

# Sky's the limit for women, says top broker

Stories by Paul Luke  
Staff Reporter

Here's a tip if you want to impress Odlum Brown portfolio manager Nancy McKinstry in a job application.

The part of your resume that's supposed to list work experience and education? Leave it blank.

Write one word in the middle of the blank page.

Write "Energy."

Even by the high-voltage standards of Vancouver's brokerage arena, McKinstry is a silver dynamo. She's a vice-president and director at Odlum Brown and manages the independent investment firm's second-largest asset base — more than \$160 million.

She is her company's second-highest revenue generator. And she's furiously active in B.C.'s non-profit sector.

Where does this bundle of photons get her drive? McKinstry doesn't know — she says she was just born this way, 53 years ago in Vancouver.

All she knows is that pressure is a fact of working life, especially in zones such as the investment business. And that pressure can grind people down and wear them out — or be funnelled into a creative urgency that pushes you to surpass your own goals.

"There is a tremendous amount of pressure here," she says from her Vancouver office. "But I firmly believe that you need to feel that pressure. You're dealing with people's money.

"You need to agonize a little."

McKinstry was no stranger to the sweet agony of a high-pressure workplace, even before she started as a broker with Odlum Brown 20 years ago.

Following graduation with a marketing diploma from the B.C. Institute of Technology, she worked for 14 years in the fashion business. After 10 years with Eaton's as a buyer, supervisor and divisional man-

ager, she became sales and marketing manager for a Vancouver clothing manufacturer.

For a seven-year stretch, McKinstry spent six months each year on the road. Dealing with the pressure cooker of New York's Seventh Avenue fashion district was good training for handling even the most volatile of days on the stock market.

As one who works hard to nurture contacts, McKinstry felt thwarted by the whirlwind turnover of personnel in fashion. After talking with her own broker about becoming an investment adviser, she completed the Canadian securities course and joined Odlum Brown, at age 34.

"I'm kind of a natural-born salesman," she says. "So whether you're selling fashion or selling securities, I had an innate good sense of numbers. And when I came into this business I had a broad range of contacts that served me well."

While other advisers were making cold calls, McKinstry built relationships by offering seminars that brought her investment message to a wider public.

Largely through referrals, her client base grew to where she now serves more than 350 people. One of her hallmarks is intergenerational investment planning: Some McKinstry clients comprise entire families of grandparents, parents and children.

Despite some inroads by women, the investment business remains male-dominated. McKinstry was the first woman to be made a director at Odlum Brown and the first to be appointed to the firm's executive committee.

She created the firm's Young Investors Club to educate kids about money management. And she has served in high-profile positions in the wider investment community over the years.

McKinstry, who rises at 5 a.m., devotes one full day and three evenings a week to non-profit work. She co-founded and chairs the Minerva Foundation for B.C. Women,



Wayne Leldenfrost — The Province

**'I do not suffer fools. I'm impatient. I move very quickly,' says Nancy McKinstry.**

which promotes economic opportunities, leadership development and education for women.

"She's a remarkable, dynamic woman," says Minerva Foundation executive director Danna Murray. "She has a way of pulling in everyone around her to make things happen. Anyone who meets her can't help but be touched by her passion."

When hiring for her own team, McKinstry looks for self-starters with high energy, quick intelligence, respect for others and the courage of their convictions.

"I do not suffer fools. I'm impatient. I move very quickly," she warns.

She loves her work — and believes other women could love it, too. Women comprise no more than 10 per cent of Canada's brokers, McKinstry says.

In terms of female participation, the brokerage business is where real estate was 15 years ago, she says.

"There's a huge opportunity for women," McKinstry says. "If they have the self-confidence and the drive to succeed in this business, I think the sky's the limit."

## 5 pointers for success from Nancy McKinstry

Two crucial qualities for salespeople in any industry are honesty and sincerity, says Nancy McKinstry, a portfolio manager with Odlum Brown.

Almost anyone can be persuasive, given a motive, McKinstry says.

The point is to be anchored by principles that make you do things for the right reasons.

"I always say to people coming into this business that the only

two things you have to sell are your integrity and trust," she says.

"If you have those two, you can't help but be a success."

Among McKinstry's other suggestions for thriving at the workplace:

### ■ Nurture curiosity

"In the investment business, the rule of thumb is to know your client. I have a tremendous interest in what makes other people tick.

"You pick up lots of energy from what they tell you," she says.

### ■ Project yourself

When she speaks in public, McKinstry understands she has only a little time to help people assess her. She tries to create a concentrated picture of who she is and what she stands for.

"I've always tried to project myself as I truly am," she says. "I try to give people a piece of what they're going to get when they

come to know me."

### ■ Accept uncertainty

"This is not an easy business," McKinstry says. "You never know what's going to happen tomorrow."

"You have to be pretty confident in your decisions because there can be so many distractions from the path you feel is best for a client."

■ Surround yourself with people who teach you and complete you

McKinstry says she has developed professionally by finding mentors and by critically assessing her own strengths and weaknesses.

In assembling a team, she seeks people who shine in areas where she does not — but who are heading in the same direction.

"We work cohesively," she says. "Everybody's on the same path. We all have the same goals."

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