

# ELITE WOMEN

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Meet 25 trailblazers – CEOs, owners, brokers and more – who have established themselves not only as individual success stories, but as role models for the next generation of women waiting to take the industry by storm

**THE DAYS** of real estate being a boys' club are over. There is no corner of the industry – from property management to real estate law, from sales coaches to the agents who turn to them for advice – that doesn't feature women in prominent roles. Every year, more and more women are establishing themselves as top agents and brokers, team leaders, managers and owners; they are becoming the mentors whom young

agents, both female and male, increasingly turn to for wisdom.

There is still work to be done – brokerages could do more to support the needs of agents with young children, and most companies are still woefully short of female representation at the corporate level – but women in real estate are no longer fighting for a seat at the table. The table is theirs for the taking.

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### CINDY DACOSTA

RE/MAX Real Estate Centre

Cambridge, ON

Cindy DaCosta has had a long, illustrious career in the Cambridge market. Since 1989, she has not only packed the trophy case with virtually every sales award available, she has also become a trusted mentor to young agents.

"It's important that they always be learning and soaking up every bit of knowledge they

can," she says. "With knowledge comes confidence, and with confidence comes success."

DaCosta sees real estate as a level playing field and argues that women not only have the same opportunities as men, but that they're at a significant advantage in an industry "where you're dealing with someone's whole life, their homes and their family issues."



### CARMELA KAPELERIS

RE/MAX Hallmark Realty

Mississauga, ON

Currently celebrating her 30th year in the industry, Carmela Kapeleris has made her mark as an agent, a broker, an acclaimed author and as Rogers TV's resident real estate expert. But Kapeleris is the first to admit that becoming such a trusted source of information isn't something young agents should expect to happen overnight.

"Climb the ladder one step at a time," she advises. "Do not skip any steps. Each step teaches you how to handle increasing responsibilities and how to hone your skills to perfection."

In addition to earning virtually every award RE/MAX has to offer, Kapeleris has also received Brilliant Minded Women's Philanthropist of the Year Award for her wide-ranging charity work with the Mississauga Food Bank, World Vision, Adopt-a-Senior, the SFN Scholarship program and a host of other initiatives.



### LOUISE STEPHENS

RE/MAX Real Estate Centre

Kitchener, ON

The managing broker of RE/MAX Real Estate Centre's bustling Kitchener office and RE/MAX's 2017 Manager of the Year, Louise Stephens is celebrating three decades in real estate. Known for her hands-on approach to management, Stephens is responsible for the

training and accountability programs that have turned her agents into both regional and national superstars. Her 90-day Commit to Success challenge, already completed by 500 of her agents, was directly responsible for RE/MAX Real Estate Centre becoming the company's number-one brokerage in Canada in 2017 based on completed transactions.

"Compassion, patience, understanding and perseverance are required in every position, be it sales or management," Stephens advises her fellow real estate professionals. "Don't let others define or describe your career – it is your personal and professional goals that matter."

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**CHERYL GRAY**  
QuadReal Property Group

Toronto, ON

In 2017, Cheryl Gray became part of the executive team that launched QuadReal Property Group, which manages 48 million square feet of real estate and \$24 billion in assets. QuadReal couldn't have chosen a better executive VP of enterprise innovation: Gray has been working in commercial real estate for almost 40 years.

Gray believes that while commercial firms are trying to promote diversity, there's still work to be done. "While women are far more prevalent today in commercial real estate than when I first started my career," she says, "there is still room for improvement, such as creating opportunities for increasing diversity and achieving greater representation in the C-suite and boards of commercial firms."

Gray has a busy few years ahead of her. The first international member to be elected an officer of the Chicago-based Institute of Real Estate Management, she will serve as president elect in 2019 and president in 2020. She's also been charged with publishing a cybersecurity wellness guide for the commercial real estate industry as part of her duties as co-chair of BOMA Canada's cybersecurity task force.



**GIZELLA DAVIS**

Century 21 Bamber Realty

Calgary, AB

Gizella Davis has been shattering client expectations in the Calgary area for more than 40 years. In that time, she has survived more boom-bust cycles than most agents have even heard of.

Davis' attention to detail has earned her numerous awards. While selling for Royal LePage, she became the first woman to earn recognition as the company's number one agent in Canada and was granted lifetime membership in Royal LePage's Chairman's Club for her years of continued excellence. At Century 21, Davis has sold her way into the company's Million Dollar Club and has earned Double Centurion distinction. But perhaps more importantly, countless clients have adopted Davis as a member of the family.



