

EPISODE 708

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:00] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to The Real Estate Syndication Show. Whether you are a seasoned investor or building a new real estate business, this is the show for you. Whitney Sewell talks to top experts in the business. Our goal is to help you master real estate syndication.

And now your host, Whitney Sewell.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:23] WS: This is your daily Real Estate Syndication Show. I'm your host, Whitney Sewell. Today, our guest is Wendy Mann. Thanks for being on the show, Wendy.

[00:00:31] WM: Thanks for having me, Whitney. So glad to be here.

[00:00:34] WS: Wendy is the CEO of CREW Network and President of the CREW Network Foundation. As CEO of the 12,000, I'm sorry, member global association, Wendy is passionately committed to the organization's mission to transform the commercial real estate industry by advancing women.

With a career spanning nearly 30 years in various leadership roles, Wendy believes that organizations thrive when members needs are top priority and chapters have the tools and resources they need to be successful. She believes that connecting, collaborating and communicating are key to our success in building relationships and creating change within the industry.

Wendy holds a bachelor's degree in communications from St. Bonaventure University and earned her certified association executive designation from the American Society Of Association Executives. She is certified as an executive leadership coach through Georgetown University. Wendy, thank you again for your time on the show. Give us a little more about just who you are.

I know you have a big background in commercial real estate and I'd love for you to elaborate on that a little bit and help us link how these things are tied together and why it's important.

[00:01:41] WM: Absolutely. I have a deep and abiding love for commercial real estate. I find it one of the hidden gems of professions in our world. Just understanding what gets built, why it gets built, how you make money from the business and the value of building community have always been something that I enjoyed. It really started with my first job in commercial real estate, which was with NAIOP, the commercial real estate development association as the number two COO there for several years. I oversaw a number of things.

One of the particular things was our research function. I was always deep into understanding where the business was going and why it was going there. In addition to that, even before that job, my husband worked in the commercial real estate industry for an old company, you might have heard of, called Equity Office Properties. He works in a REIT right now here in Washington DC. More recently, our son just took a job with JLL in Washington DC as well. We have commercial real estate in our family, in our blood.

In addition to that that time at NAIOP, I think one of the most important things was getting deep into the research side of the business and understanding and being able to look at the horizon, but understanding what's happening in the business. It's always been intriguing to me and I actually think that might be because I was a journalism major in college and I don't know back in the day, I really wanted to – I have to be honest with you, Whitney, because you'll enjoy this story, because of what we're doing right now.

My dream growing up was to be Barbara Walters. Because I thought, how cool would it be to have a job where I meet new people and I get to ask them questions. I think, in my recent history and career, I think what's made me successful is that sense of curiosity that you need to have as a journalist, that you're always curious about not just what is happening, but why.

I think in commercial real estate, that's what has really intrigued me as I've looked at the research that we did at NAIOP and what we do now at CREW Network, I like to understand not just what's happening, but why it's happening. Why are we building something here? Or how is this change in retail going to affect the community that exists, or change the community?

There's some deep questions that I don't think the average person knows. As I joke with my son, who actually got a political science degree before he went into commercial real estate, no one really grows up and says, "Gosh, I really want to be a commercial real estate broker, or I want to be a developer." It's not like saying, "I want to be a doctor or a fireman."

That's why I think it's a hidden gem and there's so much value as a profession, as a career. Now what's growing and what you talk about a lot is the investment side. It's how do you get into creating wealth and wealth management through commercial real estate, which I also don't think people see as one of the very solid investments you can make. I've really enjoyed learning more about that. For me, personally my passion has always been the curiosity about learning a new industry and how deeply I got into commercial real estate as a business. Then being able to partner that with my lifelong passion for advocating, supporting women and their careers.

[00:04:48] WS: Nice. Well, I appreciate that. Yeah, I love just the desire to not only know what's happening, but why it's happening and how – you mentioned how that affects the community. That's deeper, I think, than most of us will tend to think about a lot of those things. I guess, go a little deeper in just how you can help us today, just your superpower and just what we're going to discuss.

[00:05:09] WM: Well, so today I'm delighted to talk about – when asked that question, what's your superpower, there's so many things I want to say. I think, what has always come to the forefront for me and this might be because of my background in journalism is really, my superpower is my voice.

