The Ultimate Guide for First-Time Real Estate Investors - Sellers Edition

How to maximize the profit of your real estate investments

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Your Local Real Estate Expert

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1. Preface

The whole point of investing in real estate is to make a profit, yet many investors either don't make a profit or don't make as much of a profit as they could have.

There's a saying that goes something like: "You make your money in real estate when you *buy*...not when you sell."

That's true. To a degree...

Sure, it certainly *helps* to buy a great property at a great price, but what you do with it *while* you own it and *when* you go to sell it also matter! Unfortunately, most investors put more focus on finding and buying investments and not nearly enough thought or attention to what they do afterward...

...which is why I created this booklet — to help you maximize the profit of your real estate investment when you sell it.

This booklet is great to read as you're planning to sell an investment property, but it's even better to read it *before* you're ready to sell. Some parts of this are great to read before you even *buy* an investment property, especially if you're new to investing.

In it, I'll focus on two main types of investing: "Flipping" and rental properties. While there are certainly many other ways to invest in real estate, these are the two most common ways people invest.

I hope you find this booklet thoughtful and useful! If at any time you have any questions about the booklet or about real estate investing, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. You can reach me by email me at laurenhersheyrealtor@gmail.com

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NOTE: The first six sections will cover six tips, topics, or tactics to apply to “flips,” and the subsequent six sections will cover six for rental properties. So feel free to skip to the section that applies to your type of investment. The last five sections cover topics that apply to both types of investments, so make sure to read them regardless of the type of investment property you own.

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2. Selling Flips – Flip The Fable

For the purposes of this booklet, the word “flip” can apply to different circumstances:

- You bought a property for a low price to simply sell it for a higher price.
- You bought a property that needed work and will renovate it to improve the value, then sell it.
- You obtained ownership of a property in some way, shape, or form, and can capitalize on your rights to the property by selling it (or your rights to it).

You’ve probably heard the story about the tortoise and the hare, right? Even though the tortoise was slower than the hare, it still won the race. The moral of the story is that you can succeed by taking things slowly and steadily rather than racing forward.

But when it comes to flipping properties, you probably want to flip that fable around...

Regardless of whether the property you bought needs work or not, time is your enemy. Every day you own the property is costing you and, therefore, eating away at your profit margin. And we’re not even talking about the costs you might incur for renovations or repairs. The holding costs alone (taxes, mortgage payments, interest, utilities, etc.) add up quickly and do nothing to increase the value of the property.

That said, rushing things can lead to costly mistakes, so you don’t want to move *too* fast! But you certainly want to emulate the hare more than the tortoise when you’re flipping a property.

Try to assess how much work (if any) you will need to put into a property *before* you take ownership, and budget a reasonable amount of time to find a buyer and get the deal closed. Ideally, try to beat the amount of time you have budgeted for the entire process, but, in the least, make sure you don’t go beyond your timelines.

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Too many investors underestimate how long things will take to get done or simply don't think about time enough. By doing so, you'll be in a better position than many people who try (but fail) to flip a property.

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3. Selling Flips – Consider Contractor Costs

If you're handy and you know it, clap your hands (and try getting *that* tune out of your head now, ha!). Fact is, you can save yourself a ton of money by not having to hire contractors to do any renovations or repairs. And if you're actually a contractor, you'll probably be able to keep the costs down on materials due to your contractor discounts.

The problem is, so many people who get into flipping properties overestimate how handy they are. So, the first thing you should do to avoid costing yourself even more time and money than hiring contractors is to truly assess whether you're handy.

So, are you handy and you truly know it!? If so, clap your hands and move on to another topic in this booklet. But if you're not clapping your hands confidently right now, make sure to factor in the cost of hiring contractors to do the renovations and repairs you intend on doing to any flip — *before* getting yourself into the middle of one!

Don't make the mistake of believing you can figure it out and do whatever needs to be done; factor in the cost of hiring contractors to do the work needed.

If you want to try and do the work yourself (having already factored in the cost of hiring the work out), fine. Give it a whirl. It's worth a quick try. But determine quickly whether you're going to pull it off, and if you sense that you'll end up costing yourself more time and money than if you hired someone else, switch gears. Use the money you already factored into your projected costs and profit margins.

Too often, investors try to save money and maximize their profits by doing all the work themselves, and once everything is said and done, they end up costing themselves more than they would've otherwise spent.

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4. Selling Flips – Plan A "Prize"

Remember when you were a kid and a box of cereal had a surprise inside? Didn't even have to be much. It could've just been a cellophane wrapped "tattoo" that you applied to your arm with some water. But it made that box of cereal a heck of a lot more exciting than it would've been otherwise.

