Only REALTORS® who participated in the transaction as the listing broker or cooperating broker (selling broker) may claim to have "sold" the property. Prior to closing, a cooperating broker may post a "sold" sign only with the consent of the listing broker. (Amended 1/96)

• **Standard of Practice 12-8**

The obligation to present a true picture in representations to the public includes information presented, provided, or displayed on REALTORS®' websites. REALTORS® shall use reasonable efforts to ensure that information on their websites is current. When it becomes apparent that information on a REALTOR®'s website is no longer current or accurate, REALTORS® shall promptly take corrective action. (Adopted 1/07)

• **Standard of Practice 12-9**

REALTOR® firm websites shall disclose the firm's name and state(s) of licensure in a reasonable and readily apparent manner.

Websites of REALTORS® and non-member licensees affiliated with a REALTOR® firm shall disclose the firm's name and that REALTOR®'s or non-member licensee's state(s) of licensure in a reasonable and readily apparent manner. (Adopted 1/07)

• **Standard of Practice 12-10**

REALTORS®' obligation to present a true picture in their advertising and representations to the public includes Internet content, images, and the URLs and domain names they use, and prohibits REALTORS® from:

- 1) engaging in deceptive or unauthorized framing of real estate brokerage websites;
- 2) manipulating (e.g., presenting content developed by others) listing and other content in any way that produces a deceptive or misleading result;
- 3) deceptively using metatags, keywords or other devices/methods to direct, drive, or divert Internet traffic; or
- 4) presenting content developed by others without either attribution or without permission; or
- 5) otherwise misleading consumers, including use of misleading images. (Adopted 1/07, Amended 1/18)

• **Standard of Practice 12-11**

REALTORS® intending to share or sell consumer information gathered via the Internet shall disclose that possibility in a reasonable and readily apparent manner. (Adopted 1/07)

• **Standard of Practice 12-12**

REALTORS® shall not:

- 1) use URLs or domain names that present less than a true picture, or
- 2) register URLs or domain names which, if used, would present less than a true picture. (Adopted 1/08)

• **Standard of Practice 12-13**

The obligation to present a true picture in advertising, marketing, and representations allows REALTORS® to use and display only professional designations, certifications, and other credentials to which they are legitimately entitled. (Adopted 1/08)

## Article 13

REALTORS® shall not engage in activities that constitute the unauthorized practice of law and shall recommend that legal counsel be obtained when the interest of any party to the transaction requires it.

## Article 14

If charged with unethical practice or asked to present evidence or to cooperate in any other way, in any professional standards proceeding or investigation, REALTORS® shall place all pertinent facts before the proper tribunals of the Member Board or affiliated institute, society, or council in which membership is held and shall take no action to disrupt or obstruct such processes. (Amended 1/99)

- **Standard of Practice 14-1**  
REALTORS® shall not be subject to disciplinary proceedings in more than one Board of REALTORS® or affiliated institute, society, or council in which they hold membership with respect to alleged violations of the Code of Ethics relating to the same transaction or event. (Amended 1/95)
- **Standard of Practice 14-2**  
REALTORS® shall not make any unauthorized disclosure or dissemination of the allegations, findings, or decision developed in connection with an ethics hearing or appeal or in connection with an arbitration hearing or procedural review. (Amended 1/92)
- **Standard of Practice 14-3**  
REALTORS® shall not obstruct the Board's investigative or professional standards proceedings by instituting or threatening to institute actions for libel, slander, or defamation against any party to a professional standards proceeding or their witnesses based on the filing of an arbitration request, an ethics complaint, or testimony given before any tribunal. (Adopted 11/87, Amended 1/99)
- **Standard of Practice 14-4**  
REALTORS® shall not intentionally impede the Board's investigative or disciplinary proceedings by filing multiple ethics complaints based on the same event or transaction. (Adopted 11/88)

## Duties to REALTORS®

### Article 15

REALTORS® shall not knowingly or recklessly make false or misleading statements about other real estate professionals, their businesses, or their business practices. (Amended 1/12)