I didn't realize that for most of my career and it hasn't been until I took this role with CREW Network that I realized that my voice gives me the opportunity to share a message about what's happening in the industry and what the opportunities are for women and for the business that they do and give and get from each other.

Our organization was founded 30 years ago by women who didn't have a voice at the table. It's a very male-dominated industry. A group of pioneering women literally got together and said, "Listen, if we don't work with each other, we're never going to get the opportunities for the big

deals.” They felt literally that they didn't have a seat at the table, they didn't have a voice in the deals.

When I think back to where we are now 31 years later, as we celebrated our 30th anniversary last year, is that my superpower of being able to give my voice on behalf of women and put my voice and our message out into the industry is one of those superpowers that I think can really fundamentally change, because the more I can share with the leaders that exist in the community today, that here's what's happening and we're going to talk about the data and the studies we've been doing in commercial real estate, our newly released benchmark study is about to be released in fact, will be really powerful as a base of knowledge for today's executive leaders in commercial real estate about what exists in terms of diversity and inclusion, and the value of having diversity in terms of innovation and bottom-line success and profitability in companies.

That's not just me and my voice saying that, that's actual studies outside of what CREW Network does that validates that. Using my voice and making sure that our women, through me, get heard about what they need and want and how it can – how the companies can benefit from that is really important. I think that if I continue to do that, we can make change.

[00:07:19] WS: Nice. Well, why don't you jump right into some of that data, so we can understand the value and profitability behind what you're talking about?

[00:07:28] WM: Great. I would love to. Our study, the CREW Network 2020 benchmark study was released earlier this month. We've been doing this now since 2005. It was a really brilliant move by early leaders in 2005 when they started it, was look, we have to have something behind us that gives credibility to the fact of what's happening.

We are now in our fourth study. I will tell you that every five years when we do it, we're able to validate that progress is happening, except this year. When I look at the study, people often say, “What surprised you?” What really surprised me was the lack of progress we've made in the past five years. Part of that I think, I wonder, I wonder, I don't know this for a fact, because it wasn't something that we can benchmark, but I wonder if over the past 15 years, from 2005 to 2015, those 10 years, or 20 years that companies started getting, like we have one woman in

executive leadership, where we have one woman on the board, so we're good now. They feel like, "We're done."

Maybe there's not as much of a push for it as there had been in preceding years. I don't know for sure, but I'm just guessing that could it be. I guess, the other things that – the other two things that really surprised me were the compensation gap for women. Overall, the difference of total compensation on average, including salaries, bonuses and commission combined is 34%. That's a gap of 34% between men and women, which is an 11% increase from 2015 since our last study.

The gap hasn't closed. It's opened up further, which is really number one, surprising and very disappointing. In addition to that, one of the other things we did this time in the study for the very first time was we measured the gap for women of color. That was a new add to the study. I can just tell you, these numbers are very staggering and sad.

Women in general, earn 10% less than men in base salaries of commercial real estate, but the gap is wider for women – Asian women, it's 14%. Black women, it's 15%. Hispanic and Latinx women is a whopping 20%. That was just for salaries. If you take just commissions and bonuses, women in general earn 56% less. 56% Whitney. That's a lot of money.

[00:09:49] WS: Is that just in commercial real estate?

[00:09:50] WM: It is just in commercial real estate. Yeah, it's just our business. That's why you'd see, my voice is – I just have to tell this story. For women overall, it's 56%. For black women, it's 71%. Asian women, 73%. For Hispanic and Latinx women, it's 74%, just on bonus and commission. Think about that. That's almost, close getting up there to close to a 100% difference between men and women. It's just not right. I can talk more about why some inferences we can make about that.

The second big surprise, I think for this study was that women's career satisfaction is at the lowest we've ever benchmarked it. It's the lowest since 2005. Just 55% of women are very satisfied with their career. I think, there could be several reasons for this. One is that maybe, it's just the that women are just so frustrated with the fact that they're still earning lower pay, there's

fewer opportunities for upward mobility and less access to leadership roles than their male counterparts.

Women could be growing increasingly frustrated with that and unable to reach, or reap the financial benefits in a thriving industry. There's a lot of money to be made in commercial real estate. We know that. But women aren't making it.

