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Don't panic the slow down - We are part of the cycle - by Jennifer O'Neill

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Does the slow down bring you into an irrational panic? EVERY SINGLE TIME for me. I know the logic is that it is temporary, it's been done before, and all is good in the world. But here we go again. Whether it is seasonal (busy summer, slow winter), or cyclical (1987 highs and 1990's lows, 2008 crash, COVID boom and now interest rate slow down), it hits me again and it's the same.

This is when it is important to remember you haven't taken a vacation since COVID started. You need some me time. Decompress. And although the best time to pick up clients was during the past couple years, now you have time to update your templates, take classes, go to networking events, and expand your client base.

I worked in an appraisal firm (you know the story, it was my uncle's business) in high school. It was a pivotal time when my Dad transitioned jobs, got his SRA and took over the firm. It was the crazy 1980s. It was a bigger firm, and I did anything to help. (Well, we had three typists, crunching out reports, I can't say I could help them). But I opened files, I took the appraiser's work files and made their floor plan look good (or in one case, I found the load bearing wall and deciphered the mess and wondered how that guy could be an appraiser and not know what a load bearing wall was). I pulled out flood maps (paper maps and photocopied them), I put the arrows on the location maps, ran to one hour photo on a regular basis, and when we went to dot matrix (I swear I'm not old)... I learned how to properly load those forms and worms in the printer, so we didn't waste pre-printed URAR forms we paid for. In the late 80's, with an office full of appraisers, I couldn't assign a report - the appraisers were so busy. I'd see Donna had a New Fairfield file and try to give her three more. Terry, JoanAnn, Dave, Joe, Karl, Ellen, whoever walked in the door I was begging them to take more work. And prided myself on hand delivering all those reports to the local clients (that was quick, same-day delivery, you know!) I'm really glad I got to see all that. During that time, I drove 50 minutes to take a Principles and Practices class, and eventually went away to college. When I wound up back home, deciding what to do (I had already decided although I loved my Interior Design BFA, I wasn't going to do that), it was a natural progression to getting my appraisal license. So, by the time I started inspecting and writing appraisals, it was 1991-92. We all know I was doing the foreclosures from '87. Early on, I got exposed to time adjustments. Something that has reared it's head again. It is a cycle. Stay in the business long enough, and you get exposed to all different markets.

And then by the 2008 crash and bad mortgages, it was another whole market. If that slow down wasn't enough, add on Dodd-Frank two years later. All the relationships I had developed with clients went out the door. While clients say they picked and chose appraisers, I picked and chose my clients too. I had been appreciated for my work. The clients knew my report would go through underwriting. They knew if there was a question, not only could I answer it, I could support and defend it. And that meant their loan was going through. Introduce Dodd-Frank and the management company. The advent of the management company meant they picked the cheapest appraiser. You heard about appraisers crossing the state to do work and for half the previous, normal fee with little to no geographic competency. And no one seemed to care about quality. I hated that time. I was depressed. I really didn't want to do appraisals anymore. I definitely didn't feel appreciated. (I'm not

bashing management companies. There are good ones. And they went through their own cycles, evening out in the end). Until, one day I was sitting in my car outside a small, county town hall and the cell phone rang. I almost didn't answer it. It was private banking. They found me, because I had my SRA designation. There are always the naysayers saying the Appraisal Institute doesn't help, that it isn't recognized, but they are wrong. That one client brought joy back to my work. Challenging and complex properties, and people who read and understood the reports. But to put into perspective on the irrational panic – I got one order from private banking, and then the market went dead. I thought they were gone, that was it. It must have been a year after that first order, when I heard back from them. That's a long dead spell. And they became one of my favorite clients. Still are, actually.

And then there is the move back to a more typical market, where you (almost) forget those complete slumps.

This time, with COVID, I knew I was riding the cyclical wave. As soon as I get busy, my head goes, "the next thing is slow," and it echos in my mind. With that echo, came the mentality I have to take all this work, and when it gets slow I can...go on vacation, learn a new language, do some yoga or exercise (what do you do? Golf, tennis, fishing, hunting, have you tried pickle ball yet? Now is a good time).

But it's all relative. The local Realtors are already talking about picking up for spring and still low inventory. We are stuck with these higher interest rates for the foreseeable future. I had a variety of work still coming in (divorce, tax appeals, estate, etc). But you always feel the crunch. It's how you react and deal with what has been an inevitable force in our job description that makes you keep going. It's been a great time to take classes, expand knowledge, and look to other clientele to fill the voids. It's been a great time to vacation, or volunteer for the Appraisal Institute, or any other group in your area. I did a talk for our local board of Realtors to let them know about ANSI and how it might affect them. I have been more active in Women Council of Realtors, which around here, is going through a re-birth. And because I am part of the Appraisal Institute, I got asked to be a panelist for our Board of Realtors big spring event.

Hopefully, if you made it this far, you see my irrational panic may continue, but the long term has been steady. Keep up with technology, keep up with local groups who expand your knowledge base, and know that your skills are appreciated and needed. And try not to panic. Remember, you are part of the cycle.

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