**PAULINE RELKEY**

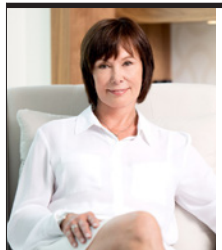
Realty Executives Diversified Realty

Regina, SK

When Pauline Relkey started out in real estate in 1991, she and her husband were raising two young children, one of whom was only four months old.

"I heard a male manager say that he was approached by a woman with two kids who wanted to be a Realtor, and his reply was something to the effect of, 'There's no way she could do it,'" Relkey says. "Well, I did it! And that so-called manager is back in sales. Your work will prove what you can do."

In addition to winning Regina's Realtor of the Year and Realty Executives Top Gun awards, Relkey is also known for her work in the community. Through the Diva Night fundraiser she started with colleagues, she has helped raise more than \$125,000 for local women's shelters.



**DEBRA BAIN**

RE/MAX Hallmark Realty

Toronto, ON

Debra Bain's career highlights could fill a book. As the president of RE/MAX Hallmark Realty, Bain oversees one of the largest RE/MAX franchises in the world. She has received some of the company's highest honours while building Hallmark into a veritable army of 1,400 agents.

Bain says her illustrious career was impacted early on by the guidance she received from other successful women in the industry. "Mentorship is so important," she says. "Young women should reach out to someone they admire and want to emulate and ask to spend some time with them."

**MICHELE DENNISTON**

Century 21 Heritage Group

Richmond Hill, ON

Michelle Denniston brought a strong corporate sales background with her when she started selling real estate 15 years ago. It has helped her build one of Century 21's most successful teams. In 2017, she received her sixth Grand Centurion award and was ranked number 14 for production among Century 21 agents worldwide. Denniston has also raised money for a wealth of charities, including the Yellow Brick House Women's Shelter and Senior Centre and Easter Seals.







## **KATHLEEN BLACK**

**Kathleen Black Coaching and Consulting**

Oshawa, ON

With a decade of experience in supercharging the performance of both agents and teams, Kathleen Black has established herself as one of Canada's top real estate coaches, landing on T3 Sixty's Emerging Leaders list for 2018. But improving a Realtor's bottom line is only half the story for Black – she also wants to help agents enjoy their lives. "You are not winning if you reach your sales targets but constantly burn out," she says. "Burning out in order to succeed and be all things to all people – that model has passed its time."

In the coaching industry, the most recognizable thought leaders continue to be men. That has forced Black to be aggressive and refuse to take a back seat when leading her business. "If you have to be 10 times or 200 times better than the competition to get your chance, so be it," she says. "Get on with being 200% better. You will only benefit in the end."

Black has spent her career doing things her own way, which she believes is the only way to truly succeed. "You cannot take shortcuts to a legacy business," she says. "Stand up for your principles and your clients, and do what you think is fair and right."



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## TINA GARDIN

Sutton Group Quantum Realty

Mississauga, ON

Tina Gardin started building her Sutton Group franchise from the ground up 25 years ago. Since then, she has become one of the GTA's most respected brokers, known for her supportive, hands-on approach to training agents and her deep involvement in organized real estate.

To support the hard-working moms at Sutton Group Quantum, Gardin launched a high-quality, flexible daycare option – something she wishes she'd had as a young mother starting her own brokerage. "I relied on my mom and a nanny in my early years as a broker," she says. "It's important to keep looking for support systems like this."

Gardin urges female agents to follow her footsteps and get involved in industry organizations. "Women are very well represented in organized real estate," she says. "That's where I was mentored by many women and men in my career. It will educate you and help you to effect change."



## SUE HEDDLE

Century 21 Miller Real Estate

Oakville, ON

Sue Heddle has spent more than a decade with Century 21 Miller Real Estate. In that time, she has come to believe that women have a distinct advantage when it comes to selling real estate.

"Women sell houses better than men. I can always tell before I scroll down to see whose name is on the listing that it is a man's listing by seeing photos of unmade beds, toilet seats left up and remotes all over the coffee table," says Heddle, who owns her own staging company and offers free home staging to all her sellers.

In addition to being one of Oakville's leading agents, Heddle is a major part of the local community. She founded the Hockey Cares Project, which uses hockey to bring Indigenous and urban youth together. The program has facilitated a cultural exchange between the young residents of Oakville and those of the Attawapiskat First Nation.



## BARBARA LAWLOR

Baker Real Estate

Toronto, ON

"Perseverance is omnipotent," says Baker Real Estate CEO Barbara Lawlor. "Nobody wins all the time, but continuing to strive and bringing the best version of yourself to the table every day will work wonders."

Lawlor has been embodying that philosophy at Baker since 1993. She has been instrumental in opening some of the company's most successful offices and was the driving force behind its pre-construction condo marketing initiatives. In 2017, she received the Riley Brethour Award for Leadership.

