

## Planning for Launch

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The real estate business is one of those professions where people often try to get in and make a “quick buck.” In good times, some people are able to actually do that. Unfortunately, that “quick buck” often comes at the expense of the customer. However, during economic downturns like the one we have experienced over the last couple of years, that ability quickly evaporates. The people left standing during the down times are positioned for growth and expansion as the economic cycle rebounds. These survivors are usually leaders and people who have built their businesses on solid foundations with an emphasis on the needs of the customer.

Carla Palmer-Allen is one of these survivors. With over twenty years in the real estate business, she has established herself as a real leader. In 2011, she will begin her tenure as President of the 1,500+ member Jackson Association of Realtors and begin her 11th year as the owner of her own real estate brokerage company, CPA Realty, LLC. Allen grew up in the Georgetown community of Jackson. Her family had a dry cleaning business, and from an early age, she helped out after school as the cashier. Allen knew she did not want to continue in the family business, so she pursued a career in office administration with Deposit Guaranty National Bank. After working there for a number of years, she needed to earn some extra income so she started working part time in real estate. She quickly knew she had found her calling in life and left her banking career to become a full time real estate agent. She began with Universal Homes and Properties in 1990, and then joined Remax of North Jackson in 1994 where she remained until 2000 when she started her own company.

Carla shared with me that early in life she considered herself “a timid person.” You would never know that today. Allen is a bold and confident leader who has built a great company and established herself as a trusted professional. She gives credit to the professional environment she enjoyed at Remax, the mentoring she received from seasoned real estate professionals including Susan Burton, Kelly Dabbs and Dorothy Thompson, and the work ethic of her father, Frank Wilson, Sr. I am sure her mentors saw in Allen a rising star who was eager to learn and become a true professional. Allen was a student of successful people in her field. Even though she has enjoyed a significant amount of success, Allen continues to look for ways to differentiate herself and her company in the marketplace. Her differentiation, like other great leaders, starts with a foundation of honesty, integrity, and dependability. In addition, she also looks for subtle ways to “go the extra mile” for her customers. She shared with me her mission statement, “To establish and maintain a proven reputation for expertise and reliability in the real estate sector.” As I review her mission, I am struck that it is a journey, not a destination.

Allen’s hard work and focus has paid off. While with Remax, she was one of the top 25 agents in the Mississippi region and a regular member of the 100% Club. At its peak, her company CPA Realty had 18 agents, and today she still has 12 agents working with her. In 2003, she was recognized by the Mississippi Business Journal as one of the state’s Top 50 Business Leaders. Jackson State University honored her in 2007 with the Executive Catalyst Inaugural Award for Business. Today, she is active with the Ridgeland Chamber of Commerce having served as Diplomat of the Year, and as noted above, she was elected by her peers to be President of the Jackson Association of Realtors.

As I quizzed Allen about her success, she shared some key principles that are instructive for other entrepreneurs and business leaders. As she was contemplating starting her own business, Allen knew she needed a plan. She planned for almost a year before starting her own company. She also is goal oriented. She sets clear and written goals. After launching her own company, she set a goal to own her own building, which she accomplished in 2004. Allen has her priorities in order as she balances the demands of being a leader with her own spiritual growth and physical fitness. I see many leaders who neglect these facets of life ultimately to their own detriment. Finally, Allen has been a good steward of her finances. She has been prudent with her financial planning which has allowed her to make the necessary adjustments and survive during the real estate slowdown. Allen is currently doing her planning for the next five years which will involve growing her business past its peak during the real estate boom years. After visiting with her and seeing her accomplishments, I would not bet against her.

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