

Convertibles to minivans to sedans— I'll take the midsized economy.

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I think we can all agree that familiar things *just feel comfortable*. This may be why we experienced sales agents diffuse situations with stories. Relating a decision to a universal feeling places folks at ease. It's like pulling on an old pair of jeans. And when you've been doing this as long as I have? Trust me. There are plenty of jeans in the closet.

I recently encountered an old acquaintance of mine I hadn't seen in quite some time and our conversation began with a familiar starter: "So, how's the real estate market holding up?" I said things were solid. And the fact is, that's (finally) true. But I'd be lying if I said that I didn't occasionally wish that things were a little more like they were back in 2006, when we could barely keep up with the market. With our company now in full swing, what I wouldn't give to see us tackle those levels of activity.

The conversation concluded with me saying, "Sometimes I wish the market felt like driving a convertible again." Being a business owner, he knew exactly what I meant.

We all had our tops down

Between 2004 and 2008, Richmond was caught in a whirlwind of redevelopment. Forgotten neighborhoods were repurposed into condominiums, chic new offices and flats, and lenders were happy to toss their capital right into the middle of the action. So long as that money was available, experienced developers were running full throttle. Suddenly, the Richmond we knew from 1995 had completely changed. This is the period I refer to as "we all drove convertibles." In other words, the market flowed like a sun-filled day—not a cloud in the sky, a sweet summer breeze and our favorite songs on repeat. *Life was good.*

Then ... a few clouds began to move in.

It didn't just rain, it poured

By 2007, we all felt it coming. We hadn't entered some afterlife, so it couldn't last forever. September 2008, Lehman Brothers gave way; then in 2009, the not-so-bulletproof bubble we all were floating in ... POPPED. Suddenly, banks decided that the best reaction included shutting the lending pipelines altogether. With loans hard to come by, buyers disappeared from the market. With no buyers and plenty of desperate sellers, prices began to fall—steeply. The market froze.

It wasn't time to put our tops up. It was time to trade in for minivans, along with a set of snow tires.

Spring finally comes

In 2015, we can all look back on that 2008-11 period and agree: *There's no need to do that one over again.* And while I may have told my friend that I sometimes long for those "convertible days," I think we also can

agree that we're much better off sticking to sedans, while travelling along a more modest but steadier market.

Over the past two springs, we've finally witnessed the excess inventories built up amid the development boom fading away, which has prices edging up and lending returning to normal. At the same time, the fall markets have kept us honest, by being a little shakey. The stock market, oil prices, inflation—they're all in a better place these days, but there's no mistaking 2015 for 2006. But with some sense of stability, *finally*, buyers and sellers can make a move without feeling like they're rolling the dice.

**One more driving analogy to sum up today's market.
And then I'm done!**

Imagine that, after a long and arduous winter, spring has finally come. And while it's not quite warm enough to roll all of the windows down and hang your arm out the window, you do it anyways. The air is cool, but there's just enough warm sunlight to keep you feeling pretty comfortable. You wheel into the driveway and decide to roll out the grill. Sure, it's a little early, but what the heck. That's how the 2015 real estate market feels to me. And you know what? These days, I don't need a convertible. I just need a full tank of gas and a steady ride.

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