

Project Management

**An Interview with Kirsten M. Beck,
Principal and Vice-President, Project Management, New York,
Avison Young**



Kirsten M. Beck

EDITORS' NOTE *Prior to joining Avison Young, Kirsten Beck was employed with The Walsh Company and managed many high-profile and complex commercial interiors projects, as well as lab spaces and restaurants. She has a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification from the Project Management Institute (PMI).*

Would you provide an overview of your role at Avison Young and your key areas of focus?

As Vice-President of Project Management for the New York office of Avison Young, I am responsible for growth and management of the project management business and the oversight of all projects in the New York area (including the five boroughs, Long Island and Connecticut). My primary responsibilities are business development, recruitment, training and broker relations.

What has made Avison Young such a leader in project management?

We have evolved into a leader in project management because of our culture. We are an extension of our clients and we are responsible for properly representing them. To achieve that, we manage projects in a very collaborative way. The entire team has the same objective – to deliver a product to meet client expectations. When you manage the team in this way, you build a reputation that is not only attractive to clients, but to other professionals in the industry. Our integrated approach delivers business improvements and efficiencies that maximize value and help to transform our clients' visions into reality.

Would you highlight Avison Young's presence in New York City and the growth of the business in the market?

Avison Young's expanding presence around the globe included the opening of our New York office in late 2012 in conjunction with the acquisition of The Walsh Company, which added project management services to the firm. With the recruiting of Arthur Mirante to lead the Tri-State and Mitti Liebersohn to lead operations in New York, Avison Young has exclusively selected best-in-class advisors to provide comprehensive consulting and real estate services to leading corporations throughout the Tri-State area. Over the past five years, Avison Young has become a key player in the New York market by completing more than 2.1 million square feet (msf) of office leasing transactions and is the leasing agent for 3.2 msf of office space in Manhattan. In addition, we manage more than 1.3 msf of projects annually and have an ever-growing roster of high-profile project management clients.

What advice do you give to young people interested in a career in project management?

This is the best job in the business, but also the most challenging. You have to manage a lot of different personalities and balance everyone's expectations. Your number one job is to set realistic expectations and then communicate, communicate, communicate. To be truly effective, you need to be able to listen to your clients and fully understand not just what they want but how to realistically deliver it to them. Listening and presenting all options to clients to steer them in the right direction while keeping their overall big picture in mind is the key to success. If you're organized, can multi-task and you like to be challenged, this is a great career choice.

Are there strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in project management?

Project management is ideal for women with the right skill set. Many women come into project management from architecture and design, engineering, furniture, construction and facility management. If one has knowledge of the process from any of those perspectives along with strong organizational and communication skills, project management is a career path with infinite possibilities. ●

Professional Development

**An Interview with Char Fortune,
Principal and Director of Learning and Professional Development,
Avison Young**



Char Fortune

EDITORS' NOTE *Char Fortune is an accomplished commercial real estate executive with more than 30 years of experience in the industry. Before joining Avison Young, Fortune was with Grubb & Ellis as Managing Director of the Corporate Services Group for the Southeast. Prior to that, she was a Senior Vice-President at Trammell Crow Company. Earlier, she worked for Cushman & Wakefield as a Senior Managing Director.*

Would you provide an overview of your key areas of focus at Avison Young?

I have three areas of focus: Global Director of Learning and Professional Development for Avison Young University (AYU); leader of the Young Guns group; and corporate real estate advisor in our Enterprise Solutions group.

The majority of my time is spent on AYU developing and conducting on-site training throughout North America and Europe. I am certified to teach selling skills and sales negotiation. I teach listener-focused presentation techniques, prospecting and business development skills, as well as business planning and goal setting. I'm also responsible for the curriculum on our e-Learning platform, which houses more than 100 courses and is available to all Avison Young staff.

As the leader of the Young Guns group, I am responsible for providing training and education for our younger professionals who are in the early stages of their careers. I affectionately say I am raising the next generation of brokerage professionals in our company.

For Enterprise Solutions, I work with multi-market companies to develop real estate portfolio strategies and assist account teams in organizing and managing these key relationships.

Would you discuss Avison Young's commitment to learning and professional development?

People win assignments using the skills that we teach through AYU, so they get excited about that. We get calls all the time from people who say, "What AYU taught me gave me the confidence and skills I needed to win an assignment." With results like that, our commitment to learning and professional development grows every day.

It starts at the top with our CEO, Mark Rose, and is a huge part of our culture. Our Managing Directors enthusiastically embrace the on-site workshops I conduct, as well as the online courses we offer. I've been all over North America and Europe this past year responding to requests for training in selling, presenting, negotiating and prospecting for all levels and roles, whether senior principals, Young Guns just getting started, business developers for property/project management, or support staff involved in any of the above.

What was the vision around the creation of Avison Young University, the firm's internal training program?

It matters to people that you care about them personally, not just professionally. It was Mark Rose's vision to invest in our people through a formal training program that would provide them the opportunity to grow. Our industry has historically done a lackluster job of developing its people and Mark wanted Avison Young to be different. He wanted our company to be at the forefront of providing training and education to attract and retain the best-of-the-best talent. It has been a very successful recruiting tool for us over the years.

How critical are diversity and inclusion to Avison Young's culture?

They are mission critical. We actually provide a live-training experience that addresses the company's culture and value system entitled "AY engAYge: Culture Matters!" The presentation focuses on the core values of Avison Young centered on diversity, inclusion, collaboration and investing in our talent.

We highly value all aspects of diversity including diversity of thought, political views, knowledge and credentials, as well as gender, age and disabilities. We also have a diversity and inclusion group under which we started a Women's Network and an LGBTQIA group. ●