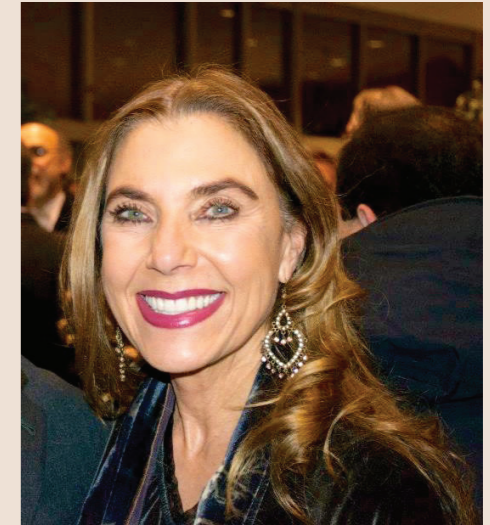


Finding Success in Commercial Real Estate

My clients believe in my talents, but they also believe in my integrity



Thirty-two years ago, a balmy spring breeze rustled through the trees on Saint Mary's campus as a young woman walked along the avenue preparing for graduation and dreaming of her approaching winter wedding. Today, Gail Sturm has traveled the world and is founder of Sturm Realty with a formidable clientele.

"I never dreamed I'd be earning the income that I am, or be in such a male-dominated field, or be so involved in my career," said Sturm, who graduated from SMC in 1977 with a BBA. "Marriage and family was so much on my mind right out of school."

But involved she is, as she sets up multi-million dollar corporate real estate deals for non-profit and for-profit companies.

"I work as a liaison between architects, developers, attorneys, interior designers, financiers, c-suite executives," said Sturm. "Essentially, I must find a solution to meet the client's real estate needs."

How did Sturm become such a big hitter in one of the largest corporate real estate markets in the country? She got experience, maintained her sense of values and self-worth, and kept looking ahead. "It's important to never stop challenging yourself. It's easy to get comfortable and just stop but I always felt a calling to do more."

Immediately after graduation, Sturm worked as a manager of a cash-processing center for Allstate Insurance Company. After a year and a half, she wasn't challenged so she started to look around. She met with Willard Brown Jr., then executive vice president of Rubloff Inc.

After an early morning interview, Brown suggested

that Sturm join the all-male forces at Rubloff. She joined the firm as an industrial broker and spent the first months visiting industrial parks, learning the difference between a "truck-level dock and a drive-in door, and memorizing floor plans."

"It wasn't anything glamorous," Sturm recalled. "I was climbing through manufacturing facilities and warehouses in a hard hat and boots and I was the only woman doing this."

Although her sex made her stand out, she took the reactions of her male counterparts in stride. When it was suggested that she cut her hair and drive a Cadillac, she stubbornly held on to her femininity.

"It took a while to win the respect of my counterparts—especially the older men, who were tempted to treat me like a daughter. But once they saw what I could produce, they started to accept me."

Sturm believes the stone wall of corporate management is becoming more pliable for women. "There is an evolution taking place," she said. "There are so many women in the business world, and many times they can get in the door more easily. But like men, once they're in, they have to know what they are talking about."

Sturm obviously knew what she was talking about, for within months, she had finished Rubloff training in record time, had arranged a lease for Midas International Corp., and had sold an industrial building in Franklin Park. Through it all, however, she kept a lookout on the industrial market, and in 1980, when she saw that the market was moving toward a slump, she started to think

about commercial real estate.

Sturm contacted Elliott Otis, then president of Elliott Otis and Company, in June 1980. Only three years after graduation, she was hired to work with Otis in surveying the buildings along the Tri-State/Edens Expressway corridor, where they helped numerous companies find, lease and purchase office space in commercial buildings. With transactions of more than a million square feet of office space valued at over \$80 million, she was soon promoted to executive vice president.

By the mid-1980s, Sturm had earned recognition as a specialist in the commercial real estate field. In March 1987, she was elected to the Board of Directors of the Chicago Office Leasing Brokers Association, co-chaired its ethics committee, and ascended to become its first female president.

Sturm, who married William Douglas Sturm ND '77, receives a great deal of support from her award winning architect husband. "He was the one who suggested I go into real estate," she said. Travel is an important part of their lives, perhaps owing to their meeting each other while in the SMC/ND Rome Program. "We try to get out of the country every few years," she said. "In this world where there is so much money and fast living, it can be tempting to live in the gray rather than the black and white, and we like to get a change of scene to help us keep things in perspective—keep us from forming tunnel vision."

Although the corporate world may have its fill of "gray" situations, Sturm has clung to her values and recognizes this quality as part of her success.

"People learn to know that they can trust you—that you're not going to promise them miracles, but what you do promise, you will deliver," she said.

"My clients believe in my talents, but they also believe in my integrity. In this, and any business, this goes far and customers will come back to someone they can trust."

"We must challenge clients to look beyond what's obvious today. It might not be relevant tomorrow, and then they'll be following the pack. Real estate is a tool companies must use to increase profitability. And if the tool is not working correctly, it will be hard to build a profitable organization in this competitive business arena."

What corporate tenants increasingly are looking for in their tenant representation includes: ongoing quality reviews throughout the process; the broker's knowledge of the client's industry, competition, compliance issues, economics and even social issues; the broker's overall knowledge of real estate; and how the broker projects himself or herself in the marketplace, since the broker effectively acts as one of the client's voices in the business community.

Working with clients as a consultant requires extensive questioning and careful listening. That, in turn, leads to a plan and, finally, implementation. Unfortunately, implementation is where many brokers are still living. To rush forward without blending real estate outcomes with client business goals is to risk cheating clients out of bottom-line savings."