Lawlor believes real estate has always been full of opportunity for women. "The education process is the same for both men and women, as are the networking opportunities," she says. "Certain pockets of the industry, like commercial and industrial, may still belong to the old boys' club, but their days are numbered."



## BARBARA BRINDLE

RE/MAX Hallmark Realty

Aurora, ON

Barbara Brindle has assumed various roles during her 30 years in real estate – from Hall of Fame Realtor to managing partner and VP of career development for RE/MAX Hallmark Realty – and she has excelled in all of them. But while Brindle is one of the most accomplished and respected women working in Canadian real estate today, that respect was not always forthcoming. As a young agent, Brindle found that her older male counterparts rarely took her seriously. "I had to increase my assertiveness to aggression at times to establish that I was a force to be reckoned with and not about to back down to a bully," she says.

Brindle takes pride in the fact that her best year in real estate came when she was a single mother. "I learned the difference between important and urgent during those years," she says, "which has been invaluable now that I am in a leadership position."



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## **SUSAN GUCCI**

**Royal LePage Signature Realty**

Toronto, ON

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An insatiable appetite for learning and a strong will have allowed Susan Gucci to have a long, rewarding career with Royal LePage. One of the leading Realtors in Toronto's highly competitive East York region, Gucci is a member of Royal LePage's top 1%, an honour she doesn't take lightly.

"It was a real eye-opener for me," she says of entering the Chairman's Club. "For the first time, I could see what was possible. It's like the curtain opened up, and all these great people appeared who are committed, supportive and the best of the best."

Gucci doesn't see any barriers to success lying in the way of female Realtors – "If I did, I wouldn't pay much attention," she says – but she does see a need for more women in leadership roles at the corporate level. "We need to have more women pursuing those opportunities. The world deserves more of what we have to offer."



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## SYLVIA PERDUE

RE/MAX Realty Specialists

Mississauga, ON

In August, Sylvia Perdue celebrated the 45th anniversary of her first deal, which she closed in her first week as an agent. Over the course of her career, she has established an incredible average of 50 sales a year and was the recipient of RE/MAX's inaugural Manager of the Year Award for Ontario in 1993. In 2014, she was named Manager of the Year for all of Canada.

"I was in the trenches when selling was really hard," Perdue says. The lessons she learned at a time when service, creativity and industriousness were crucial in getting a home sold have helped her build a training structure that puts her agents on the fast track to success.

"I believe I've helped create a company culture of fun, success and a no-nonsense approach to dealing with the day-to-day business of real estate," she says.



## SANDY CASELLA

Royal LePage Your Community Realty

Toronto, ON

Sandy Casella has been going above and

beyond for her clients since she became a full-time agent in 1998, but in the last four years, she has truly climbed into the upper echelon of agents in the GTA. Her team has rapidly expanded to eight members, and she's now sharing her experiences as a valued member of the Craig Proctor coaching team.

"I enjoy helping others, and I'm lucky enough to be able to do that," Casella says. "Feeling like I've made a difference in someone's life is very fulfilling to me."

It's no surprise, then, that Casella has dedicated a significant amount of time to charitable causes, including providing school supplies to children in need and donating funds from every home sale to research aimed at fighting teen suicide.

## JASMINE LEE

RE/MAX Hallmark Realty

Toronto, ON

Jasmine Lee has long been among the GTA's elite agents. She has been recognized no fewer than 30 times for her outstanding sales work over the last 14 years, most recently earning RE/MAX's coveted Chairman's Club Award in 2017.

A broker and team leader with RE/MAX Hallmark Realty, Lee is using her vast experience to educate the next generation of Realtors. She feels that while there are few barriers to success for women in real estate, there is a noticeable lack of female influence at the higher levels of the industry.

"Most of the coaches are men; the managers are men; most team leaders are men," Lee says. "We as women do business differently. Because women wear more hats, we are used to multi-tasking, paying attention to details, and managing people and organizing our time to make all parts of the puzzle come together."



## JOYCE PERON

EXIT Realty

Mississauga, ON

The president of EXIT Realty's Canadian operations, Joyce Peron has played a leading role in establishing the company as one of the most trusted real estate brands in eastern Canada. Peron has received EXIT's Leader's Leader Award, among several others, and

has been named one of the Swanepoel Report's 100 most influential women in real estate.

Working at a company where the majority executives are women is a point of pride for Peron, who believes that "our resiliency, fortitude and deliberateness of vision have continued to drive us forward through difficult terrain. As a result, today we have incredible female role models who speak the truth of the camaraderie, mentoring, encouragement and support we provide to each other."

