



## CRE Tech Talks

### Episode #17: The Evolving Role of the Property Manager



**Phil Mobley, Head of Research of Building Engines**

**Becky Hanner, Commercial Real Estate Restate Executive, Founder, Commercial Asset Services**



**Phil Mobley:** Hi, and welcome to another edition of CRE Tech Talks. I'm Phil Mobley. I'm Head of Research here at Building Engines, and got to be a guest on this podcast a few weeks ago and thought I'd try my hand at hosting, filling in for our regular host, Scott Sidman.

Today, I'm excited to have as a guest, a person who I have gone to frequently as a resource for all things related to property management. That is Rebecca Hanner, the Founder of Commercial Asset Services in Raleigh, North Carolina. Becky, thanks very much for joining our podcast today.

**Becky Hanner:** Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

**Phil:** Excited to have you. Becky, before we even dive into this talk about the state of property management, can you tell me what you've been up to these days?

**Becky:** Thank you for asking me. At the start of the year, it was a new beginning for me. I started my own firm, Commercial Asset Services. We provide asset and property management services -- strategic consulting, training, and contract work.

Our target audience is owners, occupiers, and property management firms, but I'm also working with a few vendors, very pleased by the industry's reception to my new venture.



**Phil:** That's great. Congratulations, Becky, for starting something new. I've got a little bit of experience with that myself. It's exciting and terrifying all at once, so best wishes to you as you move forward with that.

I mentioned that you're one of my go-to resources for any question about property management, and that's certainly true. I wanted to begin our discussion by asking you about something I've been hearing recently in the commercial real estate industry that probably, before 18 months ago, I don't think I ever heard.

That is, building owners and property managers saying, in public, that they perceive their role as commercial real estate professionals, to help their tenants attract and retain talent.

I've heard lots of different people say this over recent months. When it is said in public, there's just universal agreement. Everyone nods their heads. To me, that's new. I wanted to ask you about that. Have you been hearing the same thing, and what is your take on that?

**Becky:** I guess technically it's always been that way, because it's always been important for property locations to be where the workforce can easily get to it. It was important for banks and places to eat nearby, but the importance of this has evolved considerably over the last few years.

Projects are truly trying to create an exceptional tenant experience. Almost like high-end hospitality, if you will. Many managers even refer to their customers as guests rather than tenants, and managers are even called community managers.

Amenities are going to include anything that's fresh, or new, or exciting, or is it something that can make the tenant's life easier. For example, customers still want fitness centers but rather than being in the basement, they need to be with a great view because that's what brings a fresh perspective. Then it makes it cool.

Customers still want to have an on-site café, that the food choices need to include healthy options. Now, allowing pets in the workplace is often acceptable, so the manager needs to determine how they can handle pet exercise and waste areas.

Even building design is changing. It's including more rooftop terraces and patio space, bicycles create more greenway and more workout space. Think about local vendors. Oh my gosh, it's a growing industry and includes not only food trucks but bicycle repair, wardrobe trucks, tire changes. Hey, you've got the pets in the building, it includes veterinary services.

With all this going on, I've got to mention event managers. There are properties where there are dedicated event managers that are part of the property staff.

**Phil:** The implication that I'm hearing, Becky, is with all of this hyper-focus on tenants, and perhaps a different way or to a different level of intensity, the role of property management is clearly changing. Do you see that becoming, maybe, more like we would traditionally think of as corporate facilities management, or is it something else entirely?



**Becky:** I would say that those property managers and facility managers are focused on providing a good day-to-day operational building management. The trend for both is an emphasis on enhancing the customer experience.

Even to the point of the event management, I would say that property managers tend to have high level recording requirements and a focus towards investment strategy to create value with the result of their management activity.

**Phil:** Becky, the next thing I wanted to ask you about is, in your personal experience, you had a lot of great examples of what this intense focus on the tenant experience looks like. What, specifically, have you seen in the last couple years in your practice where you've been trying to deliver that type of experience to tenants?

**Becky:** I love it when clients are intently focused on creating a positive tenant experience, because that is where the creativity and the fun really kicks in. As an example, I had a five-building project, which was over a million square feet that had four full-time event specialists.

**Phil:** Wow.

**Becky:** I know. Now this particular portfolio includes a 14-room conference center. It includes a large indoor atrium area, an auditorium with stadium seating, an outdoor event park with restrooms, and several outdoor patio areas.

I know it's a little unusual. In this case, a strategic event plan was developed with the clients to meet their goals and to augment the special features of the project as well as to heighten property awareness. The idea, in this case, was to develop a marketing plan that provided an exciting sense of community that the project entered the surrounding neighborhood.

The event specialists managed everything -- advertising, ticketing, social media, event logistics, you name it. Last year, they hosted 373 events, and that ranged from a three-person board meeting up to 10,000 people for a heart and throat walk.

The project's in a downtown area and it's got community events occurring in the day, in the evenings, and the weekends. As you can see, this project is truly a living part of the downtown.

**Phil:** That's incredible to think about a million square foot property putting on more than one event per day and involving not just people who work in the building but the community at large. That's an amazing thing to think about, and it is different.

