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How to Approach an Estate Sale

By **TERI KARUSH ROGERS**

EVEN when heirs and executors move in harmony, estate sales can lumber along at an aching slow pace.

It can take at least several months for wills to be probated by courts, even though the apartments are often put on the market before probate is completed. Communication and consensus among geographically scattered heirs and executors eat up time and can hobble negotiations with the buyer.

For this reason, and because an executor is legally obligated to obtain the best possible price, buyers should be cautious about lowballing, said Daniela Kunen, a managing director at Prudential Douglas Elliman. "Play less games with an estate," Ms. Kunen said.

She also noted that in an estate transaction, an accepted bid is really not accepted without a signed contract, because an executor must take the highest price that comes in from a qualified buyer.

Finally, closings can be delayed by heirs who drag their feet cleaning out a loved one's apartment, by lost stock certificates and by the failure to obtain proof that estate taxes have been paid.

With planning, conflict among heirs and delayed sales can be minimized. To keep conflict from hijacking a transaction, "it's absolutely better if the executor is not a family member," said Jacky Teplitzky, a managing director at Prudential Douglas Elliman.

Estate planning lawyers emphasize the importance of "coming up with an estate plan that minimizes the ability of people to fight," said Ian W. MacLean, a trusts and estates lawyer in [Manhattan](#).

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