- **Standard of Practice 15-1**  
REALTORS® shall not knowingly or recklessly file false or unfounded ethics complaints. (Adopted 1/00)
- **Standard of Practice 15-2**  
The obligation to refrain from making false or misleading statements about other real estate professionals, their businesses, and their business practices includes the duty to not knowingly or recklessly publish, repeat, retransmit, or republish false or misleading statements made by others. This duty applies whether false or misleading statements are repeated in person, in writing, by technological means (e.g., the Internet), or by any other means. (Adopted 1/07, Amended 1/12)
- **Standard of Practice 15-3**  
The obligation to refrain from making false or misleading statements about other real estate professionals, their businesses, and their business practices includes the duty to publish a clarification about or to remove statements made by others on electronic media the REALTOR® controls once the REALTOR® knows the statement is false or misleading. (Adopted 1/10, Amended 1/12)

### Article 16

REALTORS® shall not engage in any practice or take any action inconsistent with exclusive representation or exclusive brokerage relationship agreements that other REALTORS® have with clients. (Amended 1/04)

- **Standard of Practice 16-1**  
Article 16 is not intended to prohibit aggressive or innovative business practices which are otherwise ethical and does not prohibit disagreements with other REALTORS® involving commission, fees, compensation or other forms of payment or expenses. (Adopted 1/93, Amended 1/95)
- **Standard of Practice 16-2**  
Article 16 does not preclude REALTORS® from making general announcements to prospects describing their services and the terms of their availability even though some recipients may have

entered into agency agreements or other exclusive relationships with another REALTOR®. A general telephone canvass, general mailing or distribution addressed to all prospects in a given geographical area or in a given profession, business, club, or organization, or other classification or group is deemed "general" for purposes of this standard. (Amended 1/04)

Article 16 is intended to recognize as unethical two basic types of solicitations:

First, telephone or personal solicitations of property owners who have been identified by a real estate sign, multiple listing compilation, or other information service as having exclusively listed their property with another REALTOR® and

Second, mail or other forms of written solicitations of prospects whose properties are exclusively listed with another REALTOR® when such solicitations are not part of a general mailing but are directed specifically to property owners identified through compilations of current listings, "for sale" or "for rent" signs, or other sources of information required by Article 3 and Multiple Listing Service rules to be made available to other REALTORS® under offers of subagency or cooperation. (Amended 1/04)

- **Standard of Practice 16-3**  
Article 16 does not preclude REALTORS® from contacting the client of another broker for the purpose of offering to provide, or entering into a contract to provide, a different type of real estate service unrelated to the type of service currently being provided (e.g., property management as opposed to brokerage) or from offering the same type of service for property not subject to other brokers' exclusive agreements. However, information received through a Multiple Listing Service or any other offer of cooperation may not be used to target clients of other REALTORS® to whom such offers to provide services may be made. (Amended 1/04)
- **Standard of Practice 16-4**  
REALTORS® shall not solicit a listing which is currently listed exclusively with another broker. However, if the listing broker, when asked by the REALTOR®, refuses to disclose the expiration date and nature of such listing, i.e., an exclusive right to sell, an exclusive agency, open listing, or other form of contractual agreement between the listing broker and the client, the REALTOR® may contact the owner to secure such information and may discuss the terms upon which the REALTOR® might take a future listing or, alternatively, may take a listing to become effective upon expiration of any existing exclusive listing. (Amended 1/94)
- **Standard of Practice 16-5**  
REALTORS® shall not solicit buyer/tenant agreements from buyers/ tenants who are subject to exclusive buyer/tenant agreements. However, if asked by a REALTOR®, the broker refuses to disclose the expiration date of the exclusive buyer/tenant agreement, the REALTOR® may contact the buyer/tenant to secure such information and may discuss the terms upon which the REALTOR® might enter into a future buyer/tenant agreement or, alternatively, may enter into a buyer/tenant agreement to become effective upon the expiration of any existing exclusive buyer/tenant agreement. (Adopted 1/94, Amended 1/98)
- **Standard of Practice 16-6**  
When REALTORS® are contacted by the client of another REALTOR® regarding the creation of an exclusive relationship to provide the same type of service, and REALTORS® have not directly or indirectly initiated such discussions, they may discuss the terms upon which they might enter into a future agreement or, alternatively, may enter into an agreement which becomes effective upon expiration of any existing exclusive agreement. (Amended 1/98)
- **Standard of Practice 16-7**  
The fact that a prospect has retained a REALTOR® as an exclusive representative or exclusive broker in one or more past transactions does not preclude other REALTORS® from seeking such prospect's future business. (Amended 1/04)

