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## **2025 Women in CRE: Maureen Rystrom, J. Calnan & Associates**

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What advice would you give to a woman considering a career in commercial real estate? I would give women getting into the CRE industry the same advice I would give to anyone coming into it. In this industry, it's all about relationships. Be patient and take the time to develop meaningful relationships. These relationships can take months, even years, to build. Always be authentic and genuine in your approach. People want to do business with people they know and trust. Some of my closest friends started as business relationships that developed over time. You'll see it will be well worth the wait.

Along those same lines, a mentor of mine also said, "You never want to need somebody you don't know." In other words, take the time now for a meeting, start a dialogue, and hear what someone has to offer. You never know when their services or offering will come in handy. At a minimum, you will have met a new person and learned something new.

What's a challenge you faced early in your career, and how did you overcome it? Early in my career, I often felt like the only woman in a sea of navy suits and silver hair. It was intimidating to walk into industry events where female representation was scarce. Thankfully, I had role models like Sarah Abrams and Cynthia Keliher who showed me that women could thrive in leadership roles in real estate. Their example gave me hope, but it was at JC&A that I found the real catalyst for change. Our CEO, Jay Calnan, constantly pushed me outside my comfort zone and asked, "So what can we do as a company to help you change that?" Those words were powerful – they shifted my perspective from seeing obstacles to creating opportunities. With that support, I co-founded PLA! to provide women in AEC with a platform to connect through networking, education, and philanthropy. That experience, combined with strong mentors and sponsors, propelled me into other leadership roles, including serving as president of CoreNet NE. What once felt like a challenge – being "the only woman in the room" – ultimately motivated me to build community, amplify women's voices, and open doors for others.