
▶ 2015 BEST COMPANY TO DO BUSINESS WITH IN MARIN COUNTY: BRADLEY REAL ESTATE

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When Melissa Bradley founded [Bradley Real Estate](#) in 1997 at age 26, it was in an office off her garage in San Anselmo. She’d been a realtor for a few years but liked the idea of being her own boss. Just under 20 years later, Bradley Real Estate is the North Bay’s largest independently owned local real estate brokerage, serving Marin, Sonoma and Napa counties, with 13 offices (all in Marin except one in Santa Rosa and one in Napa), more than 350 full-time agents and about 100 referral agents.



“We got married in 2003,” says her husband, Robert Bradley (president/CEO/broker of record). “Ironically, we already had the same last name. I’d joined the company around that same time,” says the attorney (who’s still an active member of the California Bar Association). By then, the company had grown to about 50 agents and two offices.

“I’d been involved in commercial real estate as an attorney,” he continues. “She gave me the title of president even without experience. I spent the first three years at the company going around with her and learning the business. She had so much energy and charisma that I soaked it in like a sponge. I focused on managing agents and she focused on selling.



“In 2009, she was pregnant and decided to be a stay-at-home mom, so I took over. Today, I call her our ‘spiritual leader.’ She’s still involved as board chair.”

The business does about 85 to 90 percent residential work, with the remaining 10 to 15 percent commercial, including apartment buildings, offices, warehouses, malls and the like.

“All our concerns are local,” says Robert. “We give a lot back to the community. We support local things, like sponsoring San Rafael’s minor league baseball team [the San Rafael Pacifics], schools and little league; basically charitable organizations that are near our offices. It makes us feel good to see the community thrive.”

And while the real estate market is currently strong, everyone knows it’s one that fluctuates regularly.

“Statistics are usually dated by the time they’re published,” says Robert. “The big challenge is keeping up with what’s going on now. Our advantage is that we’re only working in the North Bay and San Francisco, so we can see and react to trends quicker and devise plans better.

“Our biggest challenge,” he continues, “is remaining independent. When the real estate market has a lot of consolidation, there’s pressure from people wanting to buy. We don’t think of it as an option. We wouldn’t

want to.”

One of the biggest trends in real estate today is technology, which can be both good and bad. “People think a computer can answer any question,” he says. “And clients now have access to a lot of information that only realtors used to have. But the technology is often wrong—especially where pricing is concerned. A computer can’t tell you what your house is worth, especially older homes that have been customized.

“The best real estate agents use technology, but don’t rely on it,” he continues. “It’s more important now than ever to maintain a focus on clients, relationships and service. Transactions are complicated these days; there are a lot of disclosures. Our value is knowing about and explaining them clearly.”

As far as expansion goes, the company isn’t planning on anything outside its current footprint. “Maybe another Sonoma County office,” says Robert. “We’re content where we are; we’re more focused on market share growth within our current boundaries.”

And to the readers who voted for Bradley Real Estate, Robert says, “Thank you for recognizing us as a great company to do business with. It means a lot to us. *NorthBay biz* is an important publication and there are a lot of businesses like ours that have been successful here.

“I’m also really thankful and proud of my wife for starting this company. Doing that was very hard to do. It took a lot of courage,” he adds. Perhaps her story will inspire other young women (and men) to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. It’s a classic example of taking steps to reach one’s goals—and succeeding.

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