

BANKER & TRADESMAN

THE REAL ESTATE, BANKING AND COMMERCIAL WEEKLY FOR MASSACHUSETTS

A PUBLICATION OF THE WARREN GROUP

IN PERSON

The Relationship Realtor

BY JIM MORRISON | BANKER & TRADESMAN STAFF

After more than a decade working for banks and high tech companies, Marie Presti found herself re-evaluating her life in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in 2001. Today, she owns and manages an intentionally small real estate firm. She also volunteers for several real estate associations and recently became president-elect of the Greater Boston Association of Realtors. When she isn't working in those capacities, she can be seen driving her 10-year-old son, Brendan, to and from his many sporting events.

Marie Presti

Title: Principal, The Presti Group

Age: 52

Experience: 16 years



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Q: How do you describe the way you work?

A: I'm a bit of a workaholic. I'm hyper-relational when it comes to my clients. Real estate is all about relationships, but there are many agents out there who don't focus on the relationship, they focus on the transaction. I can't blame them in a way, because we only get paid when a deal closes. That forces agents to focus on the commission. If we were paid a salary and a bonus when we closed a deal, agents would be much more relational. What other industry is 100 percent commission-based?

I have to make a living, but to do that I put my clients' needs first, ahead of my own. I know in the long run it will come back around. I've been a project manager for my clients, I've helped them find rental homes and movers. I've been a therapist for my clients. I had one where the owners were divorced for several years and they were still living together in the house. The ex-husband really wanted to sell the house but wouldn't move out until after it was sold. She wouldn't move out, either. It was hard. I was referred to them by her divorce attorney. I had to work with both of them and we sold them for over the asking price. I found her a place to move, too. It was pretty hairy.

Q: Have you always worked in real estate?

A: I was the vice president of marketing for a tech company when 9/11 happened. The company had 30-plus employees and

I was the fourth or fifth employee hired. I was working long hours and I had a lot invested in the company. We had just raised \$12 million in our second round of funding. We were about to sign it and 9/11 happened and the whole company ceased operations within less than two weeks. I had to lay off five people and then I got laid off. My severance was my laptop. It was pretty traumatic. I had a little bit of a mid-life crisis. I wondered why I was working so hard for this company.

So, I did a couple of things: I bought a Saab convertible and went on a Kenyan safari for a month with a couple of people I knew. It was one of the riskier things I've done in life. It brought me back to appreciating what I have. People barely had shoes on their feet and had one outfit they wore every day and were happy and appreciative. We don't realize what we have in the U.S.

That's when I decided I wanted to do something I have a little more control over. I wanted to start a new company because I've always been entrepreneurial. So, I got my license in Massachusetts and thought I'd sell real estate to pay the bills while I was looking for something else. Now it's 16 years later and this is the longest I've been in any industry. And I'm not bored. The first year I got multiple job offers to go back into high tech. I started at DeWolfe and went through their training program, but you learn real estate by doing it. Different transactions put you in different situations and that's how you learn the right way to deal with them. I

learn something on every transaction.

I got my first listing by answering a floor time call. I asked a lot of questions and this woman said she didn't have a real estate agent. I went in, she liked me and she hired me. She needed help selling and buying and I was able to give her the guidance she needed.

Q: What is something people don't know about you?

A: I go, go, go all day, but when I go home at night I need to relax. There are definitely nights when I need to be quiet and my son and my fiancée understand that. I used to work a lot of 12-hour days, but now when I do it, I get tired. I enjoy the calmer things in life. I like paddleboarding and kayaking. I like the physical activity. It calms my mind. I did a triathlon about five years ago. It was on my bucket list. I had to push myself to make the training happen when I was working a lot, but I did it down in Nantucket. I had done a lot of 10Ks, but nothing like that before. I did three Spartan races too.

Also, my son, Brendan, is a really important part of my life. He's a big sports nut, so I've become a hockey mom, baseball mom and soccer mom. It's forced me to create a work-life balance. I try to make all of his games. On February break, the team played in a tournament in Hyannis, but it was fulfilling. I also meet a lot of clients that way too. I don't do it to drum up clients, but it happens. And my son's team won the division. ■

PRESTI'S FIVE FAVORITE THINGS TO DO:

1 Go boating

2 See live musical theater

3 Cook her mother's Italian recipes

4 Eat out in restaurants

5 Listen to audiobooks

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