Then the other part of it could be there's a lack of progress, in terms of just overall increased awareness around the disparities and challenges women face. Those could be some of the reasons that women are more dissatisfied. The reason I mention that as a big surprise and an important surprise is that until companies can figure out how to make sure that women have satisfaction, we're going to keep losing women in this business, and we're not going to be able to make progress if women are opting out of these careers, or just getting increasingly frustrated. Those are some of the key points. I think that – I'll stop there for a moment, just saying.

[00:11:44] WS: Yeah. I was just thinking like, some of the pay gap there that you were talking about, I wonder, a lot of times and I see it all the time, because I'm interviewing so many people, it is mostly men that I'm interviewing. I try to have more women on, but they're more difficult to find. They're more difficult to find in the industry, right? Just exactly what you're telling us.

I wonder too, if it's typically the man that's starting the commercial real estate business and not always. There's definitely more women that are doing that. Then obviously, then they're in the highest paid position in that company as it started and as it's growing. Then they're staying at the top obviously, of their business. Do you see more women that are starting their own businesses and coming into the industry that way, as opposed to maybe working under other people for a whole career?

[00:12:31] WM: Yeah. You bring up a really great point. I've often mentioned this in the past years and that a lot of companies in commercial real estate are family-started, they're family-owned businesses. Historically, the patriarch starts the business, he hands it down to sons, versus daughters. I do believe that's ancient history and here's why. I am seeing more and more

young women and there are a lot of I want to say cowboys out there, but I'm going to say cowgirls out there who are like, "You know what? I can do this."

In fact, there's a young woman in Toronto who's one of our members. She's the current chapter president for that. She just started her own investment fund and is doing investment and she is brilliant. I don't know how old she is, but I want to say she's maybe mid-30s. I think that what we had benchmarked in the past is that women are less of risk takers than men, so you don't see them in fully commissioned roles.

You might not see them as a broker leading a brokerage firm. What we're seeing now is private equity, investment. There's a young woman on the West Coast who just went in to started her own wealth management fund and is doing multifamily investment. Then you see some of the older generation of women who did strike out on their own on these surveying side. There's one woman out of Dallas who sold her salt and butter company twice over, but who started her own business and did.

I think that the more we see those role models, it gives other women confidence. I think, part of what we do at CREW is bring that too. They come to a place where it's a safe place to explore, what are my options? Instead of just accepting what's always been. That's one thing that I would mention. The other thing that I would mention, which I think I'm very curious to see if my crystal ball plays out on this is that I think we're facing in the next five to seven years, a mass exodus of all the Baby Boomer men who have been in this business for oodles of years and had one vision and one structure of how they viewed the business. It was very much a gentleman's club and a handshake and a lot of men doing business with that.

When that group of anywhere from 62, 63 beyond retires and leads the workforce, you have a second generation, this next generation of men coming up in the business tend to look at women differently. In fact, they've always been in a workforce where there have been women, equal partners to them. Likely, they have a wife who's an equal partner to them at home, who may be a working mother and they share responsibility.

I think that generationally, we'll see a shift in how men view women at more equal and more as a partner. That will help shift the industry as well, but we can't stop talking about it. I do want to

say, those cowgirls out there if you're listening, keep riding the pony because you are going to bring it home to all of us to really make change in the industry. Whitney, I'll say upfront right now, I have 12,000 women in my membership. Anytime you need a woman to interview, call me because I will find you a woman. Yes.

[00:15:33] WS: I wanted to go back to an earlier point that you made just about women's satisfaction just in the business, in this industry as lower. As I've thought about our team and the women that have worked for me at various different parts of the business. I even sent an e-mail to one of our employees this morning just saying, "This is what I see you doing the next six months," and transitioning her to where I feel like she's more passionate and just where she wants to be long-term and just so she can visualize getting there. Where she's at now is not where she's always going to be.

I thought maybe you could highlight a little bit how we can bring light to that, so the women that are working in this industry now, maybe they're not at the top of the organization yet, but they may be soon. How do we increase that satisfaction and so they can even see where they're going long-term?

