

HOME STAGING & REDESIGN
PUBLICATION



LOVE THE STAGER
the STAND UP issue

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Member Spotlight

Leigh Newport
Staged By Design, LLC



MEET LEIGH

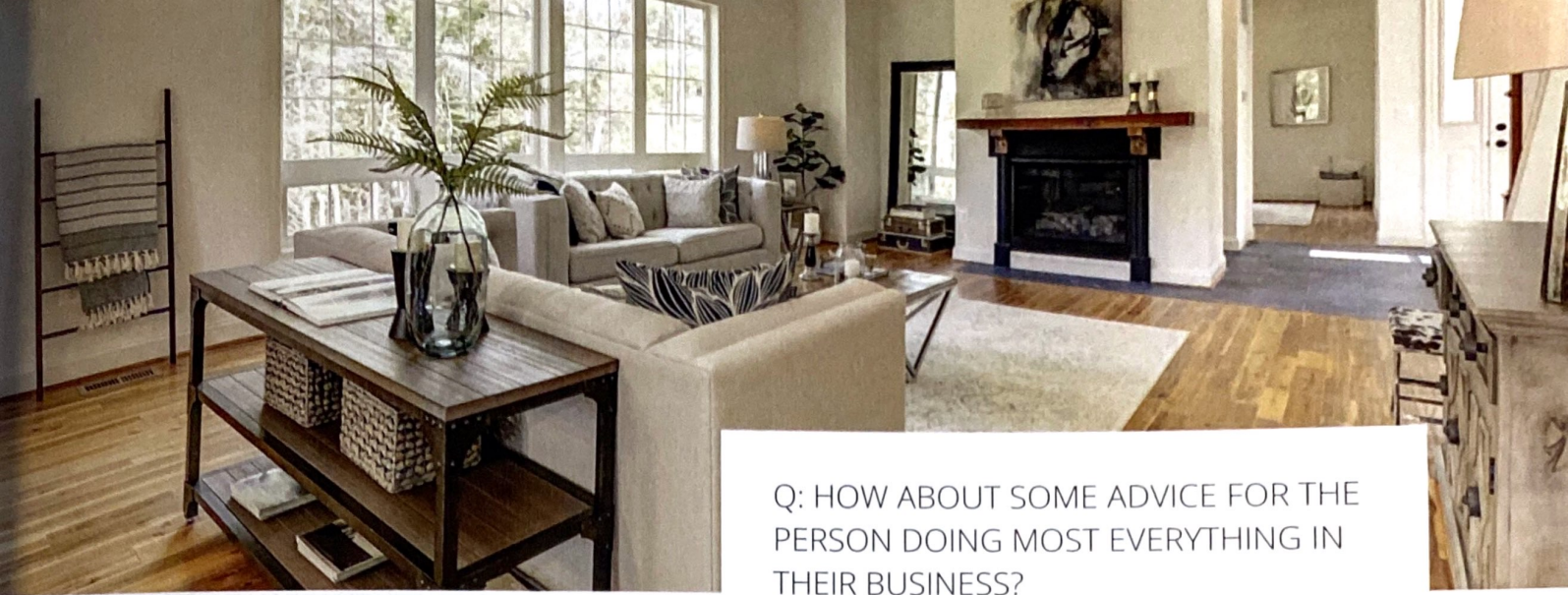
Leigh and her team have effectively and beautifully staged over \$1 billion in Real Estate since beginning the company in 2007. They reflect an overall Days on Market Average of 18 days. Leigh discovered Home Staging as a career in 2005 when the home her family was selling was professionally Staged. It sold for \$25,000 above asking price nine days after listing. Prior to Home Staging, Leigh spent a long career as a hospitality manager and corporate trainer with Marriott International. She has served on the Board of Directors for the Washington, DC Chapter of the International Association of Home Staging Professionals (IAHSP®) for three years, including the Office of President. She is a sought-after public speaker committed to educating homeowners and Realtors alike on the benefits of Home Staging through seminars, CE classes and other engagements throughout the Washington, DC Metro area.

Q: TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF AND WHERE YOU ARE IN BUSINESS TODAY.

I have owned and operated a full-service Staging company based in Northern Virginia since 2007. We provide 400 Staging Consultations per year for occupied homes, 3-5 Redesign projects per month, and stage roughly 100 vacant homes per year. I handle the sales and marketing (aside from social media), all Redesigns, and most of the Staging Consultations, while my amazing staff plans, prepares and implements the staging and de-staging. Our Operations Manager handles the logistics and facilities management, in addition to client care, follow up and everything in between. We have always operated as if we were a bigger business than we really are, with regards to our systems and standards, which allows for growth and development.



