

Focusing on Strengths Reveals Opportunities

The commercial real estate industry has historically been viewed as a male-dominated world. However, in the present day, I would challenge that view. Women have a valuable voice and role in the industry and yield power, reasoning and influence, just like their male counterparts. Commercial real estate is an ideal environment for collaboration, and professionals who focus on their strengths can bring different perspectives to the table, which is the key element of achieving teamwork and results.

I moved to Sarasota, FL in 1999, after spending a number of years as the owner of a hotel on Martha's Vineyard and being involved in various independent real estate projects. Given this experience, moving to the sales side of the industry felt like a natural transition.



By Michele Fuller

I started my professional real estate career in 2000 with a national brokerage firm, moving to their commercial division almost immediately. In 2009, I joined Ian Black Real Estate, a leading local commercial brokerage firm, and recognized that this was the company with which I wanted to grow my business. In 2016, I became a partner of the firm.

Commercial real estate is about taking on projects: determining the right use for a property, rezoning a property for future use or establishing the value-add aspect to increase a property's occupancy, as a few examples. What I enjoy about commercial real estate is it requires using a wide lens and perseverance to make all the pieces come together. I find that women have an innate ability to visualize the larger picture and a knack for managing moving parts. Women have a sense of perspective that adds to the commercial real estate conversation.

Managing the various relationships involved in a transaction is another aspect of working in this business. There are times when negotiations come to a halt and the parties are ready to walk away. This is the time I step back, listen to the requirements of both sides and assess the situation from a neutral perspective. I evaluate all angles in order to find a solution. Most women have strong listening skills and are adept at managing relationships, and I find these traits are extremely valuable in this industry.

It's true that there are more men than women in the commercial real estate industry. Yet rather than viewing this as an obstacle, I look at it as an opportunity to provide a different perspective. In my experience, learning as much as you can, working toward your goals and doing your absolute best work

can help you perceive every "obstacle" as a potential learning experience.

Your strengths are your assets, and they help drive your passion. It's always good to ask yourself questions to find where your potential lies. What do you enjoy? In what situations do you feel most confident? Look at your strengths and work to develop them. Observe others that excel in those areas and learn from them. There are so many resources available, whether it's a course, a seminar, a mentor or an organization. Explore these resources and use them to your advantage.

Search for a work environment that recognizes and values your strengths, and contributes to your professional growth. I feel very fortunate that Ian Black Real Estate has a unique collaborative approach with a highly competent team of professionals that are immensely supportive of one another.

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When trying to find your right fit, be very honest with yourself about what you need from a company. What kind of environment are you looking for? What level of support do you need in areas that are important to you? Pay attention to how collaborative the office setup is and how team members communicate with each other—all can be good indicators of what to expect if you were to join the company.

I'm fortunate in that I've never felt the discrepancy in the number of men versus women in our field to be an obstacle. I believe in finding what you love to do, honing your strengths and using your resources—with all these in place, the "obstacles" will reveal the opportunities. ♦

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