- **Standard of Practice 16-8**  
The fact that an exclusive agreement has been entered into with a REALTOR® shall not preclude or inhibit any other REALTOR® from entering into a similar agreement after the expiration of the prior agreement. (Amended 1/98)
- **Standard of Practice 16-9**  
REALTORS®, prior to entering into a representation agreement, have an affirmative obligation to make reasonable efforts to determine whether the prospect is subject to a current, valid exclusive agreement to provide the same type of real estate service. (Amended 1/04)
- **Standard of Practice 16-10**  
REALTORS®, acting as buyer or tenant representatives or brokers, shall disclose that relationship to the seller/landlord's representative or broker at first contact and shall provide written confirmation of that disclosure to the seller/landlord's representative or broker not later than execution of a purchase agreement or lease. (Amended 1/04)
- **Standard of Practice 16-11**  
On unlisted property, REALTORS® acting as buyer/tenant representatives or brokers shall disclose that relationship to the seller/landlord at first contact for that buyer/tenant and shall provide written confirmation of such disclosure to the seller/landlord not later than execution of any purchase or lease agreement. (Amended 1/04)  
  
REALTORS® shall make any request for anticipated compensation from the seller/landlord at first contact. (Amended 1/98)
- **Standard of Practice 16-12**  
REALTORS®, acting as representatives or brokers of sellers/landlords or as subagents of listing brokers, shall disclose that relationship to buyers/tenants as soon as practicable and shall provide written confirmation of such disclosure to buyers/tenants not later than execution of any purchase or lease agreement. (Amended 1/04)
- **Standard of Practice 16-13**  
All dealings concerning property exclusively listed, or with buyer/tenants who are subject to an exclusive agreement shall be carried on with the client's representative or broker, and not with the client, except with the consent of the client's representative or broker or except where such dealings are initiated by the client.  
  
Before providing substantive services (such as writing a purchase offer or presenting a CMA) to prospects, REALTORS® shall ask prospects whether they are a party to any exclusive representation agreement. REALTORS® shall not knowingly provide substantive services concerning a prospective transaction to prospects who are parties to exclusive representation agreements, except with the consent of the prospects' exclusive representatives or at the direction of prospects. (Adopted 1/93, Amended 1/04)
- **Standard of Practice 16-14**  
REALTORS® are free to enter into contractual relationships or to negotiate with sellers/landlords, buyers/tenants or others who are not subject to an exclusive agreement but shall not knowingly obligate them to pay more than one commission except with their informed consent. (Amended 1/98)
- **Standard of Practice 16-15**  
In cooperative transactions REALTORS® shall compensate cooperating REALTORS® (principal brokers) and shall not compensate nor offer to compensate, directly or indirectly, any of the sales licensees employed by or affiliated with other REALTORS® without the prior express knowledge and consent of the cooperating broker.
- **Standard of Practice 16-16**  
REALTORS®, acting as subagents or buyer/tenant representatives or brokers, shall not use the terms of an offer to purchase/lease to attempt to modify the listing broker's offer of compensation to subagents or buyer/tenant representatives or brokers nor make the submission of an executed offer to purchase/lease

contingent on the listing broker's agreement to modify the offer of compensation. (Amended 1/04)

