



**AUTHORITY MAGAZINE**

## **Women Leaders Of Real Estate: “Have the confidence to be heard” With Deborah Woodhead of AKAM**

*Jason Hartman - [Jan 28](#) · 9 min read*



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**“As women, it’s important for us to continue to understand and see the opportunities that exist and push to be part of it. AKAM creates opportunities for all genders and educational backgrounds, and creativity is encouraged at all levels. A great deal of our Senior Directors and Management group are led by women. When you walk into an Executive meeting, it is refreshing to see a balance of gender. Women need to continue to feel empowered and have the confidence to be heard. We need to support, guide and mentor our younger generation to encourage this continual advancement.”**

*As a part of my series about strong women leaders of the Real Estate industry, I had the pleasure of interviewing Deborah Woodhead. As Vice President of Corporate Finance, Deborah Woodhead is responsible for delivery of best practices, overseeing AKAM’s financial operations for corporate reporting. Deborah ensures that all financial daily transactions and controls are in place, all Financials documents are compliant with best accounting practices and works together with the CFO on creation of annual budgets, forecasts and projections. Deborah is a financial and operational management professional with over 30 years of experience in Industrial Manufacturing and holds a Bachelor’s degree in Finance from Newbury College. In her free time, Deborah enjoys spending time with her family, trips to Disney, walking and jet skiing.*

**Thank you so much for doing this with us! Can you tell us the “backstory” about what brought you to the Real Estate industry?**

Prior to my current role, I was actually the VP of Finance for a manufacturing company! I had been in that position for 34 years so when the opportunity to join the AKAM team came along, I admit I was a little hesitant at first. After mulling it over for a few days, I had decided that I was ready to make the change and was so excited to start working with AKAM. While property management is a bit different than the manufacturing industry, the values are still the same: superior customer service with exceptional leadership, paired with unending management oversight to enhance our client properties and products.

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**Can you share with our readers the most interesting or amusing story that occurred to you in your career so far? Can you share the lesson or take away you took out of that story?**

While working with one of our clients on a potential new offering, we began discussing our love for classic movies. As we neared the end of the conversation, the client was singing Judy Garland songs and I thought — Wow, what an honor it is to be a part of a business where we work with one of the most personal aspects of an individual's life, which is where they live and raise their families. If we look close enough, we will find that most people, as different as we are, share similar values of respect, integrity and kindness.

**Are you working on any exciting new projects now? How do you think that will help people?**

AKAM is working on many exciting projects for 2021. Recently, we added several marquee, new properties to our management portfolio in New York and South Florida including 100 Eleventh Avenue in New York, designed by illustrious international architect Ateliers Jean Nouvel and Skyline on Brickell in Miami, designed by award-winning firm Bermello Ajamil & Partners. Additional trophy properties recently added to the AKAM management portfolio include 7 Gramercy Park West, The Fitzroy, 51 Jay Street and Skyline Tower, the tallest building in Long Island City, Queens.

We are committed to continuously pushing the envelope and elevating the property management industry as a whole. We are working on several more initiatives to further enhance the overall lifestyle experience for our clients by introducing a more hospitality-driven approach, which is a core element that seems to be missing from the property management industry in general. When AKAM looks at bringing in projects, we look at all angles — not just how the change will impact our clients internally but also how that impacts our clients externally.

**What do you think makes your company stand out? Can you share a story?**

With attention to every detail, AKAM brings a rare combination of knowledge, relationships, and flexibility to every property under management. I think this personal attention to detail and client satisfaction is what makes us stand out. One

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particular story I can recall is during a management project at one of our properties, we had an elderly resident call and voice their concern on the impacts of the project to the community. Once our senior team was made aware of this, our vice president had personally picked up the phone to call the resident and assure them of the measures that were being taken to ensure minimal disruption. At the end of the call, the resident was relieved. I believe this care and responsiveness from our team is what makes AKAM special. Our core values at the company are to innovate, collaborate, and elevate — all with a hospitality-driven approach. We strive to always provide the highest level of service to our clients and bring value to the properties we manage.

**None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?**

My former CEO and President gave me the opportunity to advance from a VP of Finance position to General Manager. This change allowed me to travel to different site locations better understand the business, understand the customers and also understand the employees, which ultimately drove the true success of any business. His faith, unending wisdom and guidance helped me to become the person I am today.

