

# JOURNAL

REAL ESTATE INSTITUTE OF NEW SOUTH WALES | VOL 68/04

Now Recognised in the Industry as one of the Premier  
Sales Agents in Sydney

**Know  
what  
you  
stand  
for**

Bernadette Hayes  
shares how she's  
remained true to  
her core values

**PROFESSIONALISM**

Proven experience is the basis of trust

**CO-WORKING SPACES**

The rise of the new corporate cool

**PINK UP YOUR TOWN**

Supporting the McGrath Foundation

# Know what *you stand for*

**Bernadette Hayes cheerfully refers to real estate as her “third career”. Here she shares how life experience and previous career challenges have allowed her to build a successful agency that remains true to her core values.**

By TINA LIPTAI

**A** career in real estate was never part of Bernadette Hayes’ plans. If you had told her 10 years ago she would one day be leading a team of seven as Principal of her own independent real estate agency, she would have thought you were confusing her with someone else.

“If someone had told me this is what I’d be doing, I would have laughed at them,” she explained. “I never considered real estate as the career for me.”

Bernadette’s career had largely been in the hospitality industry, with a management role at the Opera House and later launching her own catering business in the 90s. Looking at getting back into the workforce after being very involved with school and community activities while raising her four children, Bernadette was considering new opportunities. Real estate was not what she saw in her future, but a brush with underwhelming customer service with two real estate agencies set the wheels in motion.

“I had a property manager looking after my investment property, but felt I could do

a better job – so I started managing it myself,” she explained.

Not long after, one of her friends found herself in a similar position and handed the management of her property over to Bernadette.

“My accountant noticed the extra income from managing the two properties and suggested I get a real estate licence. At the time I was considering retraining for a career change, but real estate hadn’t occurred to me,” she said.

After discussing it with her husband, who had worked in senior property roles with corporate and government organisations, she decided to take the plunge.

And so began what Bernadette cheerfully refers to as her “third career”. Not only did she get her real estate licence but, with the support of her husband, Bernadette opened her own independent agency – Harbourline Real Estate.

## **Sink or swim**

Joining the real estate industry with years of life and work experience behind her, Bernadette had

“

**You have to make excellence a priority and do things professionally from day one.**





**I believe it's important to create a workplace that supports women with families who are returning to work and want to continue to have a challenging and rewarding career.**

very clear ideas about how she wanted the next phase of her career to unfold.

"Before I even started the course to get my licence, I knew I didn't want to work for someone else," she said. "I've always been fiercely independent and I have strong ideas about the way things should be done. So I knew from the start that I was going to work for myself and a big agency wasn't going to suit me.

"I also had the very strong perception that 'everyone hates real estate agents', and I knew in my gut that if I was going to work in the industry then I'd need to approach it in my own way from day one.

"As daunting as it was in the beginning, I felt that starting my own agency gave me a fresh approach and I could do things how I believed they should be done. I wanted to be proud of my business and about what I was doing for a living, so I felt I needed to get away from the perceived real estate stereotype."

While by her own admission she had "no real estate experience" and did not take a "traditional route" into the industry, what Bernadette did have was sound local knowledge from 30 years of living in the area, strong ties to the community and a commitment to providing excellent service.

"I was probably quite naive when I started the business, but with the support and encouragement of my husband I created a two-year plan with a budget and started small just to see how it went," she said. "Most people probably thought I was a bit mad, but eight years later I'm still here."

And she has even managed to lure her husband, Ian, away from his government job and recruit him as Director and Head of Property at the agency.

**Away from stereotypes**

Bernadette knows firsthand the valuable contribution agents with a diverse range of skills from previous careers outside real estate can bring to a business.

"I use all my skills from my other careers and it constantly surprises me," Bernadette said.

Most of her team have held senior positions in professional backgrounds other than real estate, including the banking, finance and marketing sectors.

"What they all have in common is a passion for delivering excellent service," she explained. "They also all had a strong interest in real estate before they joined the business and they bring very different, but important, transferable skills to their roles which benefits the whole business."

Bernadette also values the contribution women can make to the workplace. More than half of her team are women with families. "I believe it's important to create a workplace that supports women with families who are returning to work and want to continue to have a challenging and rewarding career," she said. "We're accommodating when it comes to school and sporting commitments. Women have a valuable contribution to make and bring diverse skills, experience and energy to the business."

**Personal service**

From the moment she opened the doors of Harbourline Real Estate, Bernadette has been passionate about delivering excellent customer service tailored to every client's needs.

"When I take on a client, my phone is on 24/7. We don't have an answering machine, someone always picks up the call to help our clients," Bernadette explains. "I work mainly in sales, but I still have a strong interest in property management and I meet all the new landlords and tenants. I also have good relationships with all the tradespeople we work with.

"It's important for me to still be very hands on. In the recent storms where the SES had a 12 hour delay, we received a phone call at 2am from one of our tenants. My husband and our handyman ended up on the roof themselves to stop a major leak after a tree had fallen onto the house. Our landlord was living overseas and our tenants were paying a lot of money, so it's important to us to have that level of service for all of our clients."

That personal touch also extends to each of her staff. "It's a small office, so it's important to have good lines of communication," Bernadette said. "Everyone is across all new clients, whether

sales or property management, and we can all help out if needed. Open communication across the business creates great morale because everyone is involved. Everyone is invested in the business – we work through challenges together and celebrate successes together.”

### Remember why you started

Like most real estate businesses, one of the biggest challenges Bernadette and her team face is keeping up to date with the fast pace of the industry.