[00:16:23] WM: Well, first Whitney, let me say that's great leadership on your part, to acknowledge the person and their skills and understand their passion. That's really the bottom line. Here's the thing as business leaders, whether you're a man or a woman, it doesn't matter. As leaders, we need to figure out the people we have, what their talents are, what their passion is and help channel that into ways that it's going to be supportive and productive and profitable for the company.

The fact that you said, "Hey, here's where you are right now." If you do all of these things that they can see a vision and a path forward on their journey. That's the same for women in commercial real estate. What I think that happens in this business is there's been oodles. I mean, I don't want to keep saying the word oodles, but there's been significant focus on profitability and making money. I think we've seen a bit of a culture shift in that when some of the recent studies of how it's not just about making money for shareholders, we must do good to do well.

I think, that part of that is leaders figuring out what matters to their talent. I'm going to talk about women, but it's meant too, is as a leader, if we can't figure out what matters to them and create a culture in our company, in our environment that's going to make them want to stay and have satisfaction, they're not going to be productive for us anyway.

Our real goal as leaders is to say, "Hey, I noticed, I observed this that this matters to you." It can be work-life balance. It could be making money. "Here's how I'm going to help you get farther in your career doing that." I think that in commercial real estate and I think if you've been in this business a long time, you know this especially on the brokerage side, you're basically thrown into the deep water and said, sink or swim.

I think those days are over, frankly. If we don't change that model, we're not going to attract the talent we need, and that talent talent's going to go to Wall Street, it's going to go to technology, it's going to go so many other places than this industry. We need that talent for innovation into the future, because there's no question, this business is dynamic, and in 10 years, the way that technology and the way that innovation affects it is going to require that we have young bright minds who want to be in this business. We, it's incumbent upon us as the leaders to create the culture that makes them want to stay and be here.

I'm going to say specifically for women, there are things that matter to women in the workplace and we need to discover what that is to keep them and to help them grow and flourish and make the company more profitable. I think it can happen, honestly. I mean, you see it, you're doing it, I'm doing it in my own organization. People really appreciate, "Wow, this person understands what matters to me and they're going to help me get there."

I think having been through the last six months with COVID, I think we all see how productivity and efficiency can increase when we recognize the work-life balance issue for folks. I personally do not have small children at home, but I have now a renewed empathy for parents who do, who are trying to work.

It's not just women on that, by the way. Our studies showed this time, work-life balance has moved up in the factors for men as what creates satisfaction for them. I'm going to dig out that – I'm going to try to see if I can dig out that statistic for you. Typically, we ask what are the five top

things that give you satisfaction. For men, work-life balance fell down to maybe number five. Well, it's actually moved up to number two. I think we're seeing more and this goes to my point about men to the next generation of leaders in commercial real estate; work-life balance is going to matter to them as much as it does to women.

It's incumbent upon leaders to take that into consideration in the culture they're building. It all comes back to money. I mean, I'm not being Pollyanna here, because we all know that bottom line matters. The McKinsey study has shown that having more women in your organization creates better governance, more profitability and more collaboration and better decision-making. You can't beat those things.

[00:20:27] WS: Wendy, what's been the hardest part of your, say commercial real estate career, or process up to this point?

[00:20:34] WM: Wow. That's a tough question. What's been the most difficult for me? I'll say this. This is funny. What's been most difficult for me is pacing myself. I just see so much opportunity in this business for women. There's so many things I think we as an organization to do. We're expanding globally. I just want to get out there on the road and go to these other countries, where women are hungry for having the network that we provide.

One of the big things we do, we talk about talent. In the talent pipeline, we have 77 chapters in North America and our first global affiliate launched in the UK four years ago. Through this network that we have on the ground in all these communities, we are actually taking responsibility for the talent pipeline by going into high schools. We have a program called CREW Careers, where we go into high schools and we educate young women about the opportunities. We talk about the broad opportunities, everything from being an owner, to developing, to engineering, to architecture, to brokerage, to property management, so that young girls can see the opportunity that's there.

We also have a program at the university level, called You CREW, which is it's taking students who are in commercial real estate programs in their junior and senior year and helping them begin making the transition into the profession and finding their sweet spot. Is it investment? Is it

in property management? We teach them resume writing skills, interviewing skills and networking skills, the things you don't learn in business school.

