

# BREAKING BARRIERS:

## The Next Generation of Women in CRE and the Power of Mentorship

By Fidelity National Financial  
Family of Companies

### INTRODUCTION:

A New Era for Women in CRE

Women have made incredible strides in commercial real estate (CRE), securing leadership roles and driving industry innovation. However, despite progress, challenges persist—especially for the next generation of female professionals navigating this competitive landscape.

Mentorship and sponsorship are two of the most powerful tools for advancing women in commercial real estate (CRE). At FNF, building connections between experienced professionals and emerging talent is essential for creating a more inclusive and dynamic industry. Through initiatives like **FNF Women Inspire**, we actively support women at every stage of their careers. This piece explores the journeys of rising female leaders in CRE, mentorship's role in their success, and how we can all take meaningful steps to support the next generation.

### RISING STARS IN CRE:

The Next Generation of Leaders

At FNF, we are proud to cultivate top-tier talent in commercial real estate. Here, we highlight six rising female professionals impacting different areas of CRE, illustrating the diverse paths to success and the importance of mentorship.



## The Advocate

### Martha Naughten

Vice President, Commercial Sales & Account Executive

**HER CHALLENGE:** Like many women in commercial real estate, Martha has encountered gender bias, challenges to her credibility, and unequal access to opportunities—particularly early in her career. “I once had a boss suggest that I didn’t belong in the industry at all,” she recalls. She has also navigated the complexities of networking in male-dominated environments while balancing work with motherhood. Support from a strong management team and a collaborative home life has been crucial in managing it all.

**HOW MENTORSHIP HELPED:** Martha received immediate support from the InspiHER mentorship network at Fidelity National Financial. Being paired with a mentor who provided structure, encouragement, and visibility made a lasting impact on her. “Having a senior advocate to help navigate a large company was critical to my success,” she shares. Her mentor became a trusted sounding board, aiding her in building confidence and refining her business development approach. Now, Martha is eager to pay it forward—sharing her experiences and offering guidance to the next generation of women at FNF.



A good leader inspires people to have confidence in the leader; a great leader inspires people to have confidence in themselves.

– Eleanor Roosevelt



## The Culture Shaper



### April Kovari

President/State Manager

**HER CHALLENGE:** April had once accepted a leadership role that necessitated relocating to a new city and managing a team she didn't know. One of her new colleagues, who had hoped to be promoted to the role himself, made it clear that he was upset—and his cooperation was vital for the success of the office.

With humility and transparency, April built a professional rapport through regular one-on-one meetings. By involving him in the process and providing consistent support, she earned his trust—and discovered that what held him back wasn't capability, but rather his communication style.

Eventually, April became his mentor, guiding him to grow into the leader he aspired to be. By the time she transitioned to another role, he had been promoted and was thriving. "One of the most rewarding aspects of leadership is witnessing others succeed," she says.

**HOW MENTORSHIP HELPED:** April's leadership style was shaped by mentors who emphasized humility, clarity, and people-first values. Early in her career, a manager guided her through thoughtful advice and difficult conversations—encouraging her to solve problems, make sound decisions, and always lead with integrity. "He didn't just tell me what to do—he helped me discover the answer myself," she recalls.

Another mentor taught her the importance of culture and employee happiness: "People want to work where they feel valued." These experiences have shaped April's belief that mentorship should be intentional, collaborative, and focused on developing individuals—not just managing them. Today, as a leader and mentor herself, she is committed to creating a similar impact for others.



Intentional mentorship is essential for developing future leaders; it allows us to build on the experiences of those who came before us and fosters a culture of growth and collaboration.



## The Visionary



### Sonya A. Pasquini, Esq.

Vice President

**HER CHALLENGE:** Sonya Pasquini faced a turning point during the 2007–2008 financial crisis. As financing dried up, she realized that private practice wasn't the right long-term fit. Taking a risk, she accepted a management role at Chicago Title, despite a significant pay cut. That leap of faith opened the door to a career of growth, leading her to manage multiple operations and relocate to lead larger teams. "If I hadn't taken a temporary step back, I would have missed out on the career of a lifetime," she reflects.

**HOW MENTORSHIP HELPED:** Sonya's mentorship journey has been shaped by both formal and informal relationships. Early lessons came from a restaurant manager who led by example, teaching the value of hands-on leadership. At FNF, leaders pushed her to think critically, make her own decisions, and lead autonomously.

Through **FNF Women Inspire**, she connected with women whose stories inspired her to drive initiatives focused on DEI and employee development. "It helped me realize that success isn't about conforming to old paradigms but about creating new ones," she reflects. Her journey was also influenced by the lifelong support of her parents and husband, who demonstrated the significance of shared sacrifice and pursuing opportunities as a family.



Pursuing one's passion and calling is the only way to find true fulfillment and meaning in this life. The other things may follow in unexpected ways.



## The Rising Voice

### Kayleigh Smith

Sales & Marketing Representative

**HER CHALLENGE:** As a sales and marketing representative covering eastern North Carolina, Kayleigh often drives hundreds of miles each week. Time management initially posed a significant challenge for her due to her large territory, but she transformed the situation by proactively prioritizing her wellbeing and seeking support when needed. “Once I started advocating

for myself and relying on my team, I became more productive and confident in how I show up each day.”

