**Janelle Brevard:** You're listening to Drive With NAR powered by REALTOR® magazine. Listen in as two real estate pros talk must-have tools of the trade and share stories of inspiration. Get ready to step up your business.

**JB:** This episode is sponsored by the Women's Council of REALTORS®.

**JB:** Hello, hello, everyone. I'm Janelle Brevard NAR’s chief storyteller. Welcome to another episode of Drive With NAR. Today we're focusing on women in the real estate industry. You know, in 1993, 44 percent of brokers were women. Today, it's more than half, with 61 percent of brokers being women. That's according to NAR’s member profile. And what people don't realize is not only are women showing up in the industry more, they're also showing out—with major multimillion dollar deals in a once untapped luxury market. I am so happy to be joined today by two women who are truly making moves in the industry. Tiffany Curry is broker owner of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Tiffany Curry & Co., out of Houston, Texas, and Deena Zimmerman is a commercial real estate broker out of Chicago and vice president of SVN Chicago Commercial. Ladies, welcome, welcome.

**Tiffany Curry:** Thank you so much, Janelle, for having us. I'm super excited.

**JB:** In gearing up for today's show, I found myself humming this song you may remember from back in the day. It's by Queen Latifah. *Ladies first…goes sort of like…ooh, the ladies first.* *Ladies first.* I'd like you guys to tell me about a song or movie line that motivates or drives you to do your job.

**Deena Zimmerman:** What a fun question to start out with, by the way. I love that. Well, you know, it's funny because prior to the pandemic, every single Friday—I don't know why I say prior; I should have done it during it. But every single Friday, I always started my morning with Nicki Minaj ‘Starships.’ For whatever reason, that was the one that just got me. But it's interesting, because lately in my head—Kacey Musgraves, she has this song called ‘Follow Your Arrow Wherever it Points.’ For whatever reason, that's really been in my head and just always making sure I'm following my arrow wherever points.

**TC:** All genres inspire me. But lately, I've listened to Lecrae ‘Coming in Hot.’ That is the way I love to kick off my morning because, if you guys have ever heard this song, he says, you know, ‘I don't do, I don't do the most, but I do a lot.’ And then he talks about taking your shot. And then he comes back and says, ‘I'm coming in hot.’ And I think at this phase, you want motivation, especially in the mornings, or especially when you're going to a big meeting. You're headed there. You want that adrenaline rush. And so that just gives me an amazing push.

**JB:** That's perfect. OK, so you guys have inspired me already. I'm looking forward to this conversation. I think where I'd like to start is for both of you to just tell me a little bit about how your market is doing. And, you know, tell me a little bit about your yearly book of business. Tiffany, tell us about Houston a bit.

**TC:** So in Houston, our market is doing really well. Six months ago, we were blasting on fire like the rest of the country. And now we're starting to see it settle a little bit. But it's still moving. So what I'm excited about is that people are able to get out and get homes now. Whereas before everything had a flood of offers. And we had a pent-up demand of buyers and no inventory. So we're starting to see some of these buyers clear out. And that's a great thing right now. And you know, case in point, I had a couple come in recently. She works out of California, but she's been living in Ohio, because, you know, because of COVID. She's been working from home for almost two years now. And so she was being able to work remotely. And so now she's going to move to Houston. And so what I find amazing is, six months ago, we wouldn't have found anything for her. Because what's different right now is she's moving here with her husband and her mom. So that's a difference of what we're seeing amongst buyers. And so, of course, she's in the luxury price point. And you know, she wanted to live in the city. And so I don't know, I think in every major city in the U.S., you know, everything is very tight, small and expensive, and a very small patch of land. And so she wanted land for the dogs, and she wanted room for the mom downstairs. So we ended up finding them a four-story, which is not what you would typically expect. But it has a pool, it has a yard, it has a rooftop. It has a bedroom on the first floor with a full bathroom—everything for the mom. So we are seeing the market adjust, which is a great thing right now.

**DZ:** What's interesting, especially with this conversation today with Tiffany, retail always follows strong residential. So you know, wherever there's a strong residential boom, especially when we follow the demographics, you know, the income denominators and so on and so forth. Retail follows, since everybody's sheltered in place. And really in the past two years, the downtown—like the CBD of Chicago—the condo market residential—it's pretty devastated. Maybe that's not the best word to use. It's down. And we're seeing a lot of folks—interestingly enough, millennials—during the pandemic, when we all sheltered in place, they were all moving to the suburbs. And they wanted more room, right, especially when you're working and living at home. People wanted backyards. But you know, a lot of us don't have that in the city. We're also seeing that then with retail, you know, there's a lot of retailers that are pulling out of Michigan Avenue in favor of other neighborhoods, or interestingly enough, the suburbs. You know, my business was probably, prior to the pandemic, 60 to 70 percent doing retail in the city and the rest was the suburbs. And now, it's flip flop. So the suburbs are really having their moment, as are some of the further northern neighborhoods. When we look at office, obviously, that's the sector that's been the hardest hit when it's actually—again—in the CBD of the Chicago Loop. I made a comment recently, when I was speaking on a panel, you go to the Loop on a Tuesday afternoon, it looks like a Sunday afternoon. It looks like, literally, you could watch the tumbleweeds rolling. You look at office, especially medical office in the suburbs and office in Fulton Market, which is just across the river in the West Loop of Chicago. They're hitting record numbers in downtown Chicago. On the leasing side, I do a lot of both the landlord side and tenant representation. Leasing is on fire. It is absolutely on fire. We are bidding and over bidding and over bidding on property. I don't know where they're coming from. But I'm loving it. Keep on coming to Chicago, retailers.

**JB:** Tiffany, I saw an article pass through on social media a while back about you and it caught my attention. And so I have been meaning to ask you about it and congratulate you. Because, as I understand it, you are the first African American sole owner for Berkshire Hathaway, tell me a little bit about that experience and what it means to you.

**TC:** So that has been a tremendous experience. It's one that, you know, people have to remind me, like what you just did, the significance of it. It has been a great experience for me. When I became the owner of my company, Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Tiffany Curry & Co., it was a big deal for us to have that at that moment. You know, it was a message that we felt like, we're not going to really mention it because, OK, it's great. But, you know, it's not necessarily something we want to talk about. Or do we need to talk about it? But all the things that were going on in 2020, you know, during the pandemic, that we saw going on in this country, were all negative. And all those things were taking us back, I felt, as people of all races and genders, hundreds of years. And I can sit here and tell you that was something that I had a problem with. You ladies would know why, in general, because, you know, I felt like we're in the year 2020. And everything that I'm seeing on the news—the local news and the national new—is taking us back generations. And so this was something one of my great mentors in her 70s—she said, ‘I think it's time for you to share your story. There are so many people that are disappointed right now in this country. And they have nothing to look forward to. They need to see this.’ I said, ‘You know what? I'm going to … enough is enough. I'm going to speak my truth. And I'm going to share my story.’ I think on one site, it was shared over 217,000 times, which is insanity. It just … we just wrote … I personally released it. And it just took legs and life of its own. It ended up everywhere, including Black Enterprise, which of course has always been a staple within the African American community. And, you know, when I saw it there, I just couldn't believe it. I was getting messages from people from different countries, different nations. And when you look at something like that, and you stop and you think, and you say, ‘Wow.’ You know, when I started this journey 15 years ago, I had no idea this is where I would end up. And it goes to show, I think today, it's a phenomenal experience. I would say when we were initially looking at naming the company, we realized that I was going to be a franchise. You know, you start getting the notion or people saying, ‘Well, you want to put a general name