

Medak: Industry isn't 'easy' for anyone – male or female

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which was being a woman in what is essentially a man's field, Medak said. But now she's happily infected with what she calls her "family disease." She was named the top-producing broker at Norris, Beggs and Simpson for 2007, becoming the first woman to do so in the company's 75-year history, and the Building Owners and Managers Association of Portland bestowed the same honor at its first members' meeting on Wednesday.

DJC: Is there a particular reason why (2007 was) the year you became the top broker, as a woman? Is it generally accepted that more women are moving into the field?

Medak: It's funny you should ask that because I've always wondered why more women haven't moved into it. I think there are just certain industries where women haven't been involved in general. But for the last 14 years that I've been in the business, there have been very few women in general. In the office market, there are usually about 100 brokers you see on a pretty consistent basis. Of those 100 brokers, there are probably 40 that you do a lot of work with. Of those 40, there are maybe four to five women total.

DJC: Over the course of your career, then, have you encountered any challenges that you'd characterize as unique?

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— JENNIFER MEDAK
Norris, Beggs and Simpson

Medak: Well, early on, when I was right out of school, it was hard because I was young, single, 21 and female. I had a finance degree (but) had no experience. I stuck out like a sore thumb because the typical person in the brokerage industry was 40 years old, male and married. I had nothing in common with any of them.

It was hard not having anybody to celebrate or commiserate with. It's a lot easier when you can go through that with somebody else.

DJC: What advice do you have for other new brokers?

Medak: No matter what happens, you'll probably be able to find one or two people you can relate to, who you can confide in. I remember a lot of time calling my family because they were my support structure. And since there weren't very many women, I didn't feel like I could call many women when cold calling. So if I was going out to a lunch appointment (with a potential

client), I'd usually spend a lot of time preparing for it. But then sometimes I'd get there and find out that maybe the lunch appointment wasn't really about lunch.

DJC: Did you really encounter that?

Medak: Yeah, a couple of times. You know, what do you do? It happens in every industry, to

men and women. You gain some perspective and learn to ask tougher qualifiers before accepting the appointment.

DJC: Would you say that it's more challenging working your way up as a woman?

Medak: I don't think the industry is easy for anyone. We should probably put that on the table. I have taken what I initially saw as a weakness – sticking out like a sore thumb – and used it to my advantage. It's great that I stick out like a sore thumb because when I go to a broker class or an event with landlords, I might be the one name they remember out of this sea of other people who sort of blend together.

DJC: Are there any resources that young brokers who are women could take

advantage of? Or is that a need that should be filled?

Medak: Anytime you can get a good mentor, that's the only thing that should matter. You have to continually push and be your own advocate because you will find those people along your path.

DJC: Have you ever been a mentor to young women breaking in?

Medak: I always encourage brokers – men or women – to find a mentor, someone to confide in. I've been approached by a few women who have called and asked for help. I don't ever look at it like you're creating competition. I've always admired the people who not only get the best out of themselves but tend to bring everyone else around them up.

Program: Passage of time can be a downside when tax time comes