To me, Becky, the next logical question is, as you look at this type of service, and you mentioned four full-time event specialists at this property, how do you hire for this?

What skills or characteristics are you looking for? I guess another way to phrase the question is, if you are going to build a commercial real estate property management team from the ground up, what would you be looking for?



**Becky:** Since each project is different, it depends on the project. It'll be great to have people that had everything from accounting, to hospitality, to a business degree. It would be great to have people that had everything.

However, I feel like it's more important to hire someone rather than skills, to have someone that has great pride in their work because they've got energy, fire in their belly.

Someone who likes to juggle a lot of balls up in the air at one time. Somebody who's flexible and resilient, who has this interpersonal skill. You've got to have someone who's analytical and a problem solver.

You just have to find the best person for the job. Each project has a different personality. You've got to hire different people and make sure the people that they've got all these wonderful attributes about them, that you put them in the right spot, and train them. You want to make sure it's a win-win situation for them as well as for the project.

**Phil:** That sounds great. Another thing I've been hearing, in the industry, Becky, is people talking about the war for talent and how it's harder to hire people into a commercial real estate career path.

As I'm listening to you talk about what's been going on at some of these properties and all the events and the focus on customer service, I got to say I don't quite get it. To me, that sounds like an exciting thing to spend your career on. Have you seen that happen in practice?

**Becky:** It absolutely is. People that were in event management that moved over to property management and people that were in property management moved over to event management.

I just believe in the power of diversity. You need to have people with different life experiences, and education, and backgrounds to solve the problem. They're going to solve them in different ways, and they have different strengths. It's OK, but it's all about communication and mentoring.

**Phil:** Absolutely. Becky, here's the question that you had to know was coming. The name of this podcast is CRE Tech Talks. I would be remiss if I didn't ask you a technology question. Maybe, the way that we can think about technology here is this new focus on the tenant experience requires new ways of capturing feedback about it.

How do you think technology plays into understanding and measuring the effectiveness of some of these events and programs that are designed to facilitate the tenant experience?

**Becky:** That's such a great question. The way that tenants want to give us feedback and the frequency in which they're getting it, in which they wish to give it is changing. I'm just referring to provide feedback in a way that aligns with the way they communicate to their friends -- electronic, short and sweet.

Instead of a long 10-minute surveys, quick questionnaires, and mostly how it all relates to them. Not like a score card per se, but, "Hey, how do you like the new café? How frequently do you use it? Hey, here's a coupon for you to use it if you answer a few questions."



To circle back to your original question, I believe that the frequency and how you communicate and ask for feedback from your tenants plays into the importance of the tracking and retaining talent and the building.

**Phil:** Interesting. You're speaking music to my ears. I think about consumer experiences that I have on something like Uber, for example, where the feedback mechanism is actually built into the experience itself. You rate your driver after each trip. That's just part of the way you use the app.

You're on the right track there, in terms of how we can integrate feedback capture and data into the experience itself and, hopefully, give commercial real estate practitioners, like yourself, better ability to see that data, and to act on it, and to provide an even better experience to customers.

Before I let you go, anything else that you'd like to tell us about with respect to property management, and how that's been changing?

**Becky:** Something that's been going on for quite some time that everybody worries about is the upcoming talent. We've all got to continue to bring new talent into the industry, especially property managers and engineers.

I just have to say it. We've got to make sure that we hire younger and less experienced folks and team them up with someone to mentor them. Let them have an opportunity to make their own mistakes. They're going to do some things a little differently.

It's fine for an engineer or a property manager to use Snapchat to communicate a problem about a building to someone who's going to help them resolve the issue. It's fabulous for an employee to look at different softwares and determine additional uses for it, or even introduce a new software. There's just no right or wrong. We need to help it. Let it evolve and help it evolve.

**Phil:** Perfect. One of the things that we keep hearing about, and you and I are attending a lot of the same industry events, and that's millennials this and millennials that. You're right. We need to learn from people of all different generations in the workforce, and that goes both ways. Commercial real estate is certainly right for that.

**Phil:** Thanks again, Becky, for taking some time to chat today, insightful stuff, as always. Best of luck to Commercial Asset Services. That's exciting for you.

**Becky:** Thanks. Today was a blast. I appreciate it.

**Phil:** Absolutely. All right. We'll see you next time on CRE Tech Talks.

Remember to visit our podcast page at [www.buildingengines.com/cretechtalks](http://www.buildingengines.com/cretechtalks) to download today's transcript and key takeaways, as well as listen to other sessions and share with colleagues. We'll see you next time on CRE Tech Talks.

Thanks for listening.



## QUESTIONS FOR THE HOSTS?

**Contact:** Phil Mobley  
[pmobley@buildingengines.com](mailto:pmobley@buildingengines.com)  
[www.buildingengines.com](http://www.buildingengines.com)

**Contact:** Becky Hanner  
[becky@hannercas.com](mailto:becky@hannercas.com)  
[www.hannercas.com](http://www.hannercas.com)