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HOME INSPECTORS

May 27, 2015

Board of Registration of
Home Inspectors
1000 Washington Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02118

Dear Sir,

June 10 Upcoming Meeting Comments

I sent (anonymously) the attached comments/observations on Home Inspector Training when the state regulations were being reviewed awhile ago. Word got back to me that there has been a change of people and the process is starting over. I was asked to resubmit it....

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Home Inspector Training

Intro

I was training to be a Home Inspector. I had gone on close to 100 inspections (and finished the class and passed the National Exam). When the Inspector went to the (old) board for signoff clarification he was told that *no* inspections could count unless there were reports written for them. I was surprised to hear that and learned afterwards that not everyone was of the same mind set. He appears to have gone to an outlier.

I lost all my inspections along with the time spent acquiring them. I didn't see a way to salvage anything so I moved on. It ended badly. Overall there were things that could have been improved that I learned the experience. My classroom instructor recently informed his students that the State Regulations are under review. He urged me to provide input and suggested doing it anonymously if there were any fear of reprisals.

Who is Involved?

In theory anyone can train to be a Home Inspector in Mass. Take the class, pass the National Exam and if you get someone to sign off on 125 inspections you can get licensed. But not all Trainees are created equal. Some have a lot of experience. Others could use more. Not everyone who wants to be a Trainee is a good candidate. And there is no mechanism to determine this. It is pretty much freeform.

On the other side of the fence, any Inspector can have Trainees. And they can handle their Trainees however they want. They need no additional training. But they really should be prepared for the additional responsibility. If the Inspector is naturally gifted this is fine. But they need to be an initial evaluation process to determine what, if any, training Inspectors may need.

The Actual Relationship

I can't think of a better way to learn the trade than to accompany a seasoned professional. Watching them do their craft. How they examine the home and deal with the clients and realtors. And I can't think of a worse way to do it than when the personalities don't click. A Tiger management employee told me they send new recruits out with several different licensed Inspectors to find a good fit. The fit is everything. The problem is that in most non-Tiger cases the Trainee is on their own and doesn't have a lot of choice in which Inspector they go out with. And the ability of the Inspector to provide signoff (or not) puts the Trainee in a subordinate position.

More structure needs to be introduced between the Inspector and the Trainee. Right up front a written agreement should be drawn up outlining responsibilities of both. What the duties and expectations are of each. (Especially if it is a financial relationship.) For example if the Inspector prefers the Trainees to observe quietly, time should be made later for questions. (And Inspectors should welcome questions as *not just a threat or challenge but as a chance to learn.*) If the Inspector wants the Trainee nearby or allows them to do some things independently that should be outlined too.

The Inspector/Trainee relationship should be confidential. If either has a question there should be a *supervisor* who would keep tabs on how things are going. Either could go to the supervisor with questions. And if the relationship isn't working there should be an attempt to fix it or go to a different pairing. The goal is to get the best trained Inspectors.

Feedback is also important between Trainee and Inspector. The Trainee needs to know how they are

doing and what to work on. Not just go along on Inspections. Periodic status updates would really help.

Report Writing

Report writing is the Holy Grail of Home Inspecting. And reporting styles vary widely. They run the gamut from tear off checklists all the way to mini encyclopedias. Each Inspector chooses his favorite way to communicate his findings to the client. But when it comes to training there should be a more standard style of reporting used. One that is streamlined. (The purpose here is not to train novelists.) And should using a software package be ok for training purposes if all you re doing is clicking a lot? What about checklist format reports?

When to start writing reports also needs to be clarified. From the beginning? After becoming an Associate? At the discretion of the Inspector? This kind of ties in with what qualifies as valid inspection to sign off on. Needs to be clearer.

Unfortunately the report writing training has also become intertwined with fees. The norm seems to be for Inspectors to charge per report. Some charge more, some less. Some go with a flat fee. Others don't feel compelled to charge at all (for relatives, friends etc). Compensation for training needs to be more standardized. And if you are charging to review a checklist style report it seems like less work than a free form style.

Compensation for Trainees

In other trades the apprentices can earn while they learn. Pulling wire, lugging pipe, carrying boards. Not only are Home Inspector Trainees uncompensated, they may have to pay up to \$10,000 for their education. There has to be a way to redo the process so that Trainees can early on become proficient enough at parts of the inspection and assist the Inspector. They can add value. But under the existing setup they have to be able to support themselves for a year before they can get licensed.

Inspections as Criteria

What counts as a valid inspection for signoff purposes is one thing. But even before that I think too much weight is placed on the 125 inspection *count*. It makes it too easy for people with connections to the business to get in and to hard/expensive for outsiders. What is magic about 125? Or the one year waiting period? They both miss the real point of trying to determine when is a Trainee 'ready' to be licensed. There should be a final assessment made by the training Inspector *and* the supervisor (or someone else designated) to get licensed. An objective assessment as to whether a candidate is competent. Involving several people. For some Trainees it could be a lot sooner, for others even later.

A small aside here - the idea of 'indirect' supervision seems wrong. How can the Inspector know what happened if he wasn't on site? But the more I think about it I can make a case that *sometimes* it would make sense to allow a signoff if the Inspector wasn't at the inspection.

Final Thoughts

Home Inspecting is very challenging, changing, and risky - both physically and legally. Home buyers are quick to file lawsuits whether valid or just out of spite. The job requires a skill set that combines technical, personal and communication skills rarely found in the same person. The job is far from glamorous. You gotta love crawl spaces. And you won't die rich - but you might just die. There are real hazards involved. And many of the older Inspectors are of retiring age so replacements are needed. It makes sense to identify the best candidates for the job and give them the best training.