If you had a sibling, you know how much tension that caused. But even if you didn't, I'm sure you can imagine. Every kid in the house wanted that prize, no matter how insignificant it was.

That's a good approach to take when you're flipping a property. Plan on packing in a "prize" for the potential buyers to snag before their competition does. This will potentially help you sell your flip more quickly...and possibly even with multiple offers.

Your "prize" doesn't even need to be something as grand as a renovated bathroom or kitchen (as long as the houses you're competing with don't all offer those things). It can be something as simple as a minor feature other homes on the market don't have, like:

- A firepit in the backyard
- Closets with customized shelving
- A small waterfall feature in the backyard with some plantings

Those are just a few random examples. Use your own imagination and look at what other homes on the market have and don't have. Perhaps look at features that homes in higher price ranges have and copy a feature they offer (that's rarely seen in the price range your flip will be in).

Again, the trick is simply to add something that isn't all that costly but sets your house apart from the rest of the choices.

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You may not even want to make a big deal about it in your marketing or on the listing...just let buyers come in and be surprised by what they find. Just *mention* there's a surprise feature in the listing. After all, wasn't finding out which prize was in your box part of the fun?

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5. Selling Flips – Don’t Do This

One of the most common mistakes house flippers make is to over-improve the property. Don’t do this. This sounds super basic, and you probably feel like you already know this, right? Yet, people do it all the time.

That’s not to say you shouldn’t improve a property and, thereby, increase the value. Most likely you’ll need to do some sort of improvements. It’s pretty rare that you can buy a property at a great price and just turn around and put it on the market for more money without doing *something*.

The problem is, it often becomes a slippery slope for investors. They start their project, and one renovation leads to another. Or they take such pride in making the nicest place possible, they go for the highest quality features and materials.

The trick is to assess what absolutely needs to be done and to what degree of quality you need to do it for the property’s price range. And then stick to the plan. Don’t let the work you do creep out of control.

Good enough is good enough. Someone will love the work you’ve done. (At least as long as you’ve done *enough* work — and a decent job of it.)

Obviously this is probably more of an art than it is a science. There’s no way to say what exactly is too much and what’s “just enough” from one house to another, let alone from one area to another. The point I’m trying to drive home is simply to be cautious and thoughtful about the work you decide to do.

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6. Selling Flips – Set The Stage

No matter how good an actor is, if he or she is standing on stage alone — without any props or other actors — the performance isn't going to be as impressive. Same goes for a house you're trying to sell…

You can do the best job in the world renovating or sprucing up a house, but if there's nothing in it, it'll be difficult for a buyer to get a feel for how the house would look furnished and lived in.

You may have heard real estate agents talk about buyers "picturing themselves in the house" or "mentally moving their furniture in." This is why agents often recommend taking out as many personal effects as possible. You want the buyer to picture themselves in the house, not the family that lives there.

On the other hand, you don't want to do the entire opposite of that and give them nothing but empty, echoing rooms. Then it's hard for them to envision how the rooms feel with furniture and decor.

Most likely, since you're "flipping" a house, you're not living there. And you probably don't have enough furniture sitting around at home to furnish an entire other house just to set the stage — nor do you want to buy an entire house full of furniture.

Therefore, you should consider either hiring a staging company or perhaps renting some furniture and decor to stage the house yourself. Sure, some buyers may be able to look past the emptiness and picture how it could look, but why take the chance?

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7. Selling Flips – Accept The Acceptable

More often than not, regardless of whether it's a homeowner selling their own home or an investor, there's a tendency for a seller to have a target sales price. More often than not, that price is unrealistic and there's no basis for it other than it's the figure they want.

If only real estate values worked that way…

Unfortunately, a house is only worth as much as a ready, willing, and able buyer is willing to pay for it. You can't sell it for more than the most money someone in the market is willing to pay.

With that said, even if a seller understands that concept, they may still think there's a way to convince a buyer the house is worth as much as the seller wants to get. Or, they may think there's bound to be a buyer out there who'll see the house, fall in love with it, and be willing to pay whatever the seller wants to get for the house.

As common and human nature as all of that is, it's an extremely risky mindset to have as an investor — especially if you're trying to flip a property. But many investors think this way, and they end up losing money because of it.

When sellers receive an offer, they often get too hung up on a number they want to get. They don't accept totally "acceptable" offers. They say they want to wait for another buyer...another offer.

