

Alicia Ralstad

Ralstad Group Properties

Alicia Ralstad, owner of Ralstad Group Properties, gets the biggest joy in life from helping other people. Having grown up in St. Charles, Missouri, she looks back on her childhood with a smile. “We didn’t have a lot of means or money,” she says of her family of five (she is the oldest of three siblings; her brothers and five and ten years younger). “The community was really good about helping each other. Everyone kind of knew each other. We played on sports teams together, played music together, our parents and grandparents knew those of our friends. Most everyone in my family still lives there.”

When it came time for college, she knew she’d have to make her own way to pay for it — and it was playing sports that provided that path. “All during school, I played three sports: basketball, softball and soccer. I was recruited by Arizona State, University of Chicago, Northwestern and University of Arizona. But I wasn’t quite ready to leave Missouri. So I walked onto the University of Missouri softball team and got a full-ride scholarship. After two years, I needed to leave the team, and the soccer coach offered to pay for my remaining two years if I played soccer. So that’s what I did.”

It was the experience of being on a team that set the basis for how she lives her life today. “I’ve learned that motivating others and helping others see their potential is something that’s always come natural for me,” she says. “Being on a team, you learn hard work, systems and how to work well with others. You feel the internal motivation in competition with yourself. And to this day, those things drive my business. I always feel I’m part of a team, no matter what I do. And I love that feeling. I always feel like my job is to have other people see their full potential and to keep them motivated. It’s something I started when I was young and have continued to this day. It’s what I get the most joy in. Whether it’s a client, a colleague or just someone I want to sit down with and help.”

Discovering Her Own Potential

Ralstad didn’t consider business ownership until she entered the real estate industry in 2004. Prior to that, she worked for two large engineering firms. “I always took such joy in supporting those companies, writing the brand and being loyal to them,” she says. “But after 9/11, I decided to make a change. I was on an airplane that morning. I’d been traveling nonstop for work, so it wasn’t unusual that I was flying that day, too. We had to land in Salt Lake City after

we heard the second plane had gone down. I never got back on a plane for a while after that. And I changed. I just knew I had to do something different. And with a background in business and communications, I decided real estate might be right for me.”

She’d been living in Boise, Idaho, for a couple years at that point, but hadn’t yet developed a lot of relationships. “Since real estate is all about relationships, I knew I had to be strategic,” she says. “I wanted to create a niche. I knew I wouldn’t want to be selling 100 homes per year, more like 20, so I’d need to find clientele where I could still make a living.

“I thought about the medical community here and made some phone calls. I think I took 43 or 44 doctors to coffee. And I had a script. I said, ‘Help me understand what your needs are when it comes to real estate.’ I also asked about their passions and interests. I found commonality between their needs and interests. I’d found my niche. And those doctors are my friends to this day.”

Starting out, she met Melinda Kim, who was also getting into real estate. “We talked about

it and decided to approach St. Luke’s Hospital together. We told them we wanted to tailor a business that was thoughtful for the medical community — helping them recruit, getting people to Boise and taking care of the ones who were already here. One of the people we spoke with liked what we were saying, and gave us the home addresses of about 450 doctors so we could market to them.

“We still had to figure out how to do that. But one common passion we’d found among the doctors is they loved art. So we talked to some gallery owners and got permission to put local artists’ work on postcards for mailings. On the back, we put real estate facts, stats or something, along with our photo. We did that for a year and a half and it’s how we created the business,” says Ralstad. The business grew over the next few years, not just by working with doctors, but also through their referrals to family and friends. “I love it,” she adds. “It was a great way to start.”

Learning from Others

Ralstad was recruited by Flour Engineering (now Flour Corporation) right out of college. “They were trying to get young women into that field, and I was lucky enough to be the right age and to be a woman,” she says. “I’ve had a lot of luck that way; being female has gone well for me. I had a lot of opportunity from Title Nine with scholarships, then to be recruited like that felt lucky, too.”

It was there she met one of her mentors, Jim Williams. “He was before his time. He saw a handful of women with raw

talent and he gave them opportunities. It was such a gift,” she says. “He was strategic and would have these brilliant ideas, but knew his limitations and asked us to help him communicate his thoughts. He’d walk away from clients and projects if they weren’t the right thing. He was confident enough to know when to say no to things.”

