**NAR Episode 11- final transcript
Guests: Ali Whitley and Mark Shepherd**

**Intro**: You're listening to Drive with NAR powered by REALTOR® Magazine. Listen in as real estate pros talk tools of the trade and share stories of inspiration. Get ready to step up your business. This episode is sponsored by Center for REALTOR® development.

**Melissa**: Hi, everyone. Thanks for joining us today. I'm Melissa Dittmann Tracy, a news editor for REALTOR® Magazine and it's “Styled, Staged and Sold” blog. On today's episode, we're talking about professionalism. I know, I know, you hear that word and you're probably thinking, “Well, I'm professional.” But let's be honest. How are you really all the time? And most importantly, how can you show it to your clients and peers? I can't think of two better guests to join us today to talk about this. Real estate professionals Ali Whitley and Mark Shepherd. Ali's the Director of Education at RE/MAX Crossroads in Akron, Ohio, and is an instructor for several NAR designations and certifications. Mark is the founder of the Shepherd Real Estate Group in Clearfield City, Utah. He's also the chairman of NAR’s Commitment to Excellence and its Professional Standards Committees. Ali and Mark, thank you for joining us today on Drive with NAR. So professionalism is such a broad term. So let's kick this off by talking about what professionalism even means in the real estate industry. Is it mostly about how real estate professionals interact with clients? Or are there other elements involved? Mark?

**Mark**: Well, I think there are lots of elements involved, we so often talk about professionalism and think about just how we deal with our clients that we, in many cases with agents is just that they show up and that's the professionalism, but man professionalism has so much more to deal with, to deal with dealing with the public, and dealing with other agents and how we, how we treat other agents, how we respect them, how we handle ourselves when we're in showings. And when we're in somebody else's property. There's so much to do with professionalism that is outside of that realm of just how we deal with our own clients.

**Ali**: Yeah, I agree. There's so much to do with our clients. But we also have to think about preparing ourselves, continuing education, making sure that we are fully knowledgeable about our marketplaces, that all encompasses the professionalism that we need.

**Melissa**: Where do you see real estate professionals falling short? When it comes to professionalism? Are there any areas that you believe agents could use some more work on?

**Mark**: Wow, that's a loaded one. Ali, you hit that one first?

**Ali**: Yeah, I think that we need to be very cognizant of our communication, how frequently we communicate, do we pick up the phone? Are we returning calls, you know, communication is key in our business. And I think that a lot of agents don't have that piece of it. When we get so busy. In the day to day, we let some things drop sometimes. And communication certainly shouldn't be one of them.

**Mark**: Well, yeah, and this marketplace has been crazy for the last couple of years. I think if there's one thing above all others that has gone by the wayside as we've gotten so busy, it is that professionalism. I mean, Ali, you nailed it. It's communication. It's the simple things. You know, it's a showing that I had last week on one of my listings that the agent called me, got online, scheduled a showing. And online, it told them, you need to wait two hours, there's a two-hour time period, you got to get the clients the seller’s notice for at least two hours. And no sooner had he scheduled it for two hours from then that he called me and said, “Yeah, I need to get into your listing. We're in the neighborhood. You know, we'll be there in just a couple of minutes.” And I had to ask him, did you not just schedule that online? We just spoke about this. You've scheduled that for two hours from now. “Well, yeah, but we're here. I just needed to get it scheduled.” It's that stuff that has just gone it seems by the wayside, that we've just looked at it and said, you know what, we're going so fast, and so hard, and so much going on that we forget to speak, we forget to talk to people, you said right now we don't even talk to a client sometimes. That's hard and it's causing some problems.

**Ali**: Yeah. And I think oftentimes agents get so caught up in advocating for their own client, that they also forget the professionalism and the care of the customer as well. So when we're giving feedback, be considerate when you're in someone else's house, you know, be considerate of their home. And when we get caught up in solely advocating at all costs, but not also caring for the customer. We sometimes have those problems.

**Mark**: Yeah, how many of your clients now your sellers have video or audio devices in their house that they're picking that up on, maybe it's even just the ring doorbell. And you're standing there with your clients at the front door. And you're, you say something to your clients, or they say something about the house already. And then you get inside and they start picking it apart and hurting sellers’ feelings, just by being way too open, you've got to have that conversation with your buyers beforehand, and explain to them their own professionalism in this and how that reflects on you. Well, that truly and it also can affect the negotiations in the future, if the buyer decides they do want to move forward. But there has been some really negative feedback given that can harm future negotiations. And so being tactful, and making sure that yes, you're advocating for your client, but you're also protecting that ability to negotiate in the future is very important.

