

Boston Power Women: 5 Questions With Barbara Schmitt

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This limited series profiles Power Women who have helped shape Greater Boston's cities, neighborhoods, businesses and lifestyles. These women will be honored at Bisnow's [Boston Power Women event](#) on Dec. 4.

Dain Torpy Director Barbara Schmitt has represented some of the biggest names in real estate. Her practice represents office landlords in Boston and Washington, D.C., as well as large tenants with national leasing. Her client roster includes Boston Properties, Oxford Properties, MetLife and Beacon Capital Partners.



Schmitt is also focused on passing on her knowledge to the next generation and is on the faculty at Georgetown University's Master's in Professional Real Estate program.

Schmitt is a fixture on Super Lawyers' top real estate lawyers ranking in New England. Prior to joining Dain Torpy in 2015, she was a director for more than 20 years at Goulston & Storrs.

Bisnow: How do you describe your job to people who are not in the industry?

Schmitt: Writing leases for commercial real estate is like playing Monopoly. There is a basic set of rules, but everyone adds their own (you get the pot of cash in the middle if you land on free parking, etc.). My job is to take the basic rules (the form lease) and document the additional/different rules that the landlord and tenant agree to play by over the many years of the term of the lease. And, oh yes, it's real money!

Bisnow: What is the biggest business problem you have faced and how did you solve it?

Schmitt: How to structure the documents for Google's 2012 expansion in Kendall Square. Three different buildings, with three different landlords, were to be connected into one large floor plate by adding significant RSF between the buildings. The deal had to have three different leases, which provided for the connection but also could be unwound if the permits for the connectors were not obtained. I borrowed the concept of a zoning overlay district, creating an "interconnection agreement" that tied the leases together if the connectors were built and also governed the unwinding if they were not. Thankfully, the permits were granted.

Bisnow: What is one thing you think companies can do to address wage and gender inequality?

Schmitt: The issue needs to be out on the table, all the time. Management needs to be open to hearing about, and correcting, inequalities that are unintentional but nonetheless very real. We need to be able to talk about disparate impacts without it being seen as an accusation of intentional discrimination. Women know that the vast majority of men are not setting out to create an unequal workplace, but we also know that most workplaces are indeed unequal. Men need to be willing to look at the factual realities of inequality and commit to fixing them.

Bisnow: What piece of advice do you give others entering the industry?

Schmitt: Don't be afraid to do things your own way, to find a path that is comfortable for you. Always treat others as you would wish to be treated. This is especially true for staff. Make friends among those who work for you, and they will repay the favor by making you look good. It's all about relationships; find a mentor and try to forge connections with everyone you meet in a deal — remember, often the best referrals come from those who were across the table from you.

Bisnow: What do you do to unwind when you're not working?

Schmitt: I went into real estate because I was attracted to its tangible nature. I can look at a building and say, "I had a piece in creating that." Most of my hobbies are similarly tangible: cooking, sewing, knitting. I have been a recipe tester for several bread-baking cookbooks. I knit in class throughout law school — I could do about a sweater a semester — and still fantasize about being able to knit in client meetings. Alas, I suspect clients would be much less forgiving than law school professors!