

How Women Can Build Professional Careers in CRE

JULY 1, 2019 | BY JODI V. MEADE

As more and more women break in to male-dominated careers, we still have more roads to travel and mountains to move. The past 10 years have seen a welcome increase in the number of women entering the commercial real estate industry and they are developing successful careers. However, a traditional barrier to women rising into corporate leadership—what the International Labor Organization calls “unconscious gender bias”—has stubbornly endured. Despite this bias, do not let anyone tell you that you cannot accomplish something. The opportunities in this industry are there and they are growing; go out, find them, and own them.

As a woman who has risen the ranks in commercial real estate brokerage over more than three decades, and as the leader of the successful Automotive Properties Group I founded 16 years ago, I'd like to share some advice and strategies I have found valuable in helping women understand and overcome the challenges they encounter in this industry.

- **Networking**

It's important for women to be a part of a diverse set of networking groups. There is something that can be gleaned by women's groups as well as those with both men and women as members.

Networking in professional women's groups is a career necessity. We need to feel that we have a comfortable and safe place to talk with other women about gender-specific issues and challenges in our day-to-day lives. We want to have it all, career, family, and friends and there is no reason we can't. CREW, the Commercial Real Estate Women Network, has chapters nationwide that focus on business networking, educational programs and women's advancement in the industry.



Jodi Meade

(Photo composite)

It's also a good idea to create a women's network in your own company or join one already in place. Additionally, networking with men in business is key in navigating a pathway in the commercial real estate industry landscape. Men's presence in the industry, the power they wield and the positions they hold far exceed equal positions that women hold. The more opportunities you take advantage of to network in and out of your company, the better you can position yourself at the forefront of information, change and opportunity.

Ultimately, the more diversity you develop in your networking groups as well as in your company will lend credibility to your career path.

- **Develop a unique identity**

To stand out from all the background noise, develop and deliver a clear message that differentiates you from your counterparts and male colleagues, beyond gender. Evolve your own brand, special skill, or area of expertise, as your calling card. It's important to deliver your distinct message to your clients. You might choose a product type; in my case, automotive CRE expanded the

capabilities of our company as well as my brand and expertise.

- Be seen, not looked at

Maintain a professional manner at all times. Women must walk a finer line than men when it comes to clothing choices. Choose to dress professionally, in all contexts. A useful tip: "Dress for the position you want, not the one you have." Additionally, show femininity, but also strength - mini dresses, plunging necklines, etc. are distractions and are perceived as unprofessional.

- Mentorship

Find someone you respect, or more than one person, who will mentor you. Don't be shy; many executives, female or male, would feel honored to be asked to be your mentor. Find successful women, and ask them how they got to where they are. They can also help you acquire the skill set for success. Find people you would like to emulate. I always tell my mentees "If you see it, you can be it." Envision your success and position you want. You may find your mentor within your company's corporate structure, or know someone in another company who helped you enter the commercial real estate industry. Clients, too, can act as your sounding boards, and tell you how to see the business from their side of the table. In time, you will become a mentor to others and pay it forward.

- Educate yourself

A high school degree and some college courses used to be adequate for achieving professional positions. Today candidates are expected to be college graduates. Take the time, make the effort, and invest in attaining one or more professional designations, such as CRX, CPM, CFM, or CCIM. The gender-neutral letters after your name demonstrate your strong commitment to your career, and the courses you take will also offer networking opportunities and a greater depth of knowledge.

The huge challenge for women is to prove their positions of leadership in a male-dominated industry. I say "I slay dragons every day and try not to get eaten." Take yourself seriously but have fun

along the way. Women must work harder and perform better than men to achieve the same levels of career advancement. It is challenging for women to avoid being perceived negatively when we take on more assertive leadership roles requiring us to navigate through all of the preconceptions of gender-biased stereotypes. On the bright side, we possess qualities men often times lack - we pick up on subtle nuances, we pay more attention to detail, we find the answers if we don't have them in our wheelhouse, we are creative on overcoming challenges and we can effectively communicate and work with a diversity of clients and potential clients.

With the right mentorship and support, a focused approach, and with evident depth and breadth of knowledge, women can attain lucrative incomes and C-suite positions. We must work hard, but we should prepare ourselves to take our places in the larger world of greater responsibility and consequential decision-making. Above all.....enjoy the journey!

***Jodi Meade, CRX, CSM** has worked with some of the greatest brands in the automotive industry, including GM, Ford, Nissan North America, Premier Automotive Group, Sonic Automotive, Sage Automotive Group, West Coast Customs and Penske Automotive. She founded and launched the Automotive Properties Group at CBRE, and brought it to Avison Young. She is a founding member and past co-chair of the company's Women's Networking Group. The views expressed here are the author's own and not that of ALM's real estate media group.*

***Jodi Meade** was also recently featured in the July/August issue of GlobeSt. Real Estate Forum as a 2019 standout. Meade will also be a speaker at the upcoming Woman of Influence event in Colorado July 10th and 11th in a panel discussion will focus on how to take charge of your career development and build your own business within your real estate firm.*