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Appraisal as a career: "How does one become an appraiser"

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My earliest recollection of thinking I might want to become an appraiser was when my wife and I were in the process of buying our first house in 1981. Curious about the appraisal process, I met the bank's appraiser at the property and followed him around like a puppy as he inspected the interior and exterior of this small two-family house. When he was preparing to leave, I asked him the second most frequently asked question of appraisers (the first being, "So, what's it worth"), "How does one become an appraiser?" I was taken aback by his response.

Rather than suggest courses I might take, or organizations I should join, he went out of his way to discourage me from pursuing a career in appraisal. Here was a successful appraiser (I later learned that he owned his own company, employing several appraisers) doing his best to steer me away from his chosen profession. Whether the motivation for his response was to limit future potential competition (not likely), pump up his ego, or just having a bad hair day, I'll never know. He died a few years ago.

What I took away from that encounter, however, was that if I ever became an appraiser, I would do whatever I could to help others into the profession. Over the past 28 years, when asked about the road to becoming an appraiser, I have taken the time to explain the process. I have often invited aspiring appraisers to my office so that I could fully lay out the good, the bad and the ugly about becoming, and being, an appraiser.

Although these discussions would sometimes last hours, eventually the question of how I got started would come up. In 1982, after having completed three appraisal courses, I was ready to be hired by an appraisal firm. Unfortunately, the appraisal firms were not ready to hire me. Why? I very quickly discovered the age-old, "Catch 22" in the profession: you need experience to get a job, but no one is willing to train you. So, how do you gain appraisal experience?

I was discouraged, but not beaten. After a nine-month stint in real estate sales, I went back to the instructor of my first appraisal class (who had his own appraisal business) and proposed to him that he hire me without pay. I said I would work for free for as long as it took; that when I started making him money (instead of costing him money), he could start paying me a nominal amount. My recollection is that it took about three months before I received a small percentage of the fee on a single family appraisal. (His recollection is that it was closer to six months.)

When I tell aspiring appraisers this story, the most common response is, "If you think I'm going to work for no pay, you're crazy!" Until very recently I have countered with, "No, but I can't use someone without experience and I can't afford to take the time to train you." So we both lose.

About two years ago I decided to do something about this problem. I designed a practical training

program for appraisers! For the first time, aspiring appraisers can get practical, hands-on experience in a structured training program. This is not an appraisal licensing school. Students complete actual appraisals, leading to the development of a portfolio (i.e., experience!) that can be presented to potential employers. No more Catch 22! If you've been thinking about a career in real estate appraisal, check out the Practical Valuation Academy at practicalvaluationacademy.com.

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