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Parsons of Riemer & Braunstein, LLP: Importance of allowing ourselves to choose

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"It is extremely difficult to stay alert and attentive instead of getting hypnotized by the constant monologue inside your own head . . . '[L]earning how to think' really means learning how to exercise some control over how and what you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to."

-David Foster Wallace

Although the above sentiment was expressed several years ago in a commencement address, "choice" has been a word often heard throughout 2012, including in the recent election. The concept of "choice" transcends politics, however, and is relevant both to our personal and professional lives. As a woman attorney practicing in commercial real estate finance for more than twenty years, I have witnessed many changes in the industry. We are all now part of a global economy with technology advancing at incredible speeds. The relentless assault of news, email, and social media continues through the night, filling our virtual inboxes before we even have our morning coffee. One of our simplest and greatest challenges is managing the frenetic pace of our personal and professional lives. Before I arrive at the office, my day usually includes checking email, packing backpacks, reviewing spelling words, approving (or not) my daughters' wardrobe choices, and transporting the kids to school. When I arrive at the office, I take a deep breath as I check the number and relative urgency of the emails I received while commuting. Like many other women executives, I am constantly striving for equilibrium between professional and personal objectives: to provide clients with the highest quality work on a timely basis; to be an effective leader and mentor; and to be an attentive and engaged member of my family. Through it all - behind it all - are our choices.

The theme of this year's Commercial Real Estate Women Network (CREW) convention was "choices." Jim Collins, the keynote speaker and author of *Great by Choice*, encouraged us to ask ourselves not "what else do we need to do?" but "what do we need to stop doing?" In his view, if we have more than three priorities, we don't really have any.

During my tenure as president of New England Women in Real Estate (NEWiRE), we often discussed two as a "magic number." Recognizing that NEWiRE members are predominantly women who are balancing a career with busy personal lives, I asked our members to identify two specific goals for the year and to commit, notwithstanding our already hectic schedules, to two NEWiRE events each month. In order to avoid the mile-wide-and-inch-deep default setting of over-involvement, we need to be disciplined about our choices. Whether identifying or following through on our goals; whether building our networks or winning new business, we choose which objectives to pursue.

Having learned that excessive multitasking often backfires, we need to make a conscious effort to turn off the "monologue in [our] head[s]" and choose to engage. Reading email on my blackberry

while listening to my children's accounts of their days doesn't work - for them or for me. I have discovered that it is necessary for me to schedule brief windows of uninterrupted time on a regular basis in order to process competing variables and determine priorities. Such prioritizing of tasks and goals allows us to make more refined decisions and to become more effective professionals, leaders, mentors, and parents.

In the face of so many changes to our businesses and families and at so rapid a pace, we cannot lose sight of the importance of allowing ourselves to choose. As we transition into 2013, we should - as we often tell our children - make good choices.

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