

Boston Business Journal

Friday, February 27, 2009

Debra Stevens: Smiling through it all

Boston Business Journal - by [Michelle Hillman](#)

Debra Stevens is a gregarious real estate broker. She laughs easily and is quick with a smile. Those qualities still persist — even today, when the economy is taking a bite out of business. Stevens is co-owner of The Stevens Group with her husband, Mark. The firm started in the 1980s and relaunched in 2006. Stevens said she's not working on 20 lease deals at a time like the old days, but it's the 10,000-square-foot and 15,000-square-foot deals that are keeping her and her boutique tenant representation firm going. Stevens recently discussed her work with reporter Michelle Hillman.



Debra Stevens

Definition of a good day?

Every day is a good day. Every single solitary day is another chance to excel. You got to go out there and slay them every day. If we stop trying that's a failed day. Every day we get out there and just keep it going.

How many recessions have you been through and what did you learn?

The '80s and the dot-com (bust). It was tough. People would be cocky going through it and thinking they'd brave it out. You have to pay attention. Also, you have to prepare for it. When you're in a risky business like this you always have a backup. Like a squirrel puts away nuts for a storm. Just always watch your expenses during the good times.

Is this recession any different?

We've been there, done that. It's not scary anymore.

Traits that give you a competitive edge?

Trust, patience, persistence. Go under, over, around and, if necessary, through the problem to meet the client's needs.

Pet peeve?

Rudeness.

Mentor?

Mark. He taught, he pulled and he pushed me. He taught me by example. He would push me off a cliff, if I needed it ... push me to do better. Everyone needs that encouragement, especially in this business. The highs are exceedingly high and the lows are deep.

What's it like working with your spouse?

It's a luxury because they understand what you've gone through that day and your successes and your failures that day. And if you've had a really, really bad day your spouse will make you dinner that night.

Person most interested in meeting?

Ben Franklin. I just read a biography on him. Kept his sense of humor, always learned, was always studying. He was a great peacemaker, a brilliant negotiator. He loved food. He loved music.

Favorite status symbol?

To me a status symbol is a good library.

Toughest business decision?

Every deal has its point at which it's tough. During every transaction there becomes a moment at which it becomes exceedingly difficult.

Motto?

"Always be prepared to walk away from a deal."