

Angel Swanson

Windermere Real Estate

By Chuck Green

Angel hard at work, and she's nearly always working.



With a hint of regret even now, Angel Swanson recalls when financial circumstances forced her to make the difficult decision to abandon a fledgling real estate career.

"When we first came to Washington 20 years ago, Scott [now her husband] and I took real estate courses, but we didn't understand the financial commitment we had to make when you start. So we kind of let that dream go," Angel said wistfully, "and got regular jobs."

Eventually, Angel started her own company, which specialized in promotional products and importing. While the business was highly successful, deep in her heart she knew something was missing. "I woke up one morning and thought 'gosh, I never dreamed I'd be selling chotchkies.' When you're a child, it's not something you think you really want to do when you grow up," she chuckled.

At about that time, a strike left about \$1 million worth of products her company had imported for an event for a large client sitting at the dock. For Angel, that was the last straw. "The event came and went, and I was left high and dry. That's when I realized I needed to get out."

Not one to dawdle over a decision, soon thereafter — a little more than a year ago, Angel, 45, started on the path of regenerating her real estate aspirations by taking online courses. She interviewed with what she estimates was eight brokers, which she narrowed down to three and re-interviewed with. In May of 2006, based largely on office support she was promised, Angel accepted a position as a realtor with Windermere Real Estate/South in Federal Way.

True to its word, Windermere's staff, as it does for all its agents, has provided Angel with backup a number of times. "There's

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18 years ago, Angel moved to Auburn, WA, and began taking real estate classes.

tremendous support in the office, which reminds me every day what a wise decision I made coming there. I'm extremely lucky and grateful,"

In order, from left to right, are: Scott Swanson, Angel Swanson, Nicholas Swanson, Nathan Swanson, Christopher Little, Jennifer Swanson, Noah Braude, Stephany Swanson, Lauren Swanson, Pamela Swanson and Ashley Swanson



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANGEL SWANSON

said Angel, who focuses on residential real estate, primarily on the south end, mostly with homes in the \$250,000-\$350,000 range.

She truly believes she's found her calling. "I have a background doing design work and I always liked being inside a fresh palate, an empty house, and walking around and picturing what I can do with it. I love going into a home and seeing in my mind's eye all of its potential."

At the same time, as dedicated as she is to her career and clients, Angel and her 43-year-old husband, owner of an audio repair business, are equally passionate about their home life, which includes their seven children, ranging in age from 15 to 25 years of age, as well as youngsters who temporarily move in with their family. "Over the years, through word of mouth, we've taken in nine," she noted. "They're children who become homeless or have severe issues in their family and have elected not to live at home anymore and come to us."

While Angel thrives on the demands of balancing her job and home front responsibilities, she admits it can be quite the juggling act. "I have to be super organized." To help her stay that way, in her hallway Angel placed a white board, upon which, in five week intervals, is listed chores that rotate through all the children who live in the home

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took place in Kent. "It was a project of love, because the woman I sold the house to was going through bankruptcy and was practically nonfundable. She was having such a difficult time finding a place that fit the criteria of what she could work out for herself and her son." But Angel, working with a broker, helped the woman secure a three-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bath home — a moment forever etched in Angel's memory. "The house cost under \$250,000, which is a hard price range to find in Kent. When she signed the final papers, she started crying; then I started. I was so delighted for her I couldn't stand it," she said, a whisper of emotion welling in her voice.

"Not everyone I've worked with so far has needed quite as much help as she did, but you stand by the ones that need you badly, even though their deals are harder to complete. In fact, I like those transactions better than the ones that fly through," she said, ironically. "It's amazing how much people want to own a home and think they can't. I work hard for all my clients, but there's a special place in my heart for people in need of assistance."

