

# The New York Times

## Client to Broker: Clean My Windows

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Even in the strongest economies, New Yorkers of sound mind find that talking with a real estate broker can result in rolled eyes, raised voices and a New York version of “taking it outside” by threatening litigation. But now, as the sales market whimpers along in the languid last days of summer, some brokers say they have never been met by so many demands from their clients, or so much hostility.

Victoria Shtainer, a Prudential Douglas Elliman broker, said one current client has asked her to arrive two hours before open houses to clean for her. Another client, a group of corporate executives from Texas, insisted on being driven around the city at various times for five weeks.

“The behavior goes from good to bad very quickly,” said Chris A. Randolph, a Barak Realty agent who has worked with two recent clients who gave him the brunt of their anger. One client would only grunt and acted so morose in front of brokers that these brokers called Mr. Randolph to ask what they had done to offend his client.

“I feel like the waitress where I get blamed for everything that happens,” he said.

Pressure comes from all sides. Renters want the perks their friends negotiated. Buyers, hearing about drops in prices, think they should pay far less than the asking price. Sellers are angry

because they are not getting the prices they once expected, and are wondering why, when the Internet has made it easier to market their own apartments, they should have to pay a 6 percent commission, or whether brokers ought to be doing more to earn it — for instance, cleaning. And brokers who remember when their advice was eagerly welcomed are having to adjust their egos as clients take all of these feelings out on them.

“They treat us like we’re starving and we need to do them all kinds of favors to possibly make some money,” said Michele Conte, a Corcoran Group broker who was recently asked by one former client to help her sell her apartment without a commission. She agreed to help on the grounds her former client would hire her if she couldn’t sell the apartment on her own.

Of course, these complaints are unlikely to bring tears to the eyes of the countless New Yorkers who have dealt with unsavory brokers. The [New York Department of State](#) is receiving, on average, about 80 complaints about brokers every month. That is down from 100 a month last year and 110 in 2006, but it is not clear whether brokers are behaving better or whether the slower market means fewer opportunities for them to butt heads with clients.

One broker who complained to this reporter about a demanding client provided e-mails that showed her own comments were actually more hostile. “It is not your way or no way,” one of the messages said. Still, brokers want it known that they are members of the human race who need to eat and will bleed if pricked.

Sarah Parsons, a Halstead agent, said that in the 11 years she has worked as a broker, she has never encountered so many unrealistic clients as in the past year.

One buyer demanded that she limit his co-op board interview to 30 minutes. Another demanded that Ms. Parsons negotiate 30 percent off the price of a distressed apartment in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, then grew angry at her when he had trouble getting financing. She says more sellers are micromanaging her as well.

“The buyers got more demanding and the sellers got more frightened,” Ms. Parsons said. Elyse Goldstein, an Upper East Side psychologist, said she had heard from brokers that clients were taking out their frustrations on them. “When people are anxious, it stirs up their primitive defense mechanisms,” Dr. Goldstein said. She added that New Yorkers are faced with “disillusionment about what they can buy,” which she said “freaks them out.”



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