They fail to be objective and analytical about the cost of waiting for another offer that may or may not come, and if one does, it may take some time. Not to mention, any future offer may not even be as high as the one they turned down. Or, it may be just slightly over what they heard from the previous buyer but not enough to make up for the lost time and costs they incurred by waiting.

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A savvy investor (especially one who flips) knows that it makes more sense to take an acceptable offer, even if it's a bit less than they'd hoped — even if it's less than they might be able to get if they wait it out a bit. It's the old "a bird in the hand" adage.

This isn't to say that it never makes sense to turn down an offer and wait for a better one. However, always weigh the benefits of waiting, the costs of waiting, and how much better any other offer will likely be before taking a pass on a totally acceptable offer.

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8. Selling Rentals – Price With Proof

Pricing a rental property is about as scientific as it gets in real estate.

When you're talking about single-family houses being bought by people who want a new home, there's a bit more subjectivity. But when you're talking about selling a rental property, the buyer is going to be basing their decision, and subsequent offer, upon the numbers. They're usually thinking about it as plainly as this: "Do the numbers make sense?"

What they're looking for is whether the amount of rental income is greater than the amount it will cost to own the property. They want to know there will be positive cash flow and a good rate of return on the money they put into the deal.

Sure, you may find an investor (probably a rookie) who'll be okay with a break-even per year, or even a loss. They may even justify it, saying they "need the write off" on their taxes. But that's like pinning your hopes on finding a unicorn. Most investors are going to be pretty cut and dry about what they're willing to offer for your rental property, and it's going to be based upon how the numbers look.

So when you're deciding upon how much to ask for your rental property, make sure to run the numbers based upon a reasonable rate of return for your area, and price it accordingly. (And, yes, you can add a little "wiggle room," but don't go too crazy.)

This probably sounds pretty basic, but you'd be surprised at how many sellers try to sell an investment property without looking through the eyes of the investor who'll be buying it. This usually results in lost time and lost profits.

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9. Selling Rentals – Looking For Leases

When you're selling a rental property, whoever buys it (or even *considers* buying it) will want to see leases because that's essentially what they are buying. The property itself obviously has value, but when it comes to a rental, the income it produces is a huge component of the value.

Therefore, you should make sure that you have written, fully executed leases in place when you go to sell your rental property. Beyond that, you want to make sure the leases are for rents that are at (or even above) market rates for the area.

This might seem pretty basic, but many owners of rental property are fairly lax and don't always have formal leases in place. This leads to questions about the ability to rent the unit(s) and what the actual rents could be…which often leads to lower offers or even a lack of offers.

While long-term leases (for a year or more) are ideal, month-to-month leases aren't necessarily bad if you can also show that the units are consistently rented and, perhaps, that the tenants tend to stay for a decent period of time. In fact, a month-to-month lease in at least one of the units might be decent if there's a chance that the buyer will buy the property as both an investment and a place to live as an owner-occupant.

Month-to-month leases also aren't bad if your rents are lower than market rate, because the new owner can raise them more quickly than if long leases are in place. That said, you're better off getting the rents up to market rate before selling since the buyer will likely take the low rents into account when deciding on their offer.

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10. Selling Rentals – Lose The Lease

Continuing from above, having a lease in place may *not* be the best case scenario if you're selling a single-family house as a rental because the buyer might not be looking at it as a rental property.

Most people looking for single-family houses are looking for a place to buy and live in, not to rent out. And if they see there's a long-term tenant in place, that's not going to do them any good. They probably aren't looking to buy a place and wait until a lease is up to be able to move in. Sure, there are always exceptions, but you're seriously limiting your pool of buyers if you bank on the exception.

So as you prepare to sell a single-family house that you've been using as a rental property, you may want to:

- Wait until the lease is up and the tenant has vacated.
- Market it shortly before the lease is up.
- Get the tenant onto a month-to-month lease. This is good in case there's a buyer who'd want it as a rental property, but this would also allow for the lease to be terminated quickly if the buyer wants to live in it.

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11. Selling Rentals – Tame The Tenants

Tenants aren't always the most cooperative folks when you're trying to sell a rental property. After all, they don't really have much to gain by the property being sold, and the way they see it, they have a lot to lose.

Quite often, tenants make it almost impossible for agents and their buyers to get in and see the interior. And obviously, if buyers can't get in to see the property, there's a good chance they won't make an offer.

