

# TOP AGENT

MAGAZINE

CRAIG STRONG  
AND WHIT PROUTY



## CRAIG STRONG AND WHIT PROUTY



All it takes is one conversation with Craig Strong and Whit Prouty, and you're almost destined to become an instant fan. Whether it's a Facebook chat, phone call or face-to-face meeting, the top producing Keller Williams Realty real estate team in Studio City could kill you with kindness, but also with their professionalism, reliability and integrity. Oh, and they'll make you laugh too.

"We both have big personalities," claims Prouty. But what does Prouty got that Strong doesn't got? And vice versa?

"People like me," jokes Prouty, the patient negotiator. Then the bass-voiced Strong chimes in: "True, but people respect me."

This might sound like the playful banter of friendly, competitive teammates rather than business partners. Yet the pair shares more than just profits: they both have strong East Coast work ethics (Craig is a native New Yorker while Whit grew up in South Florida and attended Boston University) and a love for working out at the gym, their families and their

Toluca Lake neighborhood. Their successful three-year partnership could be boiled down to any one of these things: their ability to play off each other's strengths, their fierce determination to close a deal or their talent for motivating each other. More likely it's a combination of all of these attributes.

"One fortunate thing about our partnership is that we have both been able to identify each other's strengths," says Prouty. "You can really see it in how we take the lead with certain clients. We both do listing appointments and we meet buyers together. We get a feeling for the client and we try to figure out who works best with the client in a certain situation. One of us will take the lead with that client, and the other will stay in the loop. We are able to close deals because we work together. We always say, 'one plus one equals three.' Both of us together are stronger than both of us apart."

Strong compares their partnership to going to the gym: "You can motivate each other. You push the other guy to do his best. We always say we're going to reward ourselves with a golfing trip to Palm Springs when we close some of our more difficult deals. And we never do it. But it works. It motivates us to close the deal."

Case in point: they recently took a complicated listing in Encino that had a 1<sup>st</sup> lien, 2<sup>nd</sup> lien, 2 IRS liens and a franchise tax board liens. Several interested buyers came and went throughout the 10-month short sale process, but Strong kept showing the house and wouldn't accept an offer until he had all of the approvals he needed.

"Even though you have an offer, you have to keep showing the house and then you have to make sure that the buyer still wants the house," he says of complex transactions such as short sales and foreclosures.

The sheer force of their will, negotiating skills and

# AGENTS OF INFLUENCE

20 years of combined real estate experience helped them achieve a sales volume of \$30 million in 2009, a 40 percent growth from the year prior in one of the most challenging real estate markets in history.

“Our motto is ‘A Powerful Presence in Real Estate,’ and we really believe in that,” says Prouty. “For us, customer service is the most important. We’re always striving to service our clients because we know how important our referral and repeat business is. That’s what separates the great agents from the good ones. We plan on being here for a while.”

Fortunately they are well on their way to achieving real estate veteran status in Los Angeles. Prouty has lived in Los Angeles since 1996; and Strong since 1997.

Prouty earned his real estate license after a well-known REALTOR® suggested it upon noticing his people skills and business savvy. Thanks to his

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Prouty understands the financial impacts of purchasing a home or investment property, and excels at the technical side of the business, from contracts to negotiations.

In New York, Strong operated a four-generation family enterprise, Point Blank Body Armor, a manufacturing and distributing company for bullet resistant vests. It was here where he cultivated his communications skills, business sense and rigorous attention to detail. After the family enterprise was sold, Craig relocated to Los Angeles and became a property investor, which enabled him to develop the client base he would later use as a real estate agent.

Today, the team estimates about 50 percent of their business consists of referrals while 25 percent are repeat clientele. They have not only achieved this by providing excellent customer service, but also by getting creative and putting heavy marketing



dollars behind all of their properties, big and small. Tried-and-true agent marketing methods such as farming and open houses are also combined with modern-day Internet advertising and Facebook to build their client base.

“Facebook allows us to reach out to our clients and potential clients in a way that doesn’t feel too in-your-face,” says Prouty. “We really hit a huge audience of locals through our Facebook connections. It’s a great way to keep our sphere of influence informed.”

And they have a sphere of influence most real estate agents would envy. As residents of Toluca Lake, they are very involved in their local community. Strong sits on the board of the Greater Toluca Lake City Council, while Prouty is Chairman of the Parks and Recreation Community Services Board and serves on the Executive Committee for the Burbank Chamber of Commerce. Both of their wives also play active roles in their client network. Strong’s wife Tara is an animation voice-over actress, which has given Strong and Prouty the opportunity to serve many clients in the entertainment industry. Many of

their clients have also been referred by Prouty’s wife Laura, who currently serves as president of the Vocal Music Association for the local middle school and high school, and was the former PTA president for the City of Burbank.

“As a REALTOR®, you’re always on,” says Strong. “You never know when you’re in the grocery store and you run into an old friend or a neighbor... they could be your next buyer or seller.”

Adds Prouty: “We work diligently on growing our sphere by utilizing our sphere.”

Their sphere—the territorial area over which their real estate influence is wielded—is part and parcel to the evolution of Strong and Prouty’s business. When the real estate market slowed down in 2008, they moved into the world of distressed properties, which could actually be traced back to one client who asked them to do a short sale. From there, “it became a referral train,” says Prouty. As a result, half of their business consisted of short sales and foreclosures in 2009.

“We made a conscious decision to focus on it and get good at it,” recalls Strong. “But we made another shift last year to get our regular business back. In 8-10 months, we hope to be much more concentrated on our regular business. We always have to watch the market to know where to put our energy.”

In terms of the future, Strong and Prouty are aiming for 20 percent growth each year. And judging from their success already, that goal shouldn’t be too hard to achieve. Even if they never take that golfing trip to Palm Springs, you know they had a good time trying.

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