To effectively carry out the hard work and attract clients, Angel devised a 21-point marketing plan which includes the MLS, maintaining contact with fellow agents and a twice monthly e-mailing, including a newsletter and informational piece. In addition, she breaks those publications down by ZIP code and compiles a quarterly report that reflects which homes sold in the area, current interest rates or other data. "We make sure we hit all the points," noted Angel, who also regularly taps into craigslist as well as a large database of potential clients she developed for her former company.

If that weren't enough, Angel also prepared a personalized package, highlighting her services, reasons customers should list

with or buy with her and what it means to her to be an effective customer service professional. However, she doesn't suggest to customers her way is the best way, only that it works for her. "If other people do something different, it doesn't make it wrong. I'm not saying I'm right; I'm just saying it's the way I do business and if it's the way a customer wants to work, we're a good match." Which is

"I pledge to my clients that I will always represent them with the highest degree of skill and professionalism. If I fail to perform any activities in our marketing plan, or if you are dissatisfied with Windermere Real Estate/South, Inc. or me, I will release your listing — unconditionally guaranteed."

at a given time. "Each child is responsible for a certain chore for that week," said Angel, who noted she and her husband designate a team captain each week "to make sure everyone has a chance to lead the group. If the team captain is successful for the entire week, they're rewarded. So there's a little incentive."

Special incentive also helped drive Angel's first home sale, which

what it's all about, she added. "When a prospective client comes in, I tell them we're interviewing each other, because we're going to be together a lot and need to make sure we can work together."

And does Angel ever work the phones, making 120 calls a week "because it works. I get probably one client out of that 120 — but it's worth it," said Angel, who in one recent month closed deals on five homes, which doesn't even count one that closed earlier than expected. "This is a numbers game. It's like any other sale: It's how many calls you make and how many people you're willing to talk to that determines how many books you have in the water. You have to put in the work and talk, talk, talk."

Angel does enough of it that the longest one of her listings — a foreclosure — sat on the market is 60 days. Working with foreclosures, especially those in need of significant work, such as that one, she said, requires an abundance of tact.

"The house needed a new kitchen and bath, paint, carpeting, everything. You don't want to insult the seller; you have to succinctly convey the point that the home has issues, and you want to make sure agents looking at the listing understand the condition the home

is in — that it's a fixer. That way, their clients are prepared before they walk into the home," pointed out Angel, who ultimately sold the home for its asking price.

Selling clients on her services is one thing; effectively communicating with them is another. Based on her previous professional experiences, which were rich in selling, Angel believes, for the most part, it's important to interact with men and women differently. "Before I started my company, I had lots of other little jobs, and almost all of them required sales. All the sales I've done had something in common: the ability to read people, which I love to do, and understand how they need you to communicate to them. Men tend to like less verbiage and being shown more homes while women prefer it the other way around. It doesn't always work that way, so you have to know when to be quiet, when to talk, when to push and when not to."

Also on her not-to list is winging it with a client. "When you make calls, be prepared. Don't make them on the fly, while you're driving home from work. Go somewhere quiet and if you need a script, use one." Otherwise, she cautioned, you can lose a possible client even

Angel keeps up to date with the local real estate trends on a daily basis so existing and potential clients have the most updated information.



PHOTO BY JOE BURGASO / MACKINAGER BROS. PHOTOS



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BURGARD, MACROBEEF GRAPHICS

before you get to your pitch. "Someone's only going to listen to you for the first five seconds. If you can get on that phone and say 'I know I'm probably interrupting your dinner, but can I talk to you for a second?' Nine times out of 10, they're going to say yes."

With a response rate like that, Angel, admittedly a type A personality, needs a way to keep up with her hectic pace. She relies heavily on a computer program that enables her machine and phone to communicate with each other. Between the two of them, Angel said, she's reminded what she's supposed to be doing and when on any given day. "I'm even reminded what day it is."

