

Women in Real Estate:

CRE pros bring their expertise to *REDNews* summit

REDNews was proud to host our second-annual Women in Real Estate summit on Sept. 24 at The Briar Club. The day included a lively discussion about the accomplishments of Texas CRE professionals, challenges they face and the state of the industry in 2019. The following are highlights from one of the four panels discussions. You can look forward to reading highlights from the other three panels in upcoming issues.

CELEBRATING FEMALE PIONEERS IN THE COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY



Lori Bryant

Our first panel focused on pioneers who led the way for other women in the commercial real estate industry. We were honored to hear from Lori Bryant, ARM/managing director of CBRE Property Management; Lispah Hogan, executive managing director of NKF; Patti Knudson-Joiner, managing director of Knudson LP; Sue Rogers, principal at CRESA; and Susan Hill, senior managing director at JLL, who served as moderator.

Each offered up a different recipe for their own success, but a lot of it boils down to having the right attitude.

“One of my favorite sayings is ‘Onward and forward,’” said Hogan. “Don’t look at what’s behind you, keep looking onward and forward because knowledge is power and you gain wisdom and knowledge from everything that you’ve gone through.”

Rogers attributes her go-get-’em attitude to growing up outside of Philadelphia.

“It made me want to compete with men in the industry and I think you kind of have to have that desire and fight to kind of go after it,” she stressed. “You need that resolve to keep going after it, even when all the odds are against you.”

Knudson-Joiner echoed that, adding, “Perseverance and challenge is something we, women in general, have a tendency to thrive on.”

It’s essential in an industry where women hear “No” frequently as they try to rise through the ranks.



Patti Knudson-Joiner



Lispah Hogan



Susan Hill



Sue Rogers

“There are so many times I was told ‘You’re much better at being a receptionist or the admin,’” recalled Bryant. “You have to really persevere and show them that you can do it.”

In those instances, having a mentor helped our panelists find the confidence they needed to ignore those who doubted them.

“Having a mentor who is strong to guide you is equally as important as having a mentor who listens,” Hogan said. “If you have a mentor who listens to you, you’re going to prosper and grow that much faster because you’re going to just start clicking faster.”

Bryant was able to find one of those while working for Gerry J. Ward. His wife Jean offered an example of the kind of person Bryant says she wanted to become.

“I think she is the reason I wanted to go into this industry. She was beautiful, strong, very direct, very honest. She could hold her own in a group of men with never being insulting,” said Bryant. “They took her seriously and I had a real problem with anyone ever taking me seriously.”

That was a common challenge for our panelists as they tried to come up in an industry that is still populated by more men than women.

“I always felt like I was just not in the room to offer anything. No matter how many times I tried, I was talked over,” Rogers said. “I always loved when you have an idea and you’re talked over. Then a man in the room says the same thing

and everyone’s like, ‘Oh, my god. What a great idea!’”

The result, Bryant pointed out, is women overcompensating for being women, working twice as hard to prove themselves.

“It’s not as bad now as it was then, but I think we were like hamsters on a wheel trying to prove ourselves constantly, thinking that someone would recognize and reward us for our hard work,” she said. “But typically what they did is they took credit for it.”

That struggle only increased when our panelists decided to start a family and had to find a balance between work and life outside the office.

“With my first child, I got two weeks off. I had to be back at work unless I wanted to be replaced,” said Bryant. “There were no laws protecting women.”

Hogan recalled a similar situation when her children were born. She explained she kept a fax machine next to the bed to keep working just four weeks after childbirth.

“That’s the way it was if you wanted to keep going,” she said.

Those challenges manifested in another one: unequal pay. Women still have to fight to be paid what their male counterparts make. Ideal or not, Rogers contended the onus is on women to document what they bring to the table.

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“We still have to continue to document that because equal pay continues to be a problem,” she said.

Hill weighed in on this topic as well, citing an example from years ago when she was managing an office, hiring and training employees who all made more than she did.

When it came time for her annual review, she did her homework and determined what her worth was. She wrote that number on a piece of paper and brought it into her meeting, where her managers told her she was going to get a standard 5 percent raise.

“I said, ‘You know that’s really great, I appreciate the feedback but that’s really not going to work for me,’ and I slid that piece of paper across the table. I said, ‘That’s my number,’” Hill told the crowd. “I remember going back to my desk and thinking, ‘Oh, my gosh, I really hope that’s my number because I could be out of a job.’”

Ten minutes later, she said they brought her back in the room and agreed to that number.

“If I had never taken that chance and done that homework, I would still be making the typical 5 percent raise, which, by the time you take out the taxes, is nothing,” said Hill.

Looking back on their careers and what they would have changed, our panelists uniformly responded that they’re not sure they would make any changes.

“I think everything made me who I am today and made me as successful as I am today,” Rogers said.

“I don’t have any regrets either,” Knudson-Joiner added. “I love what I do, everyday is a new day and it felt that way since I got introduced to the urban planning, real estate profession.”

“If you don’t like something, make a change,” suggested Hogan. “Whether it’s you stepping out and making the change or whether you’re changing companies totally. Make a change that

benefits yourself and ultimately is going to benefit where you’re working.”

With lives full of valuable lessons learned, our trailblazing panelists offered a few bits of advice to the next generation of women in commercial real estate.

First, said Hill, “You cannot stop learning. There is always a need to learn.”

“You don’t want to be stale, you want to be relevant. You want to constantly strive for improvement, learning and doing everything you can to be the best,” echoed Knudson-Joiner.

An avenue for education is joining an organization that offers those opportunities, as well as the chance to meet like-minded professionals.

They were invaluable for Rogers, who pointed out that she wasn’t born into a well-connected family in Houston.

“When you come here, you know nobody and your parents don’t know anybody. You’re really making your own way,” she said. “I encourage everybody to get involved in the organizations that give you exposure and let people know you’re serious about what you’re doing. You can learn about the industry from your peers and from other corporate real estate executives.”

Knudson-Joiner did just that, often dipping into her own pocket to pay dues and fees that weren’t covered by her employer at the time.

“But it served me well because after ten years I virtually knew the industry,” she said. “I knew the people and I knew who I wanted to mentor with.”

That loops back to the importance of finding a mentor, but Rogers stressed that it must be a good fit.

“You have to be careful when you choose your mentor. Make sure that it’s somebody who’s going to support you and is going to help you and have your back,” she advised.

The right person will help you build confidence and define your own success.

“I wish I had a little more self-confidence back then. When you’re young, that’s tough. And if you’re young and working in a man’s field, it’s a little tougher,” Bryant said.

It’s vital when you’re eyeing an opportunity to advance, Hill pointed out.

“Just go for it. Take advantage of that opportunity. You’ll figure out all that stuff along the way,” she said. “But if you miss that opportunity, it may not come back for a long time. That can change your dream and your career.”

Finally, our panelists reminded everyone to pay the kindness they received in their careers forward to those who are just starting.

“Always give back,” Knudson-Joiner emphasized. “One of my mentors, Mr. Bishop, has a saying: the world is perfectly round. What goes around comes around. It was always a reminder that we should stay true to our mission, to our integrity.”

Giving back isn’t something a person can age out of either, as Hogan joked.

“I’m 61, y’all. I don’t need to be doing this, but I believe it’s important,” she said. “Knowledge is power. The more you know the more you can help other people.”

“You have to do the things, be out there, meet people, network, be active,” added Rogers. “Good things will happen when you do that.”

We are incredibly grateful that women pioneers such as these ladies as well as the other panelists believe in giving back and helping the next generation grow, as evidenced by taking time out of their schedules to share their knowledge with summit attendees, as well as REDNews readers. ■