

TOP AGENT

MAGAZINE

Melinda Estridge



Melinda Estridge — The High Road



In the 1970s, big business wasn't always easy for women. Melinda Estridge, owner of the Estridge Group, is now one of the highest achieving agents in the Washington, DC metro market, but it took effort and a strong work ethic to get here. In 1978, she had a bachelor's degree and some law school under her belt, and she possessed an entrepreneurial spirit. She entered the real estate profession while she was deciding which career path to take. It turned out that real estate fit her needs perfectly.

"I could see when I started that the real estate business was a pretty level playing field for women," she says. "Because you were dealing with homes and people's personal situations, there appeared to be fewer limits on the level of business women could achieve."

Unlike some of her colleagues, Melinda wasn't married and had no means of support other than her own earnings. "I tended bar and worked as a waitress when I started," she says. "I did whatever I could to keep myself alive." She worked for a large company as a single agent, but eventually opted to start her own LLC and formed the Estridge Group partnering with Long and Foster, the largest independently owned real estate company in the country.

"Pursuing a path in which I could design



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my own business plan and goals was of interest to me,” she says. Now she works in her group of eight other consummate professionals. The team consists of Estridge, three buyer agents, two administrative managers who assist with listings and closings, two virtual assistants, and her husband Bob O’Toole, who is her partner.

Although real estate is very much a people-oriented business, the numbers count for a lot. Estridge networks exhaustively with other professionals in the field, and she has worked diligently to become a master of time management, systems and marketing. “You must treat your business as a business,” she says. “I manage my time and I am accountable

for everything I do. I have a business plan and I revisit it frequently.” Part of that plan is maintaining relationships. “I am in touch with past clients several times a year, and have an annual client party to thank them for their continued support and referrals,” she says.

Another tactic that has placed Melinda at the top of the game is to accrue as much knowledge as possible. “Stay ahead of what’s happening in the market, and you make yourself an incredibly valuable resource for your clients,” she says.

Although she is a highly efficient professional, Melinda places great value on being a source of help and comfort to those she serves. She is a pro

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at negotiating and closing a transaction, but that isn't the most important factor. She is driven by a desire to do what is right for everyone involved, and she stakes her reputation on it.

"I never want to be so desperate for the business or so tied up in the outcome that it clouds my judgment," she says. "If a transaction hasn't worked out, learn something from it and move on. If you live your life that way, people will seek you out because they'll know you're worthy of their trust."

Melinda Estridge
The Estridge Group
Long & Foster Real Estate, Inc.
4650 East West Highway
Bethesda, MD 20814
(301) 657-9700 office
melinda@estridgetgroup.com
www.estridgetgroup.com