- **Standard of Practice 16-17**  
REALTORS®, acting as subagents or as buyer/tenant representatives or brokers, shall not attempt to extend a listing broker's offer of cooperation and/or compensation to other brokers without the consent of the listing broker. (Amended 1/04)
- **Standard of Practice 16-18**  
REALTORS® shall not use information obtained from listing brokers through offers to cooperate made through multiple listing services or through other offers of cooperation to refer listing brokers' clients to other brokers or to create buyer/tenant relationships with listing brokers' clients, unless such use is authorized by listing brokers. (Amended 1/02)
- **Standard of Practice 16-19**  
Signs giving notice of property for sale, rent, lease, or exchange shall not be placed on property without consent of the seller/landlord. (Amended 1/93)
- **Standard of Practice 16-20**  
REALTORS®, prior to or after their relationship with their current firm is terminated, shall not induce clients of their current firm to cancel exclusive contractual agreements between the client and that firm. This does not preclude REALTORS® (principals) from establishing agreements with their associated licensees governing assignability of exclusive agreements. (Adopted 1/98, Amended 1/10)

## Article 17

In the event of contractual disputes or specific non-contractual disputes as defined in Standard of Practice 17-4 between REALTORS® (principals) associated with different firms, arising out of their relationship as REALTORS®, the REALTORS® shall mediate the dispute if the Board requires its members to mediate. If the dispute is not resolved through mediation, or if mediation is not required, REALTORS® shall submit the dispute to arbitration in accordance with the policies of the Board rather than litigate the matter.

In the event clients of REALTORS® wish to mediate or arbitrate contractual disputes arising out of real estate transactions, REALTORS® shall mediate or arbitrate those disputes in accordance with the policies of the Board, provided the clients agree to be bound by any resulting agreement or award.

The obligation to participate in mediation and arbitration contemplated by this Article includes the obligation of REALTORS® (principals) to cause their firms to mediate and arbitrate and be bound by any resulting agreement or award. (Amended 1/12)

- **Standard of Practice 17-1**  
The filing of litigation and refusal to withdraw from it by REALTORS® in an arbitrable matter constitutes a refusal to arbitrate. (Adopted 2/86)
- **Standard of Practice 17-2**  
Article 17 does not require REALTORS® to mediate in those circumstances when all parties to the dispute advise the Board in writing that they choose not to mediate through the Board's facilities. The fact that all parties decline to participate in mediation does not relieve REALTORS® of the duty to arbitrate.  
  
Article 17 does not require REALTORS® to arbitrate in those circumstances when all parties to the dispute advise the Board in writing that they choose not to arbitrate before the Board. (Amended 1/12)
- **Standard of Practice 17-3**  
REALTORS®, when acting solely as principals in a real estate transaction, are not obligated to arbitrate disputes with other REALTORS® absent a specific written agreement to the contrary. (Adopted 1/96)
- **Standard of Practice 17-4**  
Specific non-contractual disputes that are subject to arbitration pursuant to Article 17 are:

- 1) Where a listing broker has compensated a cooperating broker and another cooperating broker subsequently claims to be the procuring cause of the sale or lease. In such cases the complainant may name the first cooperating broker as respondent and arbitration may proceed without the listing broker being named as a respondent. When arbitration occurs between two (or more) cooperating brokers and where the listing broker is not a party, the amount in dispute and the amount of any potential resulting award is limited to the amount paid to the respondent by the listing broker and any amount credited or paid to a party to the transaction at the direction of the respondent. Alternatively, if the complaint is brought against the listing broker, the listing broker may name the first cooperating broker as a third-party respondent. In either instance the decision of the hearing panel as to procuring cause shall be conclusive with respect to all current or subsequent claims of the parties for compensation arising out of the underlying cooperative transaction. (Adopted 1/97, Amended 1/07)
  - 2) Where a buyer or tenant representative is compensated by the seller or landlord, and not by the listing broker, and the listing broker, as a result, reduces the commission owed by the seller or landlord and, subsequent to such actions, another cooperating broker claims to be the procuring cause of sale or lease. In such cases the complainant may name the first cooperating broker as respondent and arbitration may proceed without the listing broker being named as a respondent. When arbitration occurs between two (or more) cooperating brokers and where the listing broker is not a party, the amount in dispute and the amount of any potential resulting award is limited to the amount paid to the respondent by the seller or landlord and any amount credited or paid to a party to the transaction at the direction of the respondent. Alternatively, if the complaint is brought against the listing broker, the listing broker may name the first cooperating broker as a third-party respondent. In either instance the decision of the hearing panel as to procuring cause shall be conclusive with respect to all current or subsequent claims of the parties for compensation arising out of the underlying cooperative transaction. (Adopted 1/97, Amended 1/07)
  - 3) Where a buyer or tenant representative is compensated by the buyer or tenant and, as a result, the listing broker reduces the commission owed by the seller or landlord and, subsequent to such actions, another cooperating broker claims to be the procuring cause of sale or lease. In such cases the complainant may name the first cooperating broker as respondent and arbitration may proceed without the listing broker being named as a respondent. Alternatively, if the complaint is brought against the listing broker, the listing broker may name the first cooperating broker as a third-party respondent. In either instance the decision of the hearing panel as to procuring cause shall be conclusive with respect to all current or subsequent claims of the parties for compensation arising out of the underlying cooperative transaction. (Adopted 1/97)
  - 4) Where two or more listing brokers claim entitlement to compensation pursuant to open listings with a seller or landlord who agrees to participate in arbitration (or who requests arbitration) and who agrees to be bound by the decision. In cases where one of the listing brokers has been compensated by the seller or landlord, the other listing broker, as complainant, may name the first listing broker as respondent and arbitration may proceed between the brokers. (Adopted 1/97)
  - 5) Where a buyer or tenant representative is compensated by the seller or landlord, and not by the listing broker, and the listing broker, as a result, reduces the commission owed by the seller or landlord and, subsequent to such actions, claims to be the procuring cause of sale or lease. In such cases arbitration shall be between the listing broker and the buyer or tenant representative and the amount in dispute is limited to the amount of the reduction of commission to which the listing broker agreed. (Adopted 1/05)
- **Standard of Practice 17-5**  
The obligation to arbitrate established in Article 17 includes disputes between REALTORS® (principals) in different states in instances where, absent an established inter-association arbitration agreement, the REALTOR® (principal) requesting arbitration agrees to submit to the jurisdiction of, travel to, participate in, and be bound by any resulting award rendered in arbitration conducted by the respondent(s) REALTOR®'s association, in instances where the respondent(s) REALTOR®'s association determines that an arbitrable issue exists. (Adopted 1/07)

## Explanatory Notes

The reader should be aware of the following policies which have been approved by the Board of Directors of the National Association:

In filing a charge of an alleged violation of the Code of Ethics by a REALTOR®, the charge must read as an alleged violation of one or more Articles of the Code. Standards of Practice may be cited in support of the charge.

The Standards of Practice serve to clarify the ethical obligations imposed by the various Articles and supplement, and do not substitute for, the Case Interpretations in Interpretations of the Code of Ethics.

Modifications to existing Standards of Practice and additional new Standards of Practice are approved from time to time. Readers are cautioned to ensure that the most recent publications are utilized.



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## CLASS EXERCISE

### CASE INTERPRETATION 1-28: Disclosure of Existence of Offers to Prospective Purchasers

Seller S listed her home for sale with REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B. The property was priced reasonably and REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B was confident it would sell quickly. The listing agreement included the seller's authorization for publication in the MLS and authority to disclose the existence of offers to prospective purchasers.

Within days, REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B had shown the property to several prospective purchasers and one of them, Buyer Z, wrote a purchase offer at close to the asking price.

REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B called Seller S to make an appointment to present the offer. After hanging up with Seller S, REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B received another call, this time from REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A. REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A explained that he represented a buyer who was interested in making an offer on Seller S's property. REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A explained that while his buyer-client was quite interested in the property, price was also a concern. He asked REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B if there were other offers on the property, indicating that his buyer-client would likely make a higher offer if there were competing offers on the table. REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B responded telling REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A, "That's confidential information. Please tell your client to make his best offer."

Taken aback by REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B's comments, REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A shared them with his buyer-client, who chose not to make an offer and instead pursued other properties.

Buyer Z's offer was accepted by Seller S later that evening and, sometime later, the transaction closed.

