



## **Commercial Classroom: Politics and Real Estate - by Edward Smith Jr.**

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I have voted in many local and Presidential elections, and I encourage everyone to vote. Each day now politics is in the news and on social media. The next Presidential election seems to be continuing as in the past, with strong feelings and rhetoric being expressed by so many people. Congress seems more divided than ever.

Clients are still continuously asking their agents “Who are you going to vote for?”, “What’s your position on...?” This creates a new communication challenge for those of us in real estate. We know we must develop trust with our client’s, which means being transparent and honest, but will the answer to those types of questions rub the client the wrong way? If we answer, “I don’t talk politics or religion” they may not like that answer either. More than ever we need to think about what we say.

I once read an article in the Realtor Magazine, “How divisive public discourse is affecting business relationships—and what you can do about it.” by Graham Woods, which addressed some concerns.

Part of the article was basically a caution to agents not to personally participate in social media positions that could affect their image. “Real estate pros are public ambassadors for their communities, so they should remember that they are representing their business and neighborhoods at all times, and on all forums”. Our success is largely based on the reputation we create.

Marki Lemons-Rhyal, a Chicago-based real estate coach who teaches social media ethics, says “You shouldn’t be a practitioner and shouldn’t have a license if you think, ‘I’ll say whatever I want to say’; remember you don’t ever get to take your real estate hat off. If you get online and rant and rave, about a candidate or policy, that could send a message that you won’t work with a certain type of client.”

You may be thinking, this is America, and we all have a right to free speech, which is true. But in our business what we say, especially on public media, can have consequences. At best, you may be losing potential business, but this type of conduct could also be considered a form of discrimination.

Discrimination is defined as making a distinction in favor of or against a person based on the group, class, or category to which that person belongs rather than treating them on their individual merit. We must respect the federal protected classes: race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, handicaps, and most States also protect sexual orientation and gender identity.

Whether you are a real estate practitioner, or a Realtor the National Association of Realtors Code of Ethics cautions us about our public image. It states Realtors shall not deny equal professional services to any person in any protected classes. Furthermore, the Code makes specific reference that Realtors must not use harassing speech, hate speech, epithets, or slurs regarding people in protected classes. This includes all activities, conduct, speech, including occurring outside of the real estate transaction, that is discretionary, such as social media, public statements or just conversations.

I won't work with you because you're a Republican, or a Democrat, or because you support \_\_\_\_\_ or you don't. Sounds like that could be considered discrimination to me.

Real estate practitioners sometimes must walk away from potential business. In our business some potential clients are prejudiced; they want to sell their building or house but tell us "I won't sell to \_\_\_\_\_." (People from a certain country, color or religion) We cannot list their property under those circumstances.

Politics is being discussed everywhere today, in the media, in your office and with clients and customers. You are entitled to your views and opinions, but you must decide if you wish to share them. What messages are your actions or words delivering?

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