**Melissa**: Very good points. It's, it seems like some of this too, is it's maybe some, sometimes it's not intentional, but it's being aware of how you're projecting yourself some of these technology items to moving on, you know, it's often said that real estate professionals should present their authentic selves in order to win business. But if we're honest, our authentic selves probably aren't the most professional all the time. So how do we blend these ideas of authenticity and professionalism? I'd love to hear your thoughts.

**Mark**: You know, that one is really hard. Because we're all individuals, we look different, we dress different, and we've brought in a whole new generation into selling real estate. I can't imagine in my world ever going out in anything less than a suit and tie to show a house. In fact, if I show up in anything less, something went totally wrong. And I have had to when a client calls me up on the spur f I need to see this, kind of get back into this house, we need to do this, and I get it scheduled. And it happened during COVID. And I showed up in shorts. And I have never felt more embarrassed, I must have apologized three or four times to my clients during that showing, because I felt so horrible about the way I was dressed. And they kept telling me, ah, it's alright. It's not a big deal. We're dressed down too. But to me, that was a level of professionalism. That's me, it's my authenticity, it's who I am. When I show homes, and when I deal with clients and other agents.

**Ali**: Sometimes being authentic is a wonderful thing. But at the same time, it cannot be there are so many different personalities out there. And there is an agent personality for each buyer or for each seller. And if an individual does not feel comfortable with that agent, clearly they're going to work with someone else. If you are going to a listing appointment and you go in your suit and tie or you go in your dress and your jacket, and make that person feel comfortable, that's fantastic. But if you show up, and you're going to go to vacant land, and you're in your suit and tie and you have your dress shoes on, that's not going to be appropriate for that situation. So I think we need to look at our professionalism as how are we dressed for the situation. The other thing that I think we need to think about is what we do when we're on our off time online. So when we're sitting at home, and we're online, and we're having fun, sometimes people see that as I'm in my own home and I can type whatever it is I want to type. And I think that we need to consider our professionalism when online as well. Yes, we can have fun. Yes, we can tell jokes and cut up a little bit. But we also need to make sure that we are not projecting something to our clients that we would not want to present it to them.

**Melissa**: Great points, Mark and Ali. Have you found any tools helpful in your journey to raise your own professionalism?

**Ali**: Yes, yes, absolutely. You know, there are so many tools that we have available to us through our associations, through NAR, that we just sometimes don't use. So I think mainly I like to say use your tools, use the tools that you have available to us. Through NAR, we have the opportunity to use RPR, REALTORS® Property Resource, we have the opportunity to use [Photofy](https://signup.photofy.com/nar), there are so many resources on the website that if we just dial in and we check out what we can use, there's so many opportunities to us. Mark and I were talking not too long ago about a fantastic member benefit through NAR, which is the commitment to excellence.

**Mark**: C2EX is probably one of the best benefits that NAR has rolled out in in ages because it speaks directly to professionalism. You sign on, and it gives you an immediate assessment of your skills and your knowledge and how much do you know about the business as a whole. And you find out real quick, as I went in thinking that I knew it all, I mean, good grief, I helped develop the program, I helped write the questions. And when I signed on, I took the assessment, and I realized I didn't know as much as I thought I did. Or at least I wasn't as fresh as I thought I was. And the system when that happens, assigns you tasks to complete. And it's a wonderful system, because it helps you grow as an agent, it helps you improve your professionalism and take it to a different level. It includes everything from ethics to law to civic engagement to dealing with your elected officials, and whether or not you're in our PAC donor, it covers all of those different aspects, and then it has an extra section for broker owners to deal with being a broker. And how do you act as a broker? And how do you deal with your agents? Man, it's such a great program. But the thing for me, the most important part of it is it is the first time that NAR has given out a an endorsement of an agent, we have for years, you've got all kinds of certifications, you can become a Certified Residential Specialist, or CRS, you can earn your GRI, you can get the alphabet soup behind your name. It's the first time NAR has said, hey, let's endorse an agent because of their professionalism and their commitment to excellence and being the best that they can.

**Ali**: What I really love about the program is that it doesn't matter if you have been in the business for two years or 25 years, you can still learn something through this process. And that's what I really loved about it, I have been in the business, I thought just like Mark, hey, I've got this, you know, I'll be able to breeze through this. And it was a very fun and interesting way to learn. But I did learn new concepts. And I also was able to learn information about what is on the NAR website that, you know, I maybe have not seen before, it really takes a deep dive into a lot of the information that we have on the website, and what those resources are that we can use in our business every day working with our clients, to be more prepared to be more professional, and to give our clients the best information possible.

**Melissa**: I'd love to hear some of your other favorite tools besides C2EX and things that can also be useful that maybe REALTORS® should explore for their professionalism and during maybe the slower months ahead.