Peron encourages female agents to focus on their strengths and surround themselves with talented colleagues who can fill in the gaps. "The approach of trying to do everything well simply waters you down, dulling your brilliance," she says. "Go out and shine."

## MAGGI THORNHILL

Thornhill Real Estate Group

Whistler, BC

Over the course of her illustrious career, Maggi Thornhill has sold over \$800 million worth of real estate, including the highest-priced home in Whistler's history. For the past decade, she has been the number-one agent in the area. In her 22 years of selling real estate in Whistler, Thornhill has created an unmatched database of local and international clients, who have helped her average more than \$100 million in sales in each of the last five years.

Even though Thornhill is known for selling luxury properties, she is committed to helping the less fortunate. She is a major contributor to the Whistler Blackcomb Foundation, and she donates a portion of each commission to Playground Builders, an organization that build playgrounds for children in war-torn areas.



## **DEBBIE DOMINGUES**

**RE/MAX Ultimate Realty**

Toronto, ON

By setting goals and remaining positive, Debbie Domingues has become one of RE/MAX Ultimate Realty's top agents. As a specialist in the luxury sector, Domingues has become a trusted partner for elite clients looking for exclusive properties.

Despite the inroads made over the decades, Domingues believes the real estate industry could still use more diversity. More women in leadership roles, she says, would help young women considering real estate careers realize that "there is no limit on what you can do. It would teach them that they can be anything they want to be if they set their minds to it."



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## KATHY TALBOT

Dan Gemus Real Estate Team

Amherstburg, ON

Kathy Talbot might not work in one of Canada's most glamorous markets, but she has been one of the country's steadiest, most trusted agents for the past 23 years. For much of that time, she has been completed between 80 and 100 transactions a year – a track record that agents in larger markets would kill for.

Talbot has had the opportunity to mentor several young women over the years, helping them succeed in an industry she feels is theirs for the taking. "I meet very successful women every day who are strong, independent leaders in this industry, who have inspired me to grow and think outside the box," she says. "There are no limits in this industry. It's exciting and rewarding, and there are always opportunities to keep growing and learning."



## SHIRLEY PRZYBYL

Century 21  
Bachman and  
Associates

Winnipeg, MB

Shirley Przybyl was named president of the Manitoba Real Estate Association in February, a fitting position for a woman of her vast experience. In her 25 years in the industry, Przybyl has been a leading agent and a growth-minded broker. In addition to her duties as president of the MREA, she is also the manager of Century 21 Bachman and Associates, one of the company's top Manitoba franchises. A fixture in organized real estate since 1999, Przybyl has been a driving force for change in the province.



## JOANNE EVANS

Century 21 Millennium

Brampton, ON

As the co-owner and broker of record of one of Ontario's top-performing Century 21 franchises, Joanne Evans oversees the performance of more than 180 agents spread across four thriving offices. Evans' commitment to mentoring and coaching her agents has been integral to the franchise's continued growth. "Coaching my sales team to success,

making sure they have the knowledge, skill and support they need to provide truly excellent service and make dreams come true – that's what really excites me," she says.

Evans' commitment to her agents and her clients is rivalled only by her commitment to her community. She is active in the Caring for Kids program, which supports families in need in Brampton and the Georgian Triangle, as well as the My Friends' House women's shelter. She also helped build a school in Kenya in partnership with Tenderfeet Education Centre.



## SARITA SAMAROO-TSAKTSIRIS

SST Law

Toronto, ON

Sarita Samaroo-Tsaksiris has become one of the most respected real estate lawyers in the GTA, helping countless buyers and sellers navigate the legal minefields hidden in the details of most real estate transactions.

Real estate law is still a male-dominated field, and Samaroo-Tsaksiris says she's occasionally mistaken for admin staff, but she does see a demographic shift happening. "There are strong, intelligent women making their voices known," she says. "Women also have an uncanny ability to close deals by being even-tempered and conscientious of ensuring everything goes smoothly."

## PAMELA ALEXANDER

RE/MAX Integra

Toronto, ON

Pamela Alexander is one of the most powerful women in Canadian real estate. As CEO and managing director of RE/MAX Integra, Alexander oversees RE/MAX's largest sub-franchisor and a third of the company's worldwide workforce.

Before taking on her first leadership role as regional director for RE/MAX Ontario–Atlantic Canada in 1995, Alexander had a long run as one of the company's top brokers. She opened the first RE/MAX franchise in eastern Canada in 1980. Over the course of 15 years, she built RE/MAX Professionals into a three-office, 250-agent juggernaut and earned the company's awards for Top Transaction and Broker Owner of the Year for Multiple Offices. Alexander's emphasis on professionalism and training have benefited agents and consumers alike and have helped make RE/MAX one of Canada's most recognizable brands.

