

## Hire Your Own Agent

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The relationship between home buyers and their agents has always been tenuous. Agents are paid a cut of the selling price, so the higher the price, the better for them -- but not for their clients.

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One way around the conflict is to use an exclusive buyer agent (search for one at [www.naeba.org](http://www.naeba.org)). Unlike traditional agents, EBAs don't work for listing brokers, so they avoid the risk of dual agency -- when one broker represents both parties. EBAs are still paid by the seller, but they can promise to represent your interests exclusively throughout the transaction and help you negotiate the lowest price.

EBAs are a definite minority in the real estate world. But no matter whom you hire, use an employment contract so that your agent is legally bound to protect your interests. Laws vary by state, so ask your agent whether your local Realtor association has a model contract (EBAs have their own version). If you're dealing with a traditional agent, check the contract for a renege clause, or one that changes the terms if you choose an in-house listing.

Generally, a contract allows you to employ an agent for a set time period (three to six months is typical). Make sure the agent will give you access to all the houses on the multiple listing service, as well as for-sale-by-owner homes, to ensure that you won't be pushed to in-house listings. Ask whether you'll be able to perform your own listings searches, too.

When looking for an agent, talk to friends who have recently bought homes and interview potential candidates. It's acceptable to shop around with different agents before settling on one, as long as you make it clear that you're just browsing. -- **Elizabeth Ody**

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