Several months afterward, Seller S and REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A met at a social event. REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A related his conversation with REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B. Seller S asked REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A if he thought that REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A's buyer-client would have made an offer on Seller S's home absent

REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B's refusal to disclose whether there were other offers pending. REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A responded that it was impossible to tell for certain, but his buyer-client had certainly not been favorably impressed by REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B's response to a seemingly routine question.

Seller S subsequently filed an ethics complaint against REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B alleging violation of Article 1 as interpreted by Standard of Practice 1-15. He noted that he had clearly authorized REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B to disclose to buyers and cooperating brokers the existence of pending offers and that REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B's arbitrary refusal to share information he was authorized to share could have been the reason, or part of the reason, why REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A's client had chosen not to make an offer on Seller S's home.

REALTOR<sup>®</sup> B defended his actions indicating that while he agreed that he had an obligation to promote Seller S's interests, his obligation to REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A and to REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A's buyer-client was simply to be honest. He had not, in any fashion, misrepresented the availability of Seller S's property. Rather, he had simply told REALTOR<sup>®</sup> A to encourage his client to make her best offer. "I'm not required to turn every sale into an auction, am I?" he asked rhetorically. "I feel that I treated all parties honestly and fairly," he concluded.

## **CASE EXERCISE**

### **CASE INTERPRETATION #10-5: Use of “Choose Your Neighbor” Form Letters As Part of a Marketing Campaign**

(Adopted November, 1987. Revised November, 2013 and May, 2017.)

The ABC Association of REALTORS® received a complaint from a local fair housing group alleging that REALTOR® A was using discriminatory marketing techniques, in violation of Article 10 of the Code of Ethics, as the listing broker for a property in a new subdivision.

In support of their complaint, the fair housing group provided copies of “Choose Your Neighbor” form letters sent by REALTOR® A to current neighborhood residents. The letters announced that the property was on the market and invited neighborhood residents to contact REALTOR® A if they knew of anyone who they thought might be interested in purchasing the home.

At the hearing, REALTOR® A defended his use of “Choose Your Neighbor” form letters by demonstrating that they were just one element of his marketing campaign, and were not an attempt to restrict access to the property on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, country of national origin, sexual orientation, or gender identity, as prohibited by Article 10. REALTOR® A produced copies of banner advertisements run on several websites, “OPEN HOUSE” information provided on Realtor.com, and a copy of the property’s MLS listing. REALTOR® A remarked, “In my experience, the current residents of a neighborhood often have friends or relatives who have said that they would love to live in the neighborhood. It just makes sense to me to include contacting these folks in any marketing campaign!”



## **CLASS EXERCISE**

### **CASE INTERPRETATION #15-1: Knowing or Reckless False Statements About Competitors**

REALTOR® A operated a residential brokerage firm in a highly competitive market area. He frequently used information from the MLS as the basis for comparative ads and to keep close track of his listing and sales activity as well as his competition.

One day, while reviewing MLS data and comparing it to a competitor's ad, REALTOR® A noticed that REALTOR® Z had used a diagram to demonstrate his market share, contrasting it with those of several other firms. The ad showed that REALTOR® A had listed 10% of the properties in the MLS over the past three months.

REALTOR® A thought that this was low. His analysis of MLS data showed his market share was 11%. REALTOR® A filed an ethics complaint against REALTOR® Z citing Article 15 of the Code of Ethics in that REALTOR® Z's "obviously understated market share claim" was a "misleading statement about competitors." REALTOR® A's complaint was considered by the Grievance Committee which determined that an ethics hearing should be held.

At the hearing, REALTOR® Z testified he had always been truthful in his advertising and that all claims were based in fact. He produced an affidavit from the Board's MLS administrator which indicated that a programming error had resulted in miscalculations and, after careful recomputation, REALTOR® A's market share over the past three months had been 10.9%.

The administrator's statement noted that this was the first time that information related to REALTOR® A's listings or sales had been misstated on the system. "I relied on information from the MLS. It's always been accurate and I had no reason to even suspect it was wrong last month," said REALTOR® Z in his defense.

