

**REJblog***Keeping the Insights In Site***Lynn Drake: Seeking adventure, in life and in business**Posted on [November 3, 2014](#) by [reiblog](#)

Lynn Drake

**by Dan Rafter**

Lynn Drake was bored silly working as an accountant.

And that, as it turns out, was a good thing.

Because accounting didn't take, Drake pursued a career better suited — *far* better suited — to her true talents: commercial real estate.

Today, Drake, president of Troy, Mich.-based Compass Commercial, is one of the most successful commercial real estate pros in this slice of Michigan. A specialist focusing on tenant representation, Drake during her career has completed more than 2,000 real estate transactions. Her client list is a long one, and includes such loyal big-name clients as Delta Airlines, Aflac Insurance, Entech Staffing and Farmers Insurance.

She's also a business owner, having opened Compass Commercial in 2010. Running a business is no easy task, but it, too, suits Drake's talents and her personality. Her entrepreneurial spirit has long been strong.

"I've never once regretted opening my own business," Drake said. "It's hard to do that, in any type of an economy. And in the economy we've had, it's been especially hard. I've had to work hard to make this business a success. But I've never once wished I was doing something else. This is the right path for me."

What's been the secret to Drake's success? It's not much of a secret at all. She works hard. She provides the best possible service to her clients. She's a keen student of real estate markets both local and national. She loves what she does, and that passion is clear to her clients.

And, perhaps most importantly of all, she doesn't use bad economic times or outside challenges as excuses to fall short of her goals.

"I came into the real estate market after 9/11," Drake said. "There have been a lot of challenging times in the real estate market since I've been it. But that doesn't matter. Once people understand the difference between traditional and tenant representation, they understand how important the service we provide is. I've found that there is never a bad time to expand your business and to reach for new goals. People always need good representation, no matter what is happening in the market."

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One of Drake's adventures? Climbing mountains.

## A long path

Drake's journey to commercial real estate took more than a few twists. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in business, with a concentration in accounting. Her first job after college was as an accountant. But that job left her bored.

Drake's mother, though, was a real estate investor. And the thought of making a career in the world of real estate appealed to Drake.

Drake applied to a classified ad for a leasing assistant at trucking company Central Transport in 1987. She landed the position, helping the company with its real estate acquisitions. If Central Transport moved into a new market, Drake would find them suitable spaces. She'd also lease out the company's excess truck terminals.

Drake held onto this job for five years. But one day in Ohio caused her to search for a new job. She was showing buildings and went into a dark dock facility by herself, armed with only her mace and a flashlight. She realized that she wasn't alone in the massive building. She never did see who else was prowling the space with her, and no one threatened her, but the feeling of being watched did unnerve her.

That same day, for complicated reasons, a trucker chased her in her truck. Again, Drake wasn't hurt. But the bad day did cause her to reevaluate her career.

"I decided that it was time to do something else," Drake said.

Drake then went to work for Ameritech, helping the company find suitable locations for its cell towers. This job was a good fit.

"It was one of the most exciting things I ever did other than opening my own business," Drake said.

Eventually, Drake ended up at staffing company Kelly Services as the firm's director of real estate. At the time, the company operated 1,000 branches across the United State. This job was a satisfying one. But then Drake woke up and was 40 years old. It was time for a new challenge.

## Reaching the peak

Drake celebrated her fourth decade in an unusual way: She climbed the Pioneer Mountains, a rugged mountain range in Southwestern Montana, climbing some 15,000 feet. The climb inspired Drake to make equally dramatic changes in her life.

Drake took a survey administered by the Gallup organization. The survey showed that Drake's true strengths lied in sales. Drake studied her survey results and took action, transitioning to brokerage. She spent eight years working for other companies before her entrepreneurial spirit called again; Drake decided it was time to open her own business.

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Drake seeks adventures outside the office, too.

Drake opened Compass Commercial in 2010. The move has paid off.

“I’m so excited to be a business owner. I’ve had offers from other firms. I’ve been offered merger opportunities. I have no interest in them,” Drake said. “I love running my business.”

Why is running a business such a good fit? Drake points to her parents, both of whom were entrepreneurial themselves. Drake says that her parents discussed business at the dinner table every night.

Drake herself enjoys challenges. And what’s more challenging than running a business?

Today, Drake plans to expand her business from its base in Troy, Mich. Her goal is to open a location in Columbus, Ohio, then to expand to Minneapolis. After that? Drake has already targeted Chicago and a possible location in Indiana.

The ultimate goal? To open five new locations for Compass during the next 10 years.

Of course, Drake is still a bit of a rarity in commercial real estate. This is still a business dominated by men. And the ranks of CRE pros who own their own businesses? That is truly a slice of the market that is heavily male.

So, have there been challenges forging a career in real estate as a woman?

“There were some challenges when I first started,” Drake said. “A lot of people would ask me whose assistant I was. That has changed, though. That hasn’t happened to me in years. Today, I, and my female colleagues, are well-respected in this industry. And that’s been a positive change.”

Drake has earned that respect by saving her clients’ dollars.

“We renew leases across the county. But we bring competition to a renewal,” Drake said. “My clients are already leasing a space. But there’s nothing saying that they have to stay in that space. We go out and find other landlords and negotiate the best deals for our clients. We then go back to their current landlords with this information. That changes the renewal discussions. My clients don’t always have to accept that their current landlord is going to charge them a 3 percent increase when they renew. Driving down my tenants’ costs is exciting for me. We are making an impact on the bottom lines of our clients. We are helping our clients become more profitable.”

## Adventures

Drake considers commercial real estate to be an adventure. But it’s not the only adventure she craves. Outside of work, Drake prefers to live just as adventurous a life.

This most recent Labor Day weekend, for instance, Drake went hang gliding, soaring 2,000 feet above the earth. The year before, Drake jumped out of an airplane with a parachute.

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Next year? Drake is planning a more spiritual adventure. She doesn't have the specifics yet, but she's interested in everything from studying Buddhism to attending an Eastern Indian wedding.

The year Drake turned 50 was also an excited adventure for her. She decided to do 50 things that she had never done before. Those 50 events included scuba diving with sharks, riding an elephant and writing a letter to Pres. Obama. She flew an airplane by herself, rode a camel, took fencing lessons and played paintball with her son.

"Every year I want to do something more daring," Drake said. "That gives you the courage to make changes in your business life, too. For me, they are both connected."

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