**HOW MENTORSHIP HELPED:** Mentorship has enabled Kayleigh to gain clarity and confidence early in her career. Through **FNF Women Inspire**, she was matched with a mentor who assisted her in setting clear career goals and provided perspective, validation, and honest feedback. “You can learn a lot from the people around you,” she states. “Mentorship has made me more well-rounded—both as a professional and a person.” Looking ahead, she aspires to pass on that support by becoming a mentor herself.



To be a great leader, you must have a strong foundation. Mentorship is the way you build on your experiences so that one day you can provide the same support to others.



## The Trailblazer

### Samantha S. Joseph, Esq.

Commercial Manager

**HER CHALLENGE:** After nearly 15 years in the banking industry, transitioning to Chicago Title in 2018 was a major career shift. Moving from litigation to transactional work while overseeing escrow officers, underwriters, and sales required a steep learning curve. However, the opportunity to learn from leaders like Mary Moran and Linda Green and to see firsthand how commercial deals shape communities made the challenge one of the most rewarding experiences of her career.

**HOW MENTORSHIP HELPED:** In 2022, Samantha participated in **FNF Women Inspire** and was paired with a mentor whose leadership and encouragement shaped her growth. Through this mentorship, she gained insights into the company, connected with other professionals, and received guidance on career advancement. When she sought new opportunities, her mentor introduced her to the right people, paving the way for her new role as Associate Commercial Manager overseeing multiple territories.

“The mentorship program has been instrumental in my growth, and I deeply appreciate all that FNF’s leadership does to support women in CRE,” she shares. As she steps into this next chapter, she’s committed to fostering leadership and mentorship for the next generation.



The best mentors inspire leaders. I’ve been fortunate to have great mentors, and I’m committed to paying that forward—leading by example and empowering the next generation of women.



# The Connector

## Cindy Malone

Senior Vice President & Director of Sales

**HER CHALLENGE:** Early in her career, Cindy dreaded the thought of networking. “The first few times I walked into an event, I froze,” she recalls. “I’d pick up my name tag, circle the room, and leave.” However, she continued to attend—and over time, those uncomfortable moments transformed into confidence-building experiences.

Despite her outgoing nature, Cindy had to overcome imposter syndrome and learn to advocate for herself in unfamiliar environments. Through consistency, involvement in organizations like CREW, and gradually building relationships, she ultimately transformed a professional fear into one of her greatest strengths. “Sometimes the most important thing is to just keep showing up.”

**HOW MENTORSHIP HELPED:** Mentorship has been a lifelong value for Cindy—initially shaped by her grandfather and mother, who instilled in her the importance of grit, independence, and exceptional service.

Professionally, her mentors have included CRE leaders and colleagues who provided wisdom through both formal programs and natural relationships.

Cindy is a dedicated mentor and advocate, particularly within CREW and FNF’s Women’s Leadership Mentorship Program, which she has played a pivotal role in leading and expanding nationally. “This program has fostered incredible relationships across roles and brands,” she shares. “It has enhanced the culture and created significant professional growth for individuals at every level.”

She also serves on the Board of Directors for The Goldie Initiative, a nonprofit dedicated to preparing women for senior roles in commercial real estate through scholarships and strategic mentorship. “Organizations like Goldie are doing the vital work of helping women rise—and remain—in leadership,” Cindy adds.

Whether through CREW, FNF, or Goldie, Cindy remains dedicated to one mission: helping others discover their voice, navigate their path, and embrace their value. “I tell every mentee—track your progress, advocate for yourself, and don’t wait for permission. Just go for it.”

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Nobody is looking out for you more than you do. Be prepared, stay organized, and ask for what you want—and deserve. Make it easy for others to say yes.



## THE POWER OF MENTORSHIP: Lessons from FNF Women Inspire

At **FNF Women Inspire**, we've seen firsthand how mentorship accelerates careers. Here are three key lessons from our program that apply to any company looking to develop female talent in CRE:

- 1. MENTORSHIP IS A TWO-WAY STREET:** Through these relationships, both mentors and mentees gain valuable insights, new perspectives, and leadership growth.
- 2. CONFIDENCE IS BUILT, NOT GIVEN:** Many rising stars struggle with self-doubt. A strong mentor helps women recognize their value and navigate tough conversations with confidence.
- 3. SPONSORSHIP IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS MENTORSHIP:** It's not just about advice—it's about advocacy. Women need leaders who actively promote them for opportunities and leadership roles.

## BUILDING THE FUTURE: How We Can All Support the Next Generation

The CRE industry thrives when diverse voices shape its future. Here's how you can help:

- **BE A MENTOR:** If you've been in the industry for years, take someone under your wing.
- **SEEK OUT MENTORSHIP:** If you're early in your career, don't hesitate to ask experienced professionals for guidance.
- **ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN IN YOUR NETWORK:** Help amplify the voices of talented women in CRE by recommending them for opportunities.
- **CREATE A CULTURE OF INCLUSION:** Encourage open conversations about career growth and leadership development in your workplace.

## CONCLUSION: A Collective Effort for Lasting Change

At FNF, we are committed to empowering the next generation of women in CRE. Through initiatives like **FNF Women Inspire**, we're fostering mentorship, leadership, and a culture where women at all levels can thrive.

To all the rising stars, seasoned professionals, and industry allies reading this—let's keep building a future where every woman in CRE has the support and opportunities she deserves.

If you're interested in learning more about **FNF Women Inspire**, reach out to us today.



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