

A Principal-Based Structure

An Interview with Eva Destunis,
Principal and Vice-President, Industrial Sales and Leasing,
Toronto North, Avison Young



Eva Destunis

EDITORS' NOTE *Eva Destunis has 21 years of commercial real estate experience. She began her real estate career with Cushman & Wakefield where she was part of one of the most successful industrial brokerage teams in the Toronto Northeast market. Destunis joined Avison Young in 2013 to assist the firm in building the company's industrial services platform in the Toronto North market.*

How do you define what makes Avison Young special?

Our Avison Young culture is what makes the company special. I believe our principal-based structure makes our culture unique and adds to Avison Young's success.

Being a principal-led company fosters an overall team-oriented and collaborative approach because as shareholders, we are all working toward the greater good and overall success of the firm.

Avison Young's working environment is very positive and full of great synergies. We are helping each other succeed whether we are directly involved in a transaction or not.

Would you provide an overview of your role at Avison Young?

My role at a very basic level is to generate business for the firm, but as a principal my role expands beyond sales. I am a mentor to young women in the firm locally and in the United States and Europe. I lead by example daily, in particular to our young people – I am always available for guidance and support. I am helping to build a successful office not only through business success but by helping to attract quality employees.

What are the keys to being successful in commercial real estate?

Key to success in commercial real estate is to start building relationships from day one, which can only happen by going out and meeting people. Clients that I met 20 years ago, I continue to do business with today. Discipline is also key to one's success. A plan is needed and one needs to work that plan – waking up each day, being positive, driven and motivated.

Have you been happy with the growth of Avison Young's industrial services platform?

Avison Young's industrial services platform is newer than some of our competitors' platforms, which is a great thing. It provides a fresh and updated outlook on the services and is constantly evolving as we grow. Personally, the platform has supported me in my success and growth.

What excited you about the opportunity to join Avison Young and made you feel it was the right fit?

I was most excited for the opportunity to join an office where I would be a part of its growth and success, specifically on the industrial services side. The opportunity to become a principal appealed to me, along with the fact that Avison Young is privately owned. Fast forward to 2017 and the fit is even better than I had ever hoped for.

What advice would you give to young people interested in a career in commercial real estate?

If you are serious about a career in commercial real estate, a commitment of three to five years is necessary. Completing the basics from day one is essential. Create a plan and strategy for working your plan. The plan must include goals along with the path of how to achieve these goals. Revisit your plan several times a year and modify it. Lastly, have a mentor because guidance and wisdom are invaluable. ●

U.K. Operations

An Interview with Sarah Cook,
Principal and Operations Director, London and Thames Valley,
Avison Young



Sarah Cook

EDITORS' NOTE *Sarah Cook is a qualified Chartered Secretary, bringing together legal and financial skills. Her expertise lies in business management, statutory and legal compliance, and audits for U.K. and overseas entities. She began her career with an international perspective as Policy Director of the U.K. office of the International Chamber of Commerce.*

Would you provide an overview of your role at Avison Young in the U.K. and your key areas of focus?

My job is to keep the business legal and dynamic. My role in managing the U.K. operations encompasses HR and personnel administration, employee benefits, client and supplier contracts, commercial insurances, financial oversight, IT systems and keeping up to date with U.K. legislation as well as regulations from the U.K. governing institution, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

My team's objective is to support the professional staff so that they can fulfill their client-facing roles, ensuring that the business runs smoothly, backed by robust financial systems.

What have been the keys to Avison Young's leadership in the London market and how is the firm positioned in London?

Avison Young is still building its profile in London and the U.K. The approach to leadership is consistent regardless of location. We focus on adding top talent and then delivering empowerment and autonomy. This, coupled with operational excellence, ensures that everyone can perform to their optimum ability within a zero-silo structure.

What is the state of the U.K. real estate market today?

Significant weight of capital from funds, institutions, sovereign wealth, etc., coupled with greater alignment on pricing, will hopefully see increasing investment activity in 2018 with a flow through to other service lines. Structural demand drivers, i.e. logistics, warehousing, PRS and student accommodation, should also provide activity. Outside those sectors, capital values and rents may retreat further from recent peaks. In the retail sector, there are signs of renewed occupier confidence.

Avison Young places a major focus on training and talent. Would you discuss the firm's commitment to its workforce and attracting and retaining talent?

I tell our recruits that their experiences and opinions are the most valuable resource we have, that we grow with each other, and that they should never stop enquiring and always seek to share their learning. We will continue running knowledge updates, led by our own personnel as well as those from other business sectors. In 2016 and 2017, we provided business development workshops, which will be repeated annually for new hires. Most importantly, we will further expand our junior talent, putting more structure into our RICS professional development program. We ensure that our U.K. Young Guns actively participate in this global initiative. To retain talent, we need to keep talking to our people about what matters to them in their careers and ensure that we meet those aspirations.

What are your key priorities for the business?

We almost doubled in size in Q4 2017 when we added a Manchester office, so we will focus on ensuring that our new colleagues understand the Avison Young culture and have all the tools they need to work and to enhance the brand. It is critical that the new offices have all that they need to carry on doing great work for clients and that they feel strongly that they are key components of Avison Young and have a voice.

Our 2018 growth plans are to focus on those service lines mentioned earlier where we expect the greatest activity, to expand the consulting lines in our existing locations and to spread our reach into two or more key regions. ●