



2021 Women in Professional Services: Leslie Byrd, Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP

March 23, 2021 - Spotlights

Name: Leslie Byrd

Title: Special Counsel

Company Name: Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP

Real estate associations or organizations that you are currently a member of:

New York State Bar Association (Real Property Law Section; Committee on Condominiums and Cooperatives), Member

New York City Bar Association (Real Property Law Committee), Member

In the past year, what project, transaction or accomplishment are you most proud of?

I'm most proud of finding a way to integrate really seamlessly at the firm and in my practice group. I joined Stroock in late 2019, just a few short months before the Coronavirus shuttered the nation. I had to get up to speed quickly on large complex deals across the city, forge relationships at the firm and with an entirely new set of clients, and earn the trust and respect of both. I had to juggle multiple multimillion-dollar projects, keep them moving forward and address a wide variety of COVID-19 related concerns in the structuring of these transactions.

Why should women consider a career in commercial real estate and related services?

I think commercial real estate gives everyone interested an opportunity to solve wide-ranging problems. It's holistic and challenging. You advise at the many stages of a building's lifecycle and help a project go from idea through fruition and operation. There's something very satisfying in being a part of what makes a building happen, especially when it comes to affordable housing and properties for nonprofits. You help provide a safe, clean and affordable home for people in need and you get to help charitable entities fulfill their missions. Buildings last for generations so your work lives on—you can see it and visit it. I love showing my children projects I've worked on. It makes it all so real for them.

How have you adapted and changed in the last 12 months?

I've always been very responsive, but now I'm even more so, and in a different way. I find I'm

connecting with clients and colleagues on a very personal level, not just on a professional level. COVID-19 has been a real equalizer—everyone is suffering and connecting in new ways. Without the need to travel, and separated from my extended family, I am reaching out more, participating in a number of book clubs, finding ways to connect with others and, of course, I've become far more tech savvy.

Women have made significant progress in the last year towards equality in the workplace. How do you advocate for your fellow women in real estate?

I'm active in the firm's Real Estate Women's Group and regularly try to make helpful introductions for colleagues. I invite clients and those I work with to events, when I can. At my last firm, I was on the recruitment committee and really had the opportunity to promote female candidates for positions at the firm.

What books or social media influencers would you recommend to other women?

I find novels about women overcoming adversity and finding success to be inspirational. I actually draw strength from their stories. Among my recent favorites is "The Alice Network" by Kate Quinn. It's an historical novel about two strong female characters, one is a spy recruited to the real-life Alice Network during World War I and the other is an American searching for her cousin in 1947. Another book I'd recommend is "The Henna Artist" by Alka Joshi. It's a mid-20th Century story about the struggles and triumphs of women in India.

What steps have you taken to ensure the continued success of your firm?

As someone new at the firm, I'm only in the early stages of working toward the firm's success. I started by bringing over a client that is a major nonprofit owner-manager of affordable housing in New York and New Jersey. As the client was working toward digitalization, I connected its leadership with Stroock's PropTech team, which is helping the client navigate the complexities of going digital from an old school system. I believe success is built on client relationships and expanding the services we offer clients. Helping my client to succeed beyond my areas of experience—going beyond the expected—in turn helps the firm continue to be successful.

How do you keep your team motivated despite conflicts and obstacles?

I try to keep people motivated and engaged by making sure they feel cared about, valued and heard. Taking time to listen and connect personally, not just professionally, goes a long way in making people want to do their best, to go the extra mile. Being grateful and expressing it is very important too. Everyone wants to feel appreciated.