## **ENFORCEMENT**

The second significance of the Code of Ethics is that it provides a guide by which others may measure the professional conduct of REALTORS®. The integrity and value of the Code depends ultimately on how the Code is enforced.

Proper enforcement involves all three levels of the REALTOR® organization:

The National Association of REALTORS® has the sole authority to interpret the Code of Ethics.

The Virginia REALTORS® plays a strong educational and advisory role. In addition, VR may hold hearings when REALTORS® from more than one Association are involved, when an Association for good reason is unable to hold a hearing, or when an Association has contracted with VR to hold hearings on their behalf.

The Local Association of REALTORS® has the primary obligation for the enforcement of the Code and the education of its members regarding professional standards. The Association's Grievance Committee, Professional Standards Committee, and the Board of Directors are responsible for the Association's enforcement.

All REALTORS® must abide by the Code of Ethics

and should have a working knowledge of the professional standards procedures involved in Code enforcement.

The local Association of REALTORS® is authorized to hold two types of hearings:

- (1) an ethics hearing
- (2) an arbitration hearing.

Associations may also adopt optional enforcement procedures that allow them to offer mediation as an alternative to holding a formal hearing. Remember the new option for local Associations to require mediation.

All optional enforcement procedures must be approved by local Boards of Directors and put into Professional Standards policy statements.

As an incentive to consider mediation in lieu of a formal hearing, the 180 day filing requirement is suspended while pursuing alternative methods of resolution.

**ENFORCEMENT**  
**(Cont'd)**

Anybody, a member of the public, or another REALTOR® may file a complaint with the Association alleging that a REALTOR® has violated one or more specific Articles of the Code.

The complaint is first received by the Grievance Committee who reviews it to determine if the facts given appear to indicate a possible violation of the Code. Similar to the court system's Grand Jury, the Grievance Committee prevents abuse and harassment of REALTORS® through frivolous complaints.

If a complaint is forwarded for a hearing, the ethics Hearing Panel must first determine whether or not a violation has occurred. If a majority of Hearing Panel members judge that there has been a violation of an Article of the Code, it may recommend one or more appropriate sanctions to be imposed by the Board of Directors on the offending party.

## **ENFORCEMENT**

**(Cont'd)**

Only the following sanctions are allowed by the National Association of REALTORS®:

1. letter of warning
2. letter of reprimand
3. requirement for additional ethics training or any other appropriate and reasonable course of study
4. appropriate and reasonable fine not to exceed \$15,000
5. probation not to exceed one year
6. suspension of membership (minimum of 30 days)
7. suspension of MLS service
8. expulsion of membership
9. requirement to cease and refrain or take affirmative steps to ensure compliance with the Code

An ethics Hearing Panel is not authorized to award monetary or punitive damages. However, the association may adopt a policy that allows them to assess a member found in violation of an Article or Articles, an administrative fee not to exceed \$500 in addition to any fine that might be imposed.

## **ENFORCEMENT**

**(Cont'd)**

Associations may also adopt procedures that allow them to publish the names of members who have violated the Code more than twice in a three-year period. The publication, however, may only be sent to other Association members.

The decision of the ethics panel may be appealed to the Directors, who, in any case, must approve the hearing panel's decision prior to imposition of sanction.

The ethics panel's decision is confidential. Association members are notified only with respect to suspension or expulsion, except when an Association has adopted the publication policy references above and limits the notice to its Association members.

## ARBITRATION

Article 17 of the Code requires REALTORS® to mediate and arbitrate rather than litigate in certain circumstances. Mediation and arbitration involve entitlement to commission or compensation. Mediation must be offered by all Boards and Associations, but is only mandatory in those instances when a local Board or Association requires it. We will discuss mediation in just a few minutes.

Though mediation and arbitration can be requirements under the Code of Ethics, they are also valuable services. Use of the Association's mediation and arbitration facilities saves the time and expense of litigation, while providing a hearing by your peers in which due process is accorded.