The bright side of this problem is that you're not the only person who'd be dealing with this issue. Almost any other rental property on the market competing with yours is dealing with the same issue. And that's where you can capitalize on this very common issue…

If you can get your tenants to be agreeable to having people come and see the property, and even pleasant about it, you're going to increase the odds of selling it more quickly and possibly for more money.
Think about it. If an investor can't get into any other properties but can get into yours (and has a pleasant experience with the tenants), it would make sense that the investor will be more likely to buy your property.

So, instead of being secretive about your intentions or demanding with your tenants, approach them openly about your intentions to sell and try to calm any concerns they have. That's where most rental property owners go wrong; they may not let the tenants even know what's going on and just spring it on them. They may get pushy with the tenants about letting people in whenever they want to come and might not spend any time addressing the concerns of their tenants.

Tenants just want their privacy respected. They also don't want to lose their place to live or for someone to come in and raise their rent. If you felt that way, would you be

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accommodating to the people who may cause those things to happen?

So chat with your tenants ahead of time, and also:

- Let them share how they feel about it. Listen to their concerns.
- Work with them on setting a schedule for when people can come see the property, and allow them to have a say in when those days and times are.
- Assure them that their lease protects them from being forced to find another home or from their rent being raised (if that's truly the case).

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12. Selling Rentals – Renovate Or Repair?

It’s easy to go long periods of time never seeing inside your rental properties. Tenants want their privacy and don’t always love their landlord swinging by. Also, many landlords like to avoid being in the position of being asked to fix a problem with the property — and going to the property is a quick way to be put in that position.

Therefore, conditions in and around the property can go unchecked over time.

But when you go to sell it, the condition of the property is certainly going to be of some significance. So before you put it on the market, you should make an effort to check out your entire property and see if there are any renovations or repairs that *need* to be done before you put it on the market.

However, that’s not to say you should do any and all renovations or repairs that you see need to be done. You don’t want to put any time or money into the place that won’t add to your net profit…or at least help in getting the place sold. So make sure you carefully consider whether the work you choose to do will be of any benefit.

Pro tip: Having a real estate agent come with you to help you decide on what should and shouldn’t be done is not a bad idea. Agents can help you determine what will add dollars to your net profit versus what will maybe just improve the value but not actually provide a return on your invested time or money.

Feel free to reach out to me if you’d like my thoughts and advice when you assess whether you should do any renovations or repairs.

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13. Selling Rentals – Come Clean

One of the best things you can do when selling any real estate — whether it's a single-family home or an investment property — is to present it in as neat and clean condition as possible. This is possibly more important than doing any renovations or repairs. Clean and tidy goes a long way in increasing the odds of selling a property quickly and for the most money possible.

Yet, you'd be surprised at how many *homeowners* who are selling their own home, and who'd benefit directly from decluttering and cleaning, fail to do so! They put their homes on the market with stuff everywhere (even in the pictures), looking like it hasn't been cleaned in months.

Why? Who knows for sure, but it's probably equal amounts of carelessness, laziness, and just plain old "that's how we live." And they feel like buyers should be able to look past their mess and be chomping at the bit to buy their house at top dollar.

So, if homeowners who'd benefit directly from presenting a clean home don't care, think about how little a tenant probably cares about cleaning the place while you're trying to sell your rental property.

Now, not everyone lives like that. Certainly there are people who like to keep a clean and tidy home. If you have tenants like that, you're in luck. But if you have sloppy tenants, you should consider how to get them to keep it clean for the period of time you're trying to sell the property.

For the most part, it's out of your control. But here are a few ideas that may help you have a little more control over presenting your property in as clean and tidy condition as possible:

- Ask nicely. Maybe they'll simply agree and do it!

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- Offer them reduced rent if they keep it clean for the duration of time the property is on the market.
- Offer to hire a cleaning service to come in once a week until the property is sold.

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14. Selling All Types – Diary Your Documents

“Dear Diary, this is my first entry, and I promise to write in you every day.”

There are probably millions of diaries in the world with only a few entries, and most of the things in them probably aren’t all that interesting anyway. Diaries tend to be like diets for many people — they sound like a good idea, but it’s easy to lose focus and not follow through.

It’s the same with documentation for real estate…

Even the most important documents (like closing paperwork, titles, and surveys) often get lost — and those are things that prove ownership of something pretty valuable. So it’s not surprising that things like warranties and receipts for things people have done to their properties are hard to find too.

This isn’t a huge deal for your average homeowner, but to an investor your documentation can be extremely useful in substantiating the value of your property.

So try to maintain a “diary” of everything you’ve done to the property as well as any documents that have been created and executed over the course of your ownership. You get bonus points if you can keep it in chronological order for people to be able to review more easily.

Here are some examples of things you should keep and be able to show potential buyers:

- Permits taken out and closed out for work done on the property.
- Receipts for work done on the property.
- Warranties for any products, materials, or mechanicals in and on the property.
- Financial records (profit / loss, rental income, expenses) for the property.

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- Copies of leases (not just current, but all leases during ownership to show the history of rentals and occupancy rates).
- Before and after pics of renovations and repairs (especially for flips).

That's by no means an exhaustive list. That's just to give you an idea of what to keep. But the best policy is to keep everything associated with the property in a nice, neat format that you can present to any potential buyer.

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15. Selling All Types – Sam's Share

A surprising amount of people who sell investment property are caught off guard by Uncle Sam.

When you sell an investment property, you'll likely be paying a "capital gains" tax. There's no way to give you an exact amount in a booklet like this, or even a percentage, since it will vary from one person to the next. Also, the rate will vary based upon the current tax regulations.

This is just to make sure you're aware that you'll likely incur taxation on the gains you make from the sale of your investment property — so be mindful. Also, it isn't a bad idea to consult with an accountant prior to selling your property.

That said, there's one way you can avoid those taxes, which brings us to our next topic...

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16. Selling All Types – The 411 On 1031

One way to avoid paying the capital gains on the sale of your investment property is to do what's called a "1031 exchange."

In basic terms, this is when you take the money you made on the sale of your investment property and immediately reinvest it into another "like-kind" property.

1031 exchanges are fairly complex, so we won't go into detail here. But if you're interested, make sure to look into them further or reach out to me and I can point you in the right direction. They're good options if you want to reinvest, but if you're selling because you want to liquidate, a 1031 isn't going to help you.

A 1031 exchange doesn't mean you won't ever pay taxes on your gains; it just defers the taxes. You'll eventually have to pay taxes on the gains when you sell your investment(s) and choose not to roll them into another investment. But in the meantime, you're keeping and earning money on the gains you've made thus far.

So, if you're selling your investment property in order to buy another, then the 1031 exchange is certainly something you should consider. However, be mindful that you'll need to buy a replacement property in a short period of time, which can cause you to rush and buy something that isn't necessarily the best fit just to avoid paying taxes.

Sometimes just paying the taxes is the best thing to do. It really depends upon your personal circumstances and future plans. This is also another topic you should discuss with your accountant if you have one, or find one and schedule a consultation if you don't.

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17. Selling All Types – Go With A Pro

When selling an investment property, it's important to hire a real estate agent who has expertise in handling the sale of investment property. Beyond that, it's not a bad idea to hire one who's familiar with the specific type of property you're going to sell.

If you're selling a single-family house as a "flip," it might seem like just hiring any real estate agent is fine, since that's what most do...sell single-family houses. But it's not always quite that simple or straight-forward. Selling a house you bought to flip can come with some unexpected issues and things to consider. Sure, at face value you're just trying to sell a house, but as you can probably tell from the "flip" section of this booklet, there's more to consider than a general real estate agent may even think about and consider.

Also, when selling a rental property, there's certainly more to think about, know, deal with, and do than a typical agent may deal with in their entire career selling houses. So make sure that if you're selling a multi-unit rental property you're working with a real estate agent who has the knowledge, skills, and expertise to handle the sale.

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18. Selling All Types – This Might Also Be Helpful…

Regardless of whether you're flipping houses or selling a rental property, I hope this booklet gave you insight that many investors (and even many agents) fail to think about. I also hope it helps you get the best net profit possible.

If you found this booklet about *selling* real estate investments helpful, then you might want to contact me about other articles I wrote.

Of course, just like this booklet, it's free and there's no obligation. All you have to do is ask, and I'll get one to you. (You can either send me an email or give me a call.)

Otherwise, I hope you're also receiving and reading the series of emails I'm sending in conjunction with *this* booklet. Those emails contain a few extra tips that'll help you sell your investment property as smoothly as possible with the highest net profit.

I hope to hear from you soon, whether it's a question about this booklet or you want to chat about something else not covered in this booklet. I'm always glad to hear from someone who's read one of my booklets!

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Hello, my name is Lauren Hershey—I'm a Miami real estate agent at your service. I'm a licensed full-time Realtor® with Charles Rutenberg Realty and a member of the National Association of Realtors. Specializing in sales, rentals, listings, and relocations, my reach covers the entire Miami Dade and Broward areas

I conduct my services with honesty, trustworthiness, and professionalism—and I'm always on the watch for your best interest each step of your journey.

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