



INTERVIEW

TOP REALTORS

Q&A WITH SO-CAL'S SEASONED REAL ESTATE AGENTS

by CARA VANMETER

BRRRR! WHAT'S WITH THE WINTER CHILL? Even in January, this kind of frostbite is unusual for sunny Southern California. But So-Cal isn't the only region to suffer under this glacial attack. That arctic wind is coming from the real estate market, and it's sweeping the entire nation. L.A.'s top seasoned agents aren't worried, though. People like **Syd Leibovitch** and **Jim Gillespie** have been around long enough to know it's time to just zip up their parkas and keep chopping ice until another market thaw comes along.

With nearly fifty years of experience between them, Leibovitch and Gillespie have seen all the ups and downs and not only survived, but thrived in spite of them.

Find out more about how these two real estate giants got their starts in the business, what they think of it now and what they're looking forward to in the future.

SYD LEIBOVITCH is the founder and president of Rodeo Realty, a prestigious Calabasas-based real estate firm that was recently voted the "Best of 2006" on City Search's website for Los Angeles real estate agencies.

FEEDBACK: What did you want to be when you grew up?

SYD LEIBOVITCVH: I was planning on going to law school. I never really planned on being a realtor, but I'm really glad that's how it worked out.

FB: How did you end up in real estate?

SL: When I was in college, a friend of mine took his real estate test, so I decided on a whim I would go take it with him. I passed it, and I joined Caldwell Banker and went through their training classes during winter break from UCLA. I sold two houses in my first week. So, I was the top agent in their office.

The first day I ever worked, I was supposed to meet my mentor to do an open house. He was sick, so I did it by myself. I took the people out, and sold them a house that day. That was pretty exciting to sell a house my first day of real estate.

FB: Tell me a little bit about the companies you've worked with and what you've been doing since then.

SL: I was with Caldwell for just a couple of months, but they had like three managers in the two months I was there. Then I went to Country Club.

After a couple of years there, I was one of the people at the real estate office that just felt that, if I were in charge, I would be doing things much differently. So, when I was 25, I opened my own company.

We started in 1986 with just me and one other agent. Then, in 1990, we opened a second office. Then, when the earthquake came and everyone was closing offices, we opened a third office.

FB: Was there ever a definitive moment when you thought, "OK, I've made it in the real estate business. I'm secure"?

SL: I'm still waiting to think that. I don't think that people that do really well ever think that or ever are satisfied. They're always reaching for more, more, more.

FB: So what are you reaching for next?

SL: I'm reaching for my company to be the largest company in California, if not the largest independent company in the nation, I'm halfway there. I already have 850 agents and ten offices. I think in the next ten years we'll have at least twenty offices and 2,000 agents. That's my goal for now.

FB: In the meantime, what advice would you offer to someone who is just beginning to consider getting into the real estate business?

SL: Certainly, they need to be full time. They need to go to a company where they'll get the kind of support and training they need. Being new isn't bad. I have people that are new that are just setting the world on fire. I have a new guy that sold eighteen houses his first year. So being new isn't bad. It could be really good. They're aggressive. They're energetic. They're excited. But they need to get trained and know the skills. Nothing worth getting is easy. They will have to work hard, but new people can do great in this market.

FB: What is the biggest challenge agents face today?

SL: Adjusting to a different market is challenging for some agents. But it's really a great opportunity. A couple of years ago, you would have thought a chimpanzee would be able to sell your house. It really didn't matter how good an agent was, because the home would sell anyway. By the same token, it didn't matter how much support an agent got from their company, because the house would sell anyway. In a market like this, you really need a top agent to get the job done. Sellers have to be more careful of who they use. Agents, for that matter, really need the support of companies that have services and offer support like mine. So, this kind of market is really good for me, and it's really good for a top agent.

FB: Have you ever considered leaving the real estate business and doing something else?

SL: No, I really have no other skills.