A request for arbitration must be accompanied by a deposit not to exceed \$500. The deposit of the prevailing party will be returned; the deposit of the losing party will be used to cover the cost of the arbitration.

The two different types of arbitration allowed are mandatory and voluntary.

### Mandatory Arbitration

1. REALTOR® Principal vs. REALTOR® Principal
2. REALTOR® Non-Principal vs. REALTOR® Principal, provided the complainant's REALTOR® Principal joins in the complaint.



3. Client vs. REALTOR® Principal, provided client agrees to abide by arbitration procedures and decision.

#### Voluntary Arbitration

1. REALTORS® within same firm
2. REALTOR® Principal vs. Non-Member Broker
3. Customer vs. REALTOR® Principal, provided the customer agrees to abide by procedures and decision.

The decision of the arbitration panel is valid and binding and not subject to review or appeal.

## MEDIATION

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Associations also offer mediation as a process to assist REALTORS® in settling their differences prior to arbitration. Mediation involves an attempt by parties to resolve monetary disputes with the aid of a neutral third party. A mediator's role is advisory; and although that person may offer suggestions, resolution of the dispute rests with the parties themselves.

All REALTOR® associations have been required to provide mediation services since January 1, 2001. Some of the advantages of participating in mediation as opposed to arbitrating or litigating are *privacy, speed, economy, flexibility, informality, and finality*. Mediation is less adversarial than arbitration or litigation. It provides a potential "win-win" solution and is typically more economical and expedient than either arbitration or litigation.

NAR Video: A Pathway to Professional Conduct (11 minutes)

WAAR has a Professional Courtesies & Safety Booklet in the classroom.

These Professional courtesies are intended to be used by REALTORS® on a voluntary basis, and cannot form the basis for a professional standards complaint.

### **Respect for the Public**

1. Follow the "Golden Rule": Do unto other as you would have them do unto you.
2. Respond promptly to inquiries and requests for information.
3. Schedule appointments and showings as far in advance as possible.
4. Communicate promptly if you are delayed or must cancel an appointment or showing. If a prospective buyer decides not to view an occupied home, promptly communicate the situation to the listing broker or the occupant.
5. When entering a property ensure that unexpected situations, such as pets, are handled appropriately.
6. Never criticize property in the presence of the occupant.
7. When showing an occupied home, always ring the doorbell or knock—and announce yourself loudly before entering. Knock and announce yourself loudly before entering any closed room.
8. Present a professional appearance.
9. If occupants are home during showings, ask their permission before using the bathroom.
10. Encourage the clients of other brokers to direct questions to their agent or representative.
11. Communicate clearly; ensure specialized language and real estate terminology is understood
12. Be aware of and respect cultural differences. Show courtesy and respect to everyone
13. Be aware of—and meet—all deadlines.
14. Promise only what you can deliver—and keep your promises.
15. Do not tell people what you think—tell them what you know.

## **Respect for Property**

1. When showing a property, be responsible for your clients/customers and keep the group together
2. Make reasonable and timely accommodations to provide access to listed properties.
3. Make reasonable and timely requests to access listed properties
4. Leave the property as you found it (lights, heating, cooling, drapes, etc.) If you think something is amiss (e.g. vandalism), contact the listing broker immediately.
5. Be considerate of the seller's property. Do not allow anyone to eat, drink, smoke, dispose of trash, use bathing or sleeping facilities, or bring pets. When instructed or appropriator, remove footwear when entering property.
6. Obtain permission before photographing or video-graphing or streaming the interiors or exteriors of properties, or allowing others to do so.

## **Respect for Peers**

1. Respond to other real estate professionals' communications promptly and courteously.
2. Contact the listing broker if there appears to be a discrepancy in the listing information.
3. Inform anyone accessing the property about important information, (e.g., pets, security systems, video and audio recording equipment.)
4. Show courtesy, trust, and respect to other real estate professionals.
5. Avoid the inappropriate use of endearments or other denigrating language.
6. Do not prospect at other REALTORS®' open houses or similar events.
7. Secure property and lockbox and/or return keys promptly.
8. Real estate is a reputation business. What you do today may affect your reputation—and business—for years to come.