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Atlanta Associate Shines as Real Estate Expert on 'Designed to Sell'

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Tonya M. Williams has anything but the typical life of a Realtor. She goes on listing appointments, meets with anxious clients and answers a barrage of phone calls daily, but when the RE/MAX Hall of Famer isn't keeping busy as a top-producing Realtor, she has another starring role of sorts; on Home & Garden Television's "Designed to Sell" Atlanta edition (airing every other Thursday night at 8 p.m. in all time zones).

The bubbly Sales Associate with RE/MAX of Buckhead is the real estate expert on

HGTV's top-rated home design show, which helps struggling sellers spruce up their homes for a quick sale.

"I'm having a great time being the real estate expert on the show. The awesome and unique thing about our cast is that everyone is an expert and a top producer in his or her field," says Williams, who signed on for 26 episodes. "It doesn't feel like work - it's fun, I love it, and my clients love it. They say to their friends, 'Yeah, my Realtor is the real estate expert on HGTV.'"

For her part, the Platinum Club member critiques three spaces in a seller's home and makes suggestions that will help it sell quickly. Then a design team, armed with a \$2,000 budget, takes over and gives the house a makeover. Williams returns after the changes are made and gives her opinion as to why they'll help the home sell.

So far, it's worked well.

"We've filmed 11 episodes, and each house we've featured has sold," Williams says.

TV darling

Being in front of millions of viewers each week not only boosts her career

and local celebrity, but it also reinforces that Realtors are the experts to use when buying or selling a home.

"I'm in the sellers' living rooms critiquing their homes - it's what I do for a living," Williams says. "The difference is, 'Designed to Sell' is broadcast nationwide, so many buyers and sellers are educated by watching. It validates what Realtors say to our customers. I think this exposure helps our industry as a whole."



WILLIAMS

Williams was chosen in August 2007 from among 200 Realtor applicants in the Atlanta area to be one of two real estate experts on the show. Since then, it's been a whirlwind, she says. On the weeks when she's filming, Williams spends about eight hours on the set.

"The shooting schedule is great," she says. "It allows me to work with my clients, and there's rarely a schedule conflict."

Having an open mind made it easy for Williams to take on her new role - and make it her own.

"People must make sure they're prepared when opportunity knocks," she says. "When a door is opened for you, be ready to walk through it or risk it shutting in your face. Whether the opportunity is being on camera or writing an article for your local newspaper, you have to have enthusiasm for what you do."

Balancing it all

How does Williams keep her sanity - and her schedule straight - with so many responsibilities?

"I work only with the best buyers and sellers," she says. "I don't have the time to work with people who aren't ready to work with me. As Realtors, we're brokers of time, and that's all we have. The more wisely you spend your time, the

more successful you are."

When she started in the business eight years ago, it took her six months to sell her first house. She built her business from the ground up.

Hours of hard work and late nights early in her career helped Williams secure a faithful following, but in 2003, she realized that she needed a structured business plan if she wanted to really take off.

"That year, I sat with my broker, Pat Warner, and we formulated a business plan. I fine-tuned it in 2004 and set a goal to make the 100 Percent Club in 2005; I did. Then, in 2006, I was the No. 74 RE/MAX Associate nationwide, No. 5 in the state of Georgia, and I made Chairman's Club. In 2007, I qualified for the RE/MAX Hall of Fame and made Platinum Club. Now I'm featured in 'RE/MAX Leaders and Legends Volume III' and am the real estate expert on 'Designed to Sell.' It just keeps getting better.

"I work solely by referrals, and that brings me the best clients."

Put the fun back

Agents who find themselves struggling - especially in a slower market - need to remember to have fun and celebrate their achievements instead of dwelling on their misfortunes, Williams suggests.

"Be true to yourself and be focused on what you're trying to do, but don't let that focus change who you are," she says. "Some people get so busy trying to grab the brass ring that they lose sight of everything else; then it becomes a job. You have to make it fun."

That's exactly what Williams is doing as the cameras keep rolling until early next year. In the meantime, she has another goal to work toward.

"You know what they say: 'Diamonds are a girl's best friend.' I plan on earning the Diamond Award very soon."