LEIGH NEWPORT
STAGED BY DESIGN
HAMILTON, VA
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Q: HOW ABOUT SOME ADVICE FOR THE PERSON DOING MOST EVERYTHING IN THEIR BUSINESS?

Q: FROM BEGINNING UNTIL NOW, HOW HAS YOUR BUSINESS CHANGED?

My business has evolved from a "one-woman show" to a full team of six, including my husband, Curt, who handles HR, Payroll, Invoicing and all things IT. We have grown as many other stagers have with storing items in our garage, to outside storage, to a 5,000 sq. foot warehouse. The growth happened slowly, though, as my youngest, now 15, was only 2 years old when I staged my first home. I wanted to expand at a rate that I could not only manage, but excel. This, combined with understanding the need for systems as we grow, has allowed us to do just that.

Q: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE STARTING?

I would suggest talking to someone who has the type of business you would like to have. Ask the hard questions and find out what mistakes they made, and learn from them. HSRA provides you with a foundation and environment for connection that every new stager should capitalize on.

First of all, you can't do it ALL. You will burn out quickly and the love you have for the business can be diminished by sheer fatigue. Identify the few tasks you truly dislike, or are not your strength, and hire someone, whether it is part-time, a temp or a contract position, to help you with what does not give you joy.

Q: WHAT SUGGESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ON MANAGING INVENTORY AT AN EARLY PHASE AND MOVING TO A MORE SEASONED BUSINESS?

We were fortunate to incorporate an inventory system as soon as we moved into our warehouse. It was a long, arduous task, but extremely beneficial. This is essential not only for productivity, but it helps you develop an understanding of what pieces are making you money, and what ends up gathering dust in a corner.

Be prepared to make mistakes in what and how much you buy, but know that selecting versatile pieces will lead to higher profits when it comes to inventory. Buying strategically, rather than buying based simply on demand, allows your business to scale as needed. This also avoids desperate purchases that are later regretted.

I am proud to say that I have never turned business away because I didn't have enough inventory. I have managed this through a combination of strategic buying and good relationships with our vendors with quick ship programs. That doesn't mean I haven't stressed about it, but we have always been able to make it work.

Q: WHAT PROCESSES NEED TO BE IN PLACE IN A BUSINESS SUCH AS YOURS?

I am a firm believer in systems that help to set expectations, create repeatable processes and reduce staff training time. We created a Company Manual, a Standard Operations Manual and Training Videos as soon as we converted our staff to employees. We continue to expand the systems to include client contacts and sales through our CRM.

Q: HOW ABOUT EXTRA HELP?

I pull in our Operations Manager on large stages. For high profile or overly large projects I join the team as needed. With one full-time stager and two part-time staggers, we are currently able to keep up with our current demand.

Q: WHAT DID AN AVERAGE WORKDAY LOOK LIKE IN THE BEGINNING FOR YOU COMPARED TO NOW?

I used to spend a lot of time driving to each house to preview, complete a few consultations and then head home at 6 pm. After dinner, I would put my kids to bed, have a few moments of peace and quiet and then start pulling and prepping for the next day's staging--usually after 9 pm and ending around midnight. I initially kept the accessories inventory in our basement storage and had to walk upstairs and across the entire house to get to the garage to load. It was then time to Jenga it into the Suburban where I couldn't see out because of all the pillows. The next day, freelance staggers would meet me at the house along with the furniture rental company, and we would finish in 4 or 5 hours. Today, I check in with the staff in the morning, conduct three consultations a day and am home by 6. Some days I pop by the stage or office to send proposals, but have delegated a large majority of the day to day tasks to my staff.



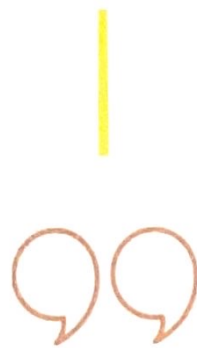
Q: WHO IS YOUR IDEAL CLIENT?

We love builders, as well as high performing agents that pay for the staging, and allow us to do what we do best! I absolutely love new agents. I enjoy being able to share how to successfully partner with your stager and training them right from the start. They also have a lot of time on their hands in the beginning and are always quick to recommend you on social media, etc.

Q: WHAT ARE SOME LESSONS LEARNED?

Don't let your business run YOU. I wish I had that perspective when I started, and I still struggle with it from time to time, as I am a people-pleaser by nature. Also, when hiring, listen to the small things people say during interviews. The insignificant comments people make often say the most about who the person really is.

ANY LAST MINUTE ADVICE FOR OUR MEMBERS? You don't have to be all things to all people. Find the clients, vendors and employees that appreciate you and do business as you do, and nurture those relationships.



*Courage is the most important of all the virtues,
because without courage you can't practice
any other virtue consistently.*