**Ali**: Yeah, as it starts to slow down, I know that sometimes can be a little demotivating for REALTORS® and people can start to think, OK, it's getting slower. And in that we may get less productive, we need to do the opposite. So continue to be productive, continue to learn for me, whenever there's a slowdown, and you know, our business is cyclical. And so if we have a slowdown at a time in the year that I'm you know, looking at my calendar and saying, OK, I've got a little time here, I always go to education. And then I look at the opportunities for different designations and certifications and say, what is it that I can learn this week, I would love to learn this for my business. So if you have not, if you work with a lot of seniors, for instance, and you do not have the Senior Real Estate Specialist designation, it's time you know, it's time to go ahead and commit to that pricing strategy advisor if you need a little brush up on that, how are we going to, you know, price homes in the coming market, looking into some of the different opportunities for certifications and designations. That's my one key that I go to, my first key that I go to, the next thing that I like to do is use my tools, what are the tools out there that are available to us, some for free or low cost, that we can use in our business and really implement a good system so that when the market speeds up again, we've got that running and we’re comfortable with it?

**Mark**: We have so many tools, get the education, use this time that things are challenging to go out and learn something new, use new tools. I mean, I can tell you my favorite absolute tool, if you want to mention is Keeping Current Matters. It has a video that I sit on camera and read my phone and the script is right there. I don't have to do, I can personalize it. So it feels like me and then I just read it and it's putting me in immediately sends it out to all of my social media. But it's tools like that that will set you apart. And that's what you're trying to do is raise the bar for yourself. And for those around you.

**Ali**: Yeah, if there's anything that we know, if you've been in this business a while, you know that the only constant is change. It changes all the time. And here we are going into a shift or change. Those of us that have been in the market for years understand that it comes, we may need to deal with it a little bit differently than we have in the past. But those that have been in the business just a few years, have not experienced this before. And we know that many agents come into the business during the high times and fall out later on. So for those people that are in that, you know, two to three range, two to three year range. And they feel that, you know, something may be stalling for them, it is a great opportunity. And I would encourage you to go get that education. Now that you have the time, you can sit down and you can get more in your business. And one thing that we have been lacking over the last couple of years, I would say, is the true negotiations that we have had to do in the past. Because at that point, it was 50 offers were coming in and I just needed to be higher than 49 of them. Right? And then the better offer, there wasn't the true negotiation that a lot of us really love to do. You know that we love to negotiate and work for our clients. So the real estate negotiation expert is a fantastic class for you to learn, earn that certification, learn how to negotiate in any market, whether it's a buyer's market a seller's market, you know, at any time.

**Mark**: Yeah, there's some classes on accounting and tax, those are great ones to take, especially at about this time of the year, and preparing for next year. But most of this, again, is preparing for the future. It may not change your business today, but it will prep you to be ready for business in the future. And I think it's the one thing when people ask me, you know, what's the lack of professionalism, and especially when the agents are flooding the market. And that's not a bad thing. That's not a, it's not a horrible thing to have tons and tons and tons of agents joining us and wanting this as their profession. But so many of them don't look at it as a profession. It's a job. It's a, again, a pastime. It's a side hustle. I had somebody I interviewed ask, I asked him in the interview, how many transactions you want to close this year? And the answer was one, you know, they just want some extra money for vacation. If they can close one deal, this is vacation for their family and we can take this to a different level, you can prep yourself to be the best of the best so that when things do change, you're still the go-to guy.

**Ali**: Yeah, you know, another idea to increase your professionalism is get involved in your associations. Get involved in your local association, get involved in your state and your national because you get to learn so much from being involved in those committees and task forces. And you get to learn from other very involved REALTORS® in your marketplace and network with people outside of your office. So you really get to meet people in in the industry and learn.

**Melissa**: Sit tight. Here's a word with our sponsor.

***Mid-Reel Ad****: The Center for REALTOR® Development is NAR’s home for exceptional education. With 11 credentials, over 100 micro courses and an award-winning podcast, there is a learning experience for every real estate professional. Sharpen your skills and boost your business by investing in yourself. Get started at* [*CRD.Realtor*](https://crd.realtor/)*. Joining me is Jennifer Rzeszewski, the Vice President and Executive Director of the Center for REALTOR® Development. Hi, Jennifer. So I hear it's Designation Awareness Month. So what is CRD doing to celebrate Designation Awareness Month?*