“Real estate is fast moving and you can never be complacent,” she said. “You must be across all legislation changes, software innovations and be focused on what’s happening in all areas of the industry.”

Despite the pace, Bernadette says it’s important not to compromise on the values and standards that are important to you and your business.

“Don’t cut corners with things like technology. Do the research and invest in quality systems that will help you to run your business better,” she said. “Make sure you have the best systems for servicing your customers and supporting your staff. It’s also really important your staff are fully trained and given opportunities to keep learning, because it builds confidence which is vital for a thriving workplace.

“One of the biggest things I’d say to anyone running a business is never compromise. Never be tempted to turn your business and how you operate into a production line and expand for the sake of it. Stay true to your values and why you started. Get comfortable with doing less, but doing it better than anyone else.

“We have politely declined to work with landlords when we realise our business values aren’t aligned. It can be hard to walk away, but this business is about quality property and quality tenants and you have to hold the line.”

### Plans for the future

Like most business owners, Bernadette has lots of plans for the future – none of which involve slowing down. “I love what I do right now and want to see it grow each year as we continue to offer standout service to our clients.

“My husband might want to retire eventually,” she joked. “But I don’t want to retire. I’d like to keep training and mentoring. That’s something I’m really passionate about.” ♦

## BERNADETTE’S TOP TIPS FOR REAL ESTATE SUCCESS

**1 Always have excellence in mind**  
From day one, do things professionally. Seek advice from people who know what they’re doing, like REINSW.

**2 Live your brand**  
Take your time creating your business name and branding. Have a clear direction, know what your brand stands for and live that in everything you do from day one. Invest the time to build your profile, be professional and work smart.

**3 Build long-lasting relationships**  
Word of mouth is vital. Building and maintaining strong relationships is essential to business success.

**4 See the big picture**  
If you want to be successful, in the long run you need to see the big picture and build your success organically. There will be ups and downs – nothing worthwhile comes easily, so you need to be very motivated and be prepared to work hard.

**5 Teamwork**  
Have a great team of people around you. Find people with talents and gifts that you don’t have. And once you find good people, you must look after them.

**6 Get a mentor**  
Find a great mentor and be prepared to work really hard. Be realistic about what you want to achieve and be 100 per cent committed.

**7 Introduce the best systems**  
Be efficient and profitable by introducing the best systems for your CRM, property management and of course your website which showcases your business.

## BUILDING A COMMUNITY FOCUSED BRAND

For Bernadette, creating a reputable brand and strong business began on day one.

“You have to make excellence a priority and do things professionally from day one. I had lived in the community for 30 years, so I was aware of community expectations and what I needed to do to create a strong local brand,” she explained. “I worked hard to build trust and a good reputation by dealing directly with the client base and securing those all-important word-of-mouth referrals.”

### Giving back

Like most agencies, Bernadette was keen to use her business to support the local community. But she stresses that it should come from a genuine desire to be part of the community, not as a way to publicise your business.

“I was raised in a family where being of service to the community was important,” she said. “So when I started the business, it was just second nature to me that we would support the community – and not just with money. Making time to give back is important – everyone benefits.”

“Early on, I spoke with the Greenwich Sports Club about sponsorship. I didn’t have much money to offer initially, but it was important to me for my business to be seen to support the local community in any way we could. They were wary at first, because they thought I just wanted sales. But they soon realised that wasn’t my intention. I started out by helping with the club’s barbecue fundraiser and each year we’ve increased our support. This year, we purchased 750 jackets for the winter season as a major sponsor.”

Harbourline Real Estate is one of the key sponsors and organisers of the annual Greenwich Carols by Candlelight, with the funds raised going to Father Chris Riley’s Youth Off The Streets. Further local support goes to the Isabelle Heim Fund and Performing Arts at Greenwich Public School. They also support breast cancer fundraising, a cause particularly close to Bernadette’s heart as she is a breast cancer survivor.

### High exposure

Another way Bernadette has been successful in building her brand was an appearance on the television show *Selling Houses Australia*. Though it was a positive experience for Bernadette and her business, she said it’s an opportunity that should be carefully considered by any agent.

“It was a great experience and it worked out really well, but it was a big risk in the sense that a successful sale may not eventuate,” Bernadette said. “The owner had previously spoken with me about selling the house. I am a little bit ‘out of the box’, so I told her she should be looking to target the local market for the sale and not developers. I got her over \$4 million from a local buyer, which is what she wanted and it still holds the record for the top selling house on that show. It was a great experience for me and has helped build the profile of the business.”

The show aired in 2015 and Bernadette is still contacted by people who have seen re-runs of the show, so it has definitely had ongoing benefits.

## Why I love real estate

“I get a great amount of satisfaction delivering amazing results for clients. Buying, selling, or leasing property is a very emotional time and clients put a lot of trust in you. It’s truly a service industry and it’s very rewarding to help them through the process.”

“I’m very pleased that I’ve built a strong business. I love that my team enjoy coming to work and I can help them further their careers. I value having people’s trust and always endeavour to do the very best I can for them for their valuable asset. You’re dealing with people’s hopes and dreams, and if you can help them achieve them it’s very satisfying.”

“It’s a tough business – one minute you can be very successful and the next minute you’re not – but I wouldn’t change anything. My husband and children are very supportive and encouraging, which really makes a huge difference. They are so proud of what I’ve built.”



**Open communication across the business creates great morale because everyone is involved. Everyone is invested in the business – we work through challenges together and celebrate successes together.**