I feel like there's so much that we can do. Pacing myself and creating those opportunities for the industry, really. It's not about me. It's not about CREW, but creating the opportunities for the industry to really leverage this next generation and cadre of exceptional women into their businesses.

[00:22:27] WS: What's the number one thing that's contributed to your success?

[00:22:30] WM: I'm going to say number one, because I already said this one, so it doesn't count, but curiosity and tenacity. I think those are the two things that have made me successful. You know what? What the heck. I'm just going to throw in a third one. It's reading the tea leaves. What I mean by that is there's a skill I call connecting the dots. I think to be successful in business, in anything, you have to be able to look out on the horizon and go, "Okay. If this is happening over here in society, this is happening with consumers, this is what I'm seeing on the investment and wealth management and private equity side and what I'm seeing over here on the development side," and I go, "If those things are all happening, this is how it's going to impact our membership and our organization."

Here's three things I can do, whether it's start a new met service for our members, or if it's address a need. If you as a leader can do that, and I will tell you, if you ask any of the most successful leaders their skill and they may not call it what I call it, but they're connecting the dots and being able to look out on the horizon and seeing what they can do right now to help reach and leverage what they see happening on the horizon. All right, I say connecting the dots. It's reading the tea leaves. It's all of that. Three things, sorry.

[00:23:42] WS: No. You're already doing this, Wendy. You've expressed this in a big way, but I ask every guest how do you like to give back?

[00:23:50] WM: I'll tell you, there's nothing more rewarding for me that when I hear from a woman that I've spoken to, a professional who says, "You don't know. You didn't do it intentionally, but you said XYZ on that last call, or when you were speaking at an event you said

blah, blah, blah.” She said, “It just struck me and it was a moment for me that was transformative,” then I know I’ve reached on a personal level someone that is going to be able to make change, or see things differently, or grow exponentially because of it.

I see the big picture, as I said, but those one-off things, they go straight to my heart to go, “All right. You’re in the right place doing the great work you need to be doing.” I find that very rewarding.

[00:24:39] WS: Thank you.

[00:24:40] WM: I feel very fortunate and very blessed to be doing what I’m doing. I’m one of those people who gets up every morning and says, I can’t wait to get to work. I know it’s crazy. I wish some days, I wouldn’t do that.

[00:24:50] WS: Yeah, it’s a blessed place to be and a lot of people would dream of being in that position and love going to work. Thank you for sharing that Wendy. Unfortunately, we’re out of time, but I’m grateful to have had you on the show and just to have been able to express what CREW Network is and how you’re helping women in this industry, specifically. Wendy, thank you again for your time. Tell the listeners how they can get in touch with you and how the women listening can learn more about the network.

[00:25:16] WM: Yeah. Well, we welcome all individuals to our network, men and women. In fact, we have 4% of our membership our men. All are welcome. You can find us online at crewnetwork.org. You can follow us on LinkedIn, just find CREW Network. We put a lot of content out there. Use the Google machine and find me. I’d love to connect with you.

Thank you so much. My pleasure to be here. I just want to mention that we’re not just helping women in the industry. We’re helping the industry transform itself to a higher level of profitability and business cell. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:25:48] WS: Don't go yet. Thank you for listening to today's episode. I would love it if you would go to iTunes right now and leave a rating and written review. I want to hear your feedback. It makes a big difference in getting the podcast out there. You can also go to the Real Estate Syndication Show on Facebook, so you can connect with me and we can also receive feedback and your questions there that you want me to answer on the show. Subscribe too, so you can get the latest episodes.

Lastly, I want to keep you updated, so head over to lifebridgecapital.com and sign up for the newsletter. If you're interested in partnering with me, sign up on the contact us page so you can talk to me directly. Have a blessed day and I will talk to you tomorrow.

[OUTRO]

[00:26:29] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to The Real Estate Syndication Show, brought to you by Life Bridge Capital. Life Bridge Capital works with investors nationwide to invest in real estate while also donating 50% of its profits to assist parents who are committing to adoption. Life Bridge Capital, making a difference one investor and one child at a time. Connect online at www.LifeBridgeCapital.com for free material and videos to further your success

[END]