***Rzeszewski****: For Designation Awareness Month, CRD, we are offering 20% off all of our designation and certification online courses. You can find those if you go to* [*Learning.Realtor*](https://learning.realtor/diweb/start) *or CRD.realtor and we're also going to be at the NAR NXT, booth number 672, in Orlando, Florida. We will be located right next to the NAR booth. We do have a fun booth activity and prizes. So please stop by.*

***Melissa****: So there's plenty of education to choose from. What's new and exciting that our listeners might want to check out?*

***Rzeszewski****: We launched a brand new certification this year, which is the Home Finance Resource certification. And we saw that consumers are often overwhelmed by the mortgage and finance areas of the real estate transaction. And we wanted to make sure that our members had a solid foundation to be able to explain that to consumers and their clients.*

***Melissa****: Sounds great. Thanks, Jennifer.*

**Melissa**: Let's hop back into the discussion we were having about professionalism in real estate. At what point in the transaction do you feel your professionalism is tested the most? And how have you learned to overcome that?

**Ali**: Yeah, I think that some of the things we need to remember is that when we are in the heat of a negotiation, sometimes we will say something or could say something that is either personal or hurtful to the other party, negative towards a person, and we need to think about that. If there is a time that somebody says something that's inflammatory to you, step back, don't respond right away, you know, sit back and think, OK, how am I going to respond to this in a productive way, in a positive way, rather than in an emotional way? So I think that is one thing that I think about before I respond, whether it is in an email or in, you know, a conversation, sit back and look at that and think, how am I going to move forward in a positive way versus an inflammatory way?

**Mark**: Yeah, we're friendly competitors. And that's hard to remember, sometimes when you're negotiating, this is not a win-win. I mean, a win-lose this, this has to be win-win stuff. We all represent clients, we're all in this together. And believe it or not, you're going to deal with that other agent again, you will do business again, they will remember who you are. And so you've got to watch the way that you're doing things when you're negotiating with other agents. And just remember that it's not a cutthroat. This is a win-win. And how do we both take care of our clients and both be successful?

**Ali**: Yeah. And, you know, another thing that I learned, and I learned this very early on in my career, I was working very hard for a client. And it was 12 o'clock midnight, we needed to have this contract together, it wasn't going to work. And it was 11:35. And we're on the phone together. And I have a client who is sobbing because it isn't coming together. And this isn't going to be, you know, the transaction tonight. And it really hits us, you know, it hit me hard. And I helped that client, and I got off the phone. And I was so defeated. And I felt so down. And I realized that if I feel like this tomorrow, if I wake up tomorrow, and I still hold this feeling, I'm not going to be able to do this job. And I'm not going to be prepared for my next client that needs me or this client, you know, to work on the next transaction. And so I decided right then and there that I will do my very best every single day. And I will work as hard as I possibly can every day. And if something doesn't go right, I'm not going to hold on to that into the next day, I'm going to wake up fresh, I'm going to be ready and prepared to help that next person, because it is the most important thing to that client, we may have five transactions, we may have 25 going on at one time. But this situation right now, this transaction is the most important to that person that you're talking to. And we need to make sure that we give it the focus that it's due.

**Mark**: Yeah, I went to a class years and years and years ago, and I'll never forget the lesson that I learned in that class. And it was what we were talking about mission statements. And I had a mission statement for my business. You know, I'd been doing this long enough, but it was one of those mission statements that was, you know, 40 paragraphs long and it was a dissertation, not another real mission statement. And in there, the instructor said, look, I'll let you steal this and I begged him afterward if I could, his mission statement, which I've adopted is: Amaze, amuse, delight and surprise. That was it. It was four words. That was the probably the most important changing aspect of my business in years, and I've lived by it ever since. I'm out there to take care of clients. That's what keeps me professional is that they are my reason. They are what feeds my family. But the first thing that my broker taught me was if you lose sight of the of the client and start focusing on commission, you're done. As soon as you start focusing on clients and lose sight of the commission, you'll be successful. Commission will happen, if you don't have to worry about that, focus on your clients, amaze them, amuse them, have them just go wow. And they will keep coming back and they will send their friends and you will never ever have to worry about that again. It's taken I think a whole different level. And again, it did it for me 15 years ago when he told me that, and it changed the way that I did business from that moment on.

**Melissa**: I love that phrase. I appreciate you both sharing. You know, I think reflection is so important. It shows us where we need to learn to grow. So, Mark and Ali, thank you for joining us on Drive with NAR and for sharing how to be more professional, friendly competitors. I'm using your phrase, Mark, in real estate.

***Outro****: Thanks for joining us on this episode of “Drive With NAR.” Tune in every month on* [*Magazine.realtor/drive*](https://magazine.realtor/drive) *or subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Get more tips to boost your business at* [*Magazine.Realtor*](https://magazine.realtor/)*.*