

### **USE OF UNLICENSED ASSISTANTS AND OFFICE STAFF**

The Commission often receives questions from brokers and salespersons on the use of unlicensed personal assistants, secretaries and office staff. The use of personal assistants has grown considerably in recent years. Personal assistants are generally thought of as unlicensed persons performing various functions as employees (including clerical support) or independent contractors of a real estate broker within the framework of a real estate transaction. The Commission recognizes the growth in the utilization of such assistants. Inquiries generally fit into two categories: (1) whether the activity performed is one which requires a license, and (2) what are the supervisory responsibilities of an employing broker?

Personal assistants who hold active real estate licenses and the brokers in whose offices they work should be aware that the brokers are fully responsible for all licensees, whether they are called personal assistants or not, and all licensed “assistants” are fully subject to Idaho License Law and Rules.

The license law prohibits unlicensed persons from negotiating, listing or selling real property. Therefore, foremost to the use of personal assistants is careful restriction of their activities so as to avoid illegal brokerage practice. Personal assistants may complete forms prepared and as directed by licensees but should never independently draft legal documents such as listing and sales contracts, nor should they offer opinions, advice or interpretations. In addition, they should not distribute information on listed properties other than that prepared by the employing broker or broker associate.

On the other hand, they may:

1. Perform clerical duties for an employing broker or broker associate which may include the gathering of information for a listing;
2. Provide access to a property other than showings to potential buyers and hand out reprinted, objective information, so long as no negotiating, offering, selling or contracting is involved;
3. Distribute preprinted, objective information at an open house, so long as no negotiating, offering, selling or contracting is involved;
4. Distribute information on listed properties when such information is prepared by the broker or broker associate;
5. Deliver paperwork to other brokers;

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6. Deliver paperwork to sellers or purchasers, if such paperwork has already been reviewed by a broker;
7. Deliver paperwork requiring signatures in regard to financing documents that are prepared by lending institutions; and
8. Prepare market analyses for sellers or buyers on behalf of a broker, but disclosure of the name of the preparer must be given, and it must be submitted by the broker.

Employing brokers need to be especially aware of their supervisory duties under the license law. Brokers have always been and continue to be responsible for the actions of their licensed and unlicensed staff. Part of that responsibility has been supervising unlicensed staff and seeing that the unlicensed personnel does not engage in any prohibited activity -- that is, activity requiring a real estate license.

An employing broker should have a written office policy explaining the duties, responsibilities and limitations on the use of personal assistants. This policy should be reviewed by and explained to all employees.

Licensees should not directly share commissions with unlicensed assistants. Although this may not technically be a violation of the licensing act if the activity is not one which requires a license, the temptation to “cross over” into the area of negotiating and other prohibited practices is greatly increased where compensation is based on the success of the transaction.

If brokers develop adequate policies for the use of assistants and routine procedures for monitoring their activities, the assistant can serve as a valuable tool in the success of the transaction. As with any other activity involving the delegation of an act to another, the freedom and convenience afforded the broker in allowing the use of assistants carries with it certain responsibilities for that person’s actions.

## IDAHO REAL ESTATE LICENSE LAW

### **54-2002. Licensure Required.**

No person shall engage in the business or act in the capacity of real estate broker or real estate salesperson in this state without an active Idaho real estate license therefore. Unless exempted from this chapter, any single act described within the definitions of “real estate broker” or “real estate salesperson” shall be sufficient to constitute “engaging in the business” within the meaning of this chapter. Any person who engages in the business or acts in the capacity of real estate broker or salesperson in this state, with or without an Idaho real estate license, has thereby submitted to the jurisdiction of the state of Idaho and to the administrative jurisdiction of the Idaho Real Estate

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Commission, and shall be subject to all penalties and remedies available under Idaho law for any violation of this chapter.

### **54-2059. Disciplinary Powers - Revocation, Suspension or Other Disciplinary Action.**

The Commission may temporarily suspend or permanently revoke licenses issued under the provisions of this chapter, issue a formal reprimand and impose a civil penalty in an amount not to exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000), and assess costs and attorney's fees for the cost of any investigation and administrative or other proceedings against any licensee who is found to have violated any section of the Idaho Code, the Commission's administrative rules or any order of the Commission. The Executive Director may issue informal letters of reprimand to licensees without civil penalty or cost assessment.

The Commission may impose a civil penalty in an amount not to exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000) and assess costs and attorney's fees for the cost of any investigation and administrative or other proceedings against any person who is found, through a court or administrative proceeding, to have acted without a license in violation of section 54-2002, Idaho Code. The civil penalty provisions of this section are in addition to and not in lieu of any other actions or criminal penalties for acting as a broker or salesperson without a license which might be imposed by other sections of this chapter or Idaho law.

The Commission may also accept, on such conditions as it may prescribe, or reject any offer to voluntarily terminate the license of a person whose activity is under investigation or against whom a formal complaint has been filed.

### **54-2065. Penalty for Acting as a Broker or Salesperson Without License.**

Any person acting as a real estate broker or real estate salesperson within the meaning of this chapter without a license as herein provided shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction thereof, if a natural person, be punished by a fine of not to exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000), or by imprisonment in the county jail for a term not to exceed one (1) year, or by both such fine and imprisonment in the discretion of the court; or if a limited liability company or corporation, by a fine of not to exceed ten thousand dollars (\$10,000). Additionally, the court may assess a civil penalty against a natural person in an amount not to exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000), and against a limited liability company or corporation, in an amount not to exceed ten thousand dollars (\$10,000). All civil penalties shall be credited to the special real estate fund.