



2021 Women in Professional Services: Mindy Stern, SSRGA

March 23, 2021 - Spotlights

Name: Mindy Stern

Title: Partner

Company Name: SSRGA

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

Former Chair of the Real Property Law Section of the New York State Bar Association, and is a member of that Section's Executive Committee. Chair of the Committee's Housing Task Force, and Task Force creating a scholarship fund in memory of the Association's deceased former president, Lorraine Power Tharp, and is a member of the Executive Committee's Task Force regarding attorney escrow accounts and a member (and former co-chair) of the Section's committee on Not For Profit Entities and Concerns.

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

Recently, I have assisted clients who inherited partnership interests in valuable real estate properties or large tracts of mostly undeveloped land navigate the complex, intertwined real estate and estate legal issues. Helping them sort through the different agendas and financial circumstances of the parties in ways intended to maintain family harmony using a practical, strategic and empathetic approach is extremely rewarding.

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

I am extremely fortunate because SSRGA has a culture of teamwork. The firm is infused with a cooperative and supportive ethic that makes it easy to come together and easy to work toward goals as a team. When every member of the team knows that they can get help on anything, small or large, it removes a lot of tension and enables them to achieve their best. I have made it a priority to foster this culture, by supporting my peers and working across practices to accomplish client goals. The culture of the firm makes it easy to motivate others and to maintain a positive environment.

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 am gratified to say that in recent years I have not had to advocate for women, as a gender, as much as in the past. The individuals in my firm, my clients and peers all evaluate people based on merit—on their intelligence, character, skills and work ethic—rather than on their gender. Individual

performance is the determining factor, and people are appropriately rewarded. This is not to say that gender discrimination does not exist. I believe the best way to break down remaining barriers is to treat fellow women in the exact same manner that I treat men, and to insist that others do the same.

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

During the past year, I have worked within SSRGA, and externally with the real estate industry and legal community, to continue advancing projects, transactions and education initiatives despite the many challenges created by the pandemic. Initially, I worked with my firm to create and implement remote-work procedures that enabled us to continue seamlessly representing clients throughout 2020. As importantly, I have worked to mentor younger associates to prevent the pandemic disruption from impacting their professional development. Our efforts to support clients through the turmoil of early 2020 helped to resolve complex problems and ensure their economic stability at a very difficult time.

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

Traditionally, real estate has been a male-dominated industry, but this is quickly changing based on the efforts of many strong and successful women. I routinely urge women to explore a career in commercial real estate because there is extraordinary opportunity, and the job itself, helping to create the built environment of our city, is enormously rewarding. The business is challenging, multi-faceted and extremely interesting.

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

I have learned to be flexible and adapt to constant change. Like so many others, I have had to accept the reality of our current circumstances and fully commit to the path forward. It seems that the past 12 months have been filled with a continual series of obstacles. To be successful, we have had to pivot many times and continue onward. And it is not just the logistical roadblocks created by COVID. Projects have been complicated by the stress and emotional burden prompted by the pandemic. Overcoming this has required endurance and patience, and above all, it has required that we stay calm. You have to remain unshakable in your determination to accomplish clients' goals.

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

As we continue through this period of uncertainty, leadership is more important than ever. I found that two books, in particular, shed light on this issue. "The Presidents Club" by Michael Duffy and Nancy Gibbs, is a remarkable study of leadership and the transition of leadership. The book focuses on the relationships between post-WWII presidents and the ways they worked together for the nation. "Becoming" by Michelle Obama, is another remarkable story, told in her distinctive voice, of her journey from the South Side of Chicago to the White House. It explores how she kept her moral compass, her decency, her desire to help others, her sanity and her good humor. It is powerfully inspiring.