



2019 Ones to Watch: Michele Wood, Valbridge Property Advisors

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Name: Michele Wood

Title: Director of Research

Company Name: Valbridge Property Advisors

Year that you entered your current field? 2002

List up to three CRE organizations that you are currently a member of:

CREW—Houston Chapter

Commercial Real Estate Research Forum (CRERF)

Valbridge Women's Council

What do you consider to be your greatest professional accomplishment in the past 12 months?

In the past year, I have been very lucky to have the opportunity to research topics of interest in commercial real estate and have articles published in national publications. This led me to connect with a distinguished professor of real estate at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, and together with another professor at Texas A&M, we are collaborating on an original research study of how the presence of street art may impact commercial real estate values in neighborhoods where it is prevalent. Our research has been selected to be presented at the annual conference of the American Real Estate Society in April in Phoenix.

Who or what do you attribute to your success?

I attribute my success most to two things: I have an incredibly supportive partner who also works in commercial real estate and can help me brainstorm ideas, help me understand some complex issues and how to explore those, and is a fantastic editor. The second key to my success has been the amazing support I get from my bosses here at Valbridge. When I started, my position did not exist and they have been so open and supportive in letting me follow my passions and interests. I feel very blessed to have this freedom in my job.

What advice can you offer to someone who is interested in a career in your industry?

My advice would be to collect talented and supportive people with you as you go through your career, and then don't be afraid to reach out to those people when you have an idea, or want to explore your ambitions. I also have learned how important it is to be brave in trying something new, and not be afraid to fail at it. I had never written a magazine article before, and had no expectation of getting published right away. To my complete surprise, it was much simpler than I had imagined, and has opened up more opportunities to really go after my broader interests. Thinking that I wasn't good enough to write kept me from trying for too long.

Who are some leaders that you admire and why? ?

On a broad scale, I really admire the work of Brene Brown. She has done a lot of groundbreaking work on vulnerability and really opening up yourself to courage both in your personal and professional lives. I think it is critical to maintain a perspective of integrity and balance to ensure we are living our best moral and happy selves whether in our personal relationships or our business choices, and Brene shines a light on how to keep that as a value.

I also have admired the current President of Cushman & Wakefield/Picor's office in Tucson, AZ, Barbi Reuter. Though I have never worked for Barbi, it's clear that her staff really admires and is fond of her, and as a result, they perform highly. CRE isn't an easy profession for a woman, and Barbi makes it look easy. I really get excited when I see women of character enjoying hard-earned success in CRE.

If you have a mentor, who is it and how have they influenced your personal & professional growth?
It sounds cheesy, but my most trusted mentor is my husband Josh Wood. He and I work together in commercial appraisal, and he is the person I trust most to help me find new opportunities in my career, to balance my ambitions with my personal life, and to make sure I'm saying yes to the right things and letting some things go. A lot of people tell me they could never work with their spouse, but we have done it for 16 years and have found a way to really make it work for us.

How have your life experiences impacted who you are professionally?

I was the victim of an awful boss at a previous firm. Despite stellar performance and 12 years of loyal, flawless service, one day I was fired without warning and without a penny of severance. It caused a crisis in my life that I'm still feeling the impacts of. That lesson taught me to really value people of good character above people who just have power, to trust my own instincts about people and not be in a position of vulnerability to people who you've seen treat others badly. I now insist on working for people I trust, admire and respect, and happily, that has resulted in more professional success than I could have dreamed of in my previous, worse situation.

What was your favorite thing to do as a kid?

It's funny to imagine as an enthusiastic city girl now, but my favorite thing as a kid was to play in the woods behind my house in suburban New Jersey. We had a wonderful neighborhood with lots of forest in tact, so we would spend hours and hours of every summer day building forts and constructing whole worlds in those woods. My dad probably didn't appreciate how many of his wood-working tools I left out there in the rain, but it was a magical way to spend my childhood.