

The Zen Of Stan

By Stan Adler

Story 2

The Invisible Feature

In this story, Victor, consultant-at-large and good friend of the narrator and Carrie, inadvertently seals a deal for Carrie with a horticultural tip—or so Carrie believes until Victor offers her another point of view.

The feature that sells a property is often invisible until the client notices it. It sometimes takes a client's viewpoint to point out the efficiency of a particular design, the convenience of a special feature, or the uniqueness of a piece of property.

When the client spots that favorite feature, he or she will make a comment, raise an eyebrow, or simply smile. If you are where you should be—fully present and focusing—you will immediately see what the client sees and will understand how the feature fits into the whole idea of what you're selling.

You will then respond just as you would to a friend who had called your attention to something special that you had missed: with thanks and appreciation. As a result, the client will now relate to the product and you personally because you both share good taste and appreciate features that make a world of difference.



Carrie was a successful real estate agent who expressed her assertiveness in a caring and genuine manner. By no coincidence, "utmost care" was the slogan on her business card. Carrie felt the best way to maintain her own personal balance was to hold someone else's hand—the client's—and guide him or her through the sales process one step at a time. Making each step count was the challenge.

Carrie related to her clients so effectively that she often created the feeling of a greater intimacy than actually existed. In fact, it wasn't unusual for clients to get just a little bit jealous when they found out she gave her other customers the same special consideration they had received.

One evening she was in her office installing a new software program when James, a longtime acquaintance, called with a surprising request. "Mom wants to buy a condominium."

James's mother, Diane, was a very special woman, someone for whom Carrie had tremendous respect. Now in her late seventies, Diane had been an influential person in the days when Hollywood was an entertainment empire without precedent and Los Angeles was becoming a city. She had been friends with two of America's greatest novelists, and had advised one of them to return to the South while his genius was still intact. She had dined with the stars—Gable, Grant, and Bergman, to name just a few.

Diane currently owned an estate in Napa, and Carrie had assumed she intended to stay there forever. But now, James explained, she wanted to move closer to her family. In particular, she had mentioned Tiburon . . . something with a bay view. And it had to be

the perfect place. Carrie could think of no other person for whom she would rather find the perfect place. At the same time, she could think of no other person whose standards were higher, or an area where finding the perfect place would be more difficult.

The next morning, she wasn't surprised to learn there were no bay view condos available in Tiburon. Getting a Tiburon condominium by the bay was about as easy as getting a berth at the San Francisco Yacht Club—who knows, something might open up in six or eight years.

All of this meant one thing to Carrie—utilize all available connections and keep in close touch with that exclusive little share of the marketplace. In less than two weeks, rather to her amazement, she found a new listing in Tiburon. The description was promising: "Truly one of the best! Upper end unit on bayside with wonderful light and superb San Francisco view . . ."

“He is somebody who never claimed much for himself. People just kind of gave it to him. His shadow never ate him alive.”

– John Farrant on Roshi Aitken

It sounded perfect on paper. Carrie immediately previewed it and, to her surprise, it was even better than it had sounded. It met every requirement that James had specified.

She called James and told him the good news. The following afternoon, James drove his mother down to Marin from Napa. Carrie and James' wife, Patti, were waiting for them outside the front door of the condo. Diane laid her hand on Carrie's forearm and said, "Dear, I hope you haven't gone to too much trouble to find me something." Then she smiled and said, "Well, I suppose you are all waiting for me. Let's take a look."

Leading the way up the stairs, Diane stopped suddenly, bent down, and picked up a purple petal. "Look," she exclaimed with delight, "it's so beautiful." Delicate petals of floppy purple blossoms were strewn and crumpled on the stairs. They had fallen from the tree that grew beside the staircase. "They're everywhere," Diane said, handing Carrie the petal, "like so many rose petals."

"It's so soft," Carrie said, "like some kind of fabric."

"Yes," Diane whispered as she stepped into the entry hall, "like silk."

As James and Patti toured the house discovering an array of features, comforts, and advantages in every room, Diane followed quietly.

"Diane, come out on the balcony," Patti said. "Just look at this view!"

Carrie accompanied Diane onto the balcony. The view was truly magnificent. A gentle swell of green grass extended a few hundred feet to the narrow road bordering the shoreline. Next to the road was a walking path, and then there was the gentle lapping surf and expansive clarity of the bay cradled between Angel Island and Belvedere Island, showcasing a view of the skyline on the other side of San Francisco Bay.

Standing next to the railing, wearing a sober, almost worried expression, Diane said, "Yes, it is a grand view." Then she leaned slightly forward and looked down below. There was a smile on her face when she turned back. "Look at that," she said with real pleasure. "A tree just like the one in front."

Everyone looked over the railing at the tree with the purple blossoms.

"Carrie, do you know what variety of tree that is?" she asked.

"I'm sorry, Diane, I don't. But I'll find out."

Patti opened the sliding doors on the other side of the living room and invited Diane to look at the view from that angle. With her same quiet smile, Diane said, "Yes, dear, I can see it from here. The tree, Carrie, you must be sure to find out what kind of tree it is."

That evening, Carrie was in her office checking for new listings and catching up on paperwork when the phone rang. It was James. His first sentence was a question.

"Carrie, remember the tree that Mother liked? Do you know the name of that tree?"

The first thing she had done upon getting home was to call her friend Victor. "Yes, it's a pleroma, sometimes called princess flower. Native to Brazil—"

"Wonderful," he said with a sigh of relief. "Mother wants the pleroma tree, and also the condo that goes with it."



The next day Victor called Carrie to find out how Diane liked the condo and if his horticultural tip had made any difference.

"I'll say it did. The tree that Diane showed me—that you identified, that's what sold the house."

He chuckled and replied, "Careful now, don't give me too much credit."

The response on the other end of the line was not what he expected.

"Victor, this is one of my favorite sales," Carrie said, "but I really don't feel I can take credit for it. It happened all because of that tree."

"Carrie, obviously you should always be aware of the features that excited the customer the most, but it doesn't really matter whether it was you or the customer who identified the features. Because more than selling a house, you facilitated a meeting and brought together a customer and a house as surely as if you had been a matchmaker. Carrie, if you do it right, you are the most important feature of the deal—although sometimes, you become very nearly invisible."

Carrie didn't respond.

"Carrie, are you there?"

"I'm still here. But . . ."

"Carrie, forget the conquering hero scenario. That's fodder for the ego. With top agents a sale sometimes happens so smoothly that no one, including themselves, can accurately explain the process. Whereas beginning or unskilled agents are so eager to take things into their own hands that they often find themselves the center of attention. And that's too bad, because that's where your client should be. And that's where Diane is."

"Thank you for that, Victor," Carrie said. "Now I must run along and open escrow."