**Ok. Thank you for all that. Let's now jump to the main core of our interview. The Real Estate industry, like the Veterinarian, Nursing and Public Relations fields, is a women dominated industry. Yet despite this, less than 20 percent of senior positions in Real Estate companies are held by women. In your opinion or experience, what do you think is the cause of this imbalance?**

As women, it's important for us to continue to understand and see the opportunities that exist and push to be part of it. AKAM creates opportunities for all genders and educational backgrounds, and creativity is encouraged at all levels. A great deal of our Senior Directors and Management group are led by women. When you walk into an Executive meeting, it is refreshing to see a balance of gender. Women need to continue to feel empowered and have the confidence to be heard. We need to support, guide and mentor our younger generation to encourage this continual advancement.

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**What 3 things can be done by a) individuals b) companies and/or c) society to support greater gender balance going forward?**

As individuals, we can build and change the culture, beliefs and actions of others. It is part of each of us and our job to assist each other wherever we can, personally and professionally.

As a company, it's key for us to not only support our employees, but also our communities. Being in real estate and property management, we have the ability to renew faith in neighborhoods and can change the lives of people around us today, as well as future generations.

As a society, we have made great strides in this area but there is still more work to be done. We must continue to focus on growth for all employees and genders. We can do this by making it a point to be inclusive and include all inputs when it comes to decision-making, giving everyone the tools and empowerment needed to grow in their careers.

**In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges faced by women executives that aren't typically faced by their male counterparts?**

Equality, work-life balance and feeling confident enough to know you have a voice that is heard. I am very fortunate to work with AKAM in this respect as they recognize the importance of these values across the board and really set the team up for success.

**Can you share 3 things that most excite you about the Real Estate industry?**

We impact the home life of individuals as well as the financial security of owners, since AKAM specifically works to retain and grow the value of the properties we manage. The real estate business as a whole is so dynamic, so we are always looking for ways to service and improve our client experience. Lastly, we have the opportunity to connect with so many interesting people from different places, which is truly enriching!

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**Can you share 3 things that most concern you about the industry? If you had the ability to implement 3 ways to reform or improve the industry, what would you suggest?**

The top three concerns for me currently include the uncertainty with interest rates and effects on ownership, renovations, and maintenance of existing properties. There is also a concern as general affordability continues to be an issue for lower wage earners. And of course, political uncertainty and the effects it could have on additional regulations and infrastructure to support such requirements. In terms of improving the industry — providing safe, sufficient and affordable housing for all.

**What advice would you give to other leaders to help their team to thrive?**

I have one basic rule: Respect at all times. It is the best rule to ensure you can build a team that feels valued and respected. I always encourage having an open dialogue.

**Ok, here is the main question of our interview. You are a “Real Estate Insider”. If you had to advise someone about 5 non intuitive things one should know to succeed in the Real Estate industry, what would you say? Can you please give a story or an example for each?**

- 1) There are many positions in real estate, which is the beauty of it! If you're looking to begin a career in real estate or perhaps begin a career on a different path in the industry, there is no better way to understand a business than to live and grow with it. One of the many things I love about AKAM is the abundance of opportunities we offer from entry-level roles all the way up to senior leadership.
- 2) Always be willing to listen. In this industry, one of the greatest values we can offer our clients is listening to them. As a result, we are able to identify ways to improve their lives and communities, which is one of the greatest values we can add.
- 3) Be a trusted partner with your client. In order for the relationship to truly work, you have to earn their respect through consistent leadership with integrity — which is a foundation that AKAM has been built on.



- 4) Flexibility and the eagerness to learn. As the market changes, so do the regulations. In turn, our clients need to evolve and we have to be able to adapt quickly. Sometimes this means applying newly acquired knowledge so in these situations, be patient and allow yourself the time to grow.
- 5) Networking is key. We need to have strong relationships all around us, from coworkers to clients to surrounding communities and organizations.

**Because of your position, you are a person of enormous influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the greatest amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger.**

I have a habit that every time I shop or go to a store I donate one dollar. Imagine if every person donated just one dollar each time they went shopping or had the opportunity to donate — it would fund many great charities and causes in need. With proper funding, real change can take place to help people.

**How can our readers follow you online?**

You can follow me @akamliving on Instagram, AKAM on LinkedIn and Facebook, or visit [www.akam.com](http://www.akam.com). Feel free to reach out to [feedback@akam.com](mailto:feedback@akam.com) as your comments always help us to enhance our services we deliver to clients!

**Thank you for your time, and your excellent insights!**

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