When she moved into the real estate field, she looked up to Leigh Hill. “She put an emphasis on our role as advocates and educators, not as salespeople. And she does that better than most of our industry does. She lets people draw their own conclusions based on the right information.” It was around the same time she learned a lot of people had negative feelings about realtors. “My goal became to change the way people feel about our industry,” she says. In 2004, she started out at Windermere, a firm she respects, and moved on to open her own business several years later. “I thought that if I’m going to make a difference, I’m going to be small by design because I’m going to focus on people who have those same core values to support our community and maintain trust-based relationships, always doing what’s in the client’s best interest. And if I could find a small team of those people, people would think differently about our company, and then they’d start thinking different-

ly of other companies in the industry. I wanted to be the most trusted in all the firms in Idaho. That was my goal.”

When she opened Ralston Group Properties in 2009, she worked by herself at first. It wasn’t until 2013 that she started to bring in other agents. Today, there are six people on her team. And she looks to her parents as the influence behind how she runs things. “They taught me a solid work ethic, but also the importance of listening,” she says. “My whole life, even as a kid, I’d ask people questions and I would just listen and listen. I think that’s been key to developing relationships with our clients today. It’s also about having the curiosity to understand someone’s transition instead of just what you think they should do or what the next step is. “They also taught me trust has to be earned and that you can’t do anything to lose that trust. You have to maintain it. And

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that's what our company is built on today: long-term, trust-based relationships."

How the Company Works

Focusing on what's in the clients' best interests is of utmost importance to Ralstad. "We talk more people out of buying and selling their home every week than you could imagine," she says. "A lot of real estate people look at the business as transaction-based. But we see it as helping people transition in life. So it's transition-based. We're not just helping someone buy or sell a house. There's always a story to it. If last year we helped 110 families, 15 of those had a divorce or blended a family. Another 10 had an unexpected death of a spouse, mother or child. We're counselors. We're advocates."

As far as clientele goes, the firm still helps the medical community, but has also blossomed into helping Boise State professors, Micron executives and beyond. "They all run in the same circle and know each other," she says. "I love helping companies and recruiting people to come here because I love where I live. It's a joy for me. And I enjoy helping their children buy their first home as much as I do selling a \$1.5 million home. There's not a dollar value on it. I think we have four generations we're helping at this

point."

Ralstad recognizes her strengths as a hard worker, good listener and ability to remain calm under pressure as assets to her success as a business leader. "I can usually help calm everyone around a situation and get to a solution. I get joy out of helping people see their potential, whether in business, relationships or how they can contribute to our community," she says. She also says choosing to see the positive side of things is key. "I choose happiness. I was always taught it was a choice, so that's my approach. When I see something disappointing, like a realtor from another firm selling a

"Care about those you love and those you do business with. See what's best for them and act accordingly."

house for the wrong reasons, not keeping the client's best interests in mind, I try to have compassion regarding how or why that happened."

Looking Toward the Future

While Ralstad doesn't have a formal succession plan in place, she does think finding someone who believes in her firm's brand would be a great way to keep it going when she retires. "If I can find that person, I'll give them opportunities just like people did for me when I was starting out," she says. Aside from that, she wants to spend more time with family and to become even more involved in the community. "I'm going to keep my eyes and ears open to stay connected and to help people as much as I can," she says.

When asked if she had to focus on one group, she sets her sights on seniors. "They deserve it," she says. "They've worked long and hard. If I had all the money in the world and access to buy land, I'd start designing and building thoughtful senior living communities. It would be a true com-

munity, not the senior living we have now. Something that would create a sense of family.

I'd spend time and energy just creating that next step, that last chapter in life, making it more special than it is currently. That'd be fun."

In a way, it all stems back to what Ralstad learned as a young woman growing up: how to listen well and to earn trust, how to be part of a team — whether in sports or business — and to do so over the long term. To really care about those you love and those you do business with. To see what's best for them and to act accordingly. To spread happiness. Those are the keys to her success.