One thing Angel reminds new agents about is to keep their ears open and abide by their instincts. "Listen to advice, and do whatever speaks to your heart, because that's what will work for you. If you're hesitant or unsure about something, you won't do it well." For example, she recalled a presentation made to new agents at her office, where agents were told "you have to do all these things and invest all this money." "Well, I don't believe that. I started a company with \$200. I did my website myself, for free, which isn't hard because most of them are template based. You can do a lot of things to cut those costs but still develop your exposure. Don't try to do all of them. Find the ones that work for you and do them well — a lot."

Angel does a lot of thinking ahead, which she believes will help her listings grow. "Business is all about where you're headed, not where you're at. I'm headed for more business. Right now, I'm finding a balance between doing business and prospecting for more." While she continues to send out e-mails and mailers, she admits it's becoming more difficult to meet her weekly quota of 120 calls. "It's getting tougher to make

Angel made the decision to become a Realtor with one basic focus, to impart enough information to buyers and sellers to help them make an educated decision, and to make the transition from one home to another as stress free as possible.



Angel is strongly supported by the entire staff of Windermere Real Estate/South Inc. Here she's receiving hands-on support from Andrea Taylor, Office Administrator.

those personal contacts, which are very important. If you don't do them, you won't have any business in two or three months, said Angel, who noted by her second year, she hopes to hit the six-figure salary mark.

Ultimately, she's smart enough to realize she can't do it alone. In addition to the help she receives at her office, Angel knew meeting her objectives had to be a family affair. "When we decided I was changing jobs, I announced that for the first two years, I was going to be very busy and would work every day I was home, or even when we're on vacation. They know when mom tells them that, it's the truth. You won't love all of it, but you have to wrap your arms around it."

Not only has she wrapped her arms around it, Angel's fully embraced putting in a full day's work — no matter what time she starts. That's not necessarily as easy as it might sound, given the perpetual

demands that accompany a household her size, not to mention the special needs of her mother, who has Alzheimer's and lives with Angel. "Even if I don't start my day until three in afternoon, I still need to have what I call 'the day.' Maybe I volunteered in my children's school all morning, or helped my mother, so my day didn't start until three. I'll work until nine or 10 in the evening and have my workday."

Seeing the workday through is abetted by the fact that, in addition to an office at Windermere, Angel, as well as her husband, have home offices. "I like working from home, but it takes discipline. People who've worked for me did their jobs from home. Some people can't. They have to remember that even though they might still be in their p.j.s, they have to do the work."

Home office or not, Angel's convinced she wouldn't have accomplished nearly as much as she has without her sense of self motivation,

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instilled in her as a child. "I've always been self motivated; I went to a Montessori school, where you're kind of on your own. I moved up through levels of learning that kind of patterned my life."

Her life was also shaped by her uncle, also a Realtor, in Chicago, where Angel grew up and attended the University of Illinois Circle campus. "He was our dad and a tremendous influence."

Despite their tremendous workloads, Angel and Scott recognize the importance of spending time alone. They enjoy motorcycling together, he on his Harley, she on her Sazuki, riding wherever their whims take them, as well as Caribbean trips. Angel loves to spend time in the kitchen, whipping up Southern cuisine. "I cook and cook, pork chops, all the stuff they tell you not to eat!"

Given her good fortune, Angel's acutely aware of how easy it would be to forget the difficult times. When she and Scott first came to Washington, for instance, they visited the food bank once a week. In fact, someone noticed their plight at the time and brought food to their home, a humbling experience for Angel. "Once I got over the embarrassment, I reminded myself how important it would be to give back more than we got, which we constantly try to do." Angel's also active in her local church, through which she participates in a program to help homeless men. "I can't ever allow myself to forget where I came from."

She never does, even if it occasionally mildly stirs her husband's ire. "He's yelled at me for getting out of the car and walking over to a guy holding a sign asking for help and giving him my card and saying, 'We can get you in shelter or a program.' Scott hates when I do that, but he understands."

After all, they both understand and remember where they came from. ■

There's a sense of calmness outside of Angel's Federal Way office, and it's here in the wooded area where she tackles most of her phone calls.



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