
STICKS AND STONES: CHOOSE YOUR WORDS CAREFULLY

Description

There's an old childhood saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Any adult KNOWS that's not true. Often the words do a person more permanent damage than any physical injury, which brings me to my point:

WORDS MATTER. USE THEM PROPERLY.

Using terms properly (or to be more specific, making sure you don't use words improperly) may help dial back some of the hostility in certain parts of the state with regard to the seller side of a residential transaction.

We all know there's no such thing as a split settlement. Stop using the term as shorthand for the situation where the seller has someone either assisting or representing them who is a different person than the settlement agent. Find another term, either "seller's assistant" or "seller's attorney" or invent your own nonsense term to apply.

Represent is another term to be avoided by people owning or working for a lay settlement company. Only attorneys licensed to practice in Virginia may *represent* a seller. Think of *represent* as a "word of art." It has special meaning within the law, and especially does not apply to lay settlement service providers. This term inflames some attorneys as they are well aware that non-attorneys and attorneys working for lay settlement providers are incapable of representing anyone in the settlement process. As an alternative, use "assist" instead.

Client is a third term that should be used carefully. By statute real estate agents have clients. Attorneys have clients. Title and settlement agents have customers, or perhaps consumers if they are getting a mortgage loan on their property.

How do you break yourself and your staff of bad habits, using careless wording? One suggestion is to use a "swear jar." Many families have members put in a quarter (dollar?) every time they swear, or in this case, misuse a word. Periodically, there is either an "office" family party using the funds to bring in a special treat, or there is a drawing so all the funds go to one person, or the funds are donated to a charity. The goal is to stop using the words inappropriately by making yourself and all in your office aware every time a word is used incorrectly, even in casual conversation.

Good luck. I'm sure all of us in the industry can quickly eliminate wrongful language if we focus on the issue. Let the community know what your office does to break these bad habits.

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