

Sell Valuables But at a Discount



WONDER WHETHER YOU CAN GET SOME MONEY FOR THAT antique doll that your aunt gave you? Or how about that 19th-century mantle clock that's been in your family for generations? You do have options for putting cash in your pocket, but you may have to settle for less than what the item is actually worth.

Before you try to sell, you can ask an appraiser to assess the piece's value. Mark Grove, a Fairfax, Va., appraiser, says a professional also can provide guidance on how to sell your items. "We can say, 'This should go to Goodwill, this to eBay or this to an auction,'" he says.

Expect to pay between \$150 and \$200 an hour, although a local antique operator might charge \$75. You can find an appraiser by going to the American Society of Appraisers (www.appraisers.org), the International Society of Appraisers (www.isa-appraisers.org) and the Appraisers Association of America (www.appraisersassociation.org). You can look for an appraiser by specialty, such as toys, gems and fine arts.

Barbara Gant, who lives in Phoenix, Ariz., had an old Asian vase appraised on a local TV show. "They not only told me it was worth \$900 but were able to point out damage I didn't notice," says Gant, a retired real estate broker in her late sixties. She's not sure if she will sell the vase.

Or you can conduct your own detective work to see if you can estimate the price an item might fetch. Take a look at the asking prices of similar items on eBay.com. You also can subscribe to a pricing Web site,

such as Prices4Antiques.com. Even if you find an item similar to yours, the values can differ widely. "You can have a vase that would sell for thousands, but if you don't see that chip and know what it can do to the cost, it's a difference," says Leigh Snitiker, manager of capital collections at Adam A. Weschler & Son, an auction house in Washington, D.C.

Don't Expect the Full Value

Once you decide to sell, don't expect to automatically get the appraised value. Snitiker says her auction house's appraisals are based on sales records of similar items that sold recently at auction, taking into account the condition, size and maker. And an auction house or consignment shop will set its own price based on what it thinks the item can sell for, and it will take a cut.

If you go the auction house route, you usually sign a contract agreeing to a minimum bid and then mail the piece, says Ken Goldin, president of Goldin Auctions, a West Berlin, N.J., firm that specializes in sports collectibles. Many houses hold the auction through an online bid, he says, sometimes allowing phone bids.

Snitiker says a majority of items sold at her auction house go for close to their appraised value. Unless you set a minimum bid, she says, the item could sell for a low price. And if there are few interested buyers bidding up even the minimum bid, the item could go for less than appraised value. An auction house takes up to 20% of the sales price, Goldin says.

Whether to auction locally could partly be decided on the hassle. Heavy furniture may be difficult to ship cross country. Snitiker says her auction house typically requires the seller to pay all the shipping costs.

Another choice is to sell at a consignment shop, which could take 40% to 50% of the final price. If the item doesn't sell after a certain time, the shop will reduce its price.

You also could sell directly to an antique dealer that specializes in your valuable. But Goldin warns that you will likely sell the item to the dealer for much less than what the dealer will sell it for. "It's not so unusual for them to get 10 times the price they paid you," he says.

If you want to eliminate the middle layer, you can always go through a direct-sales method such as eBay or Craigslist. "There are private buyers that are used to the price points that come with certain items, so you won't necessarily have to price extremely low to get an offer on Craigslist," Snitiker says. "But some people aren't comfortable having random people come into their home to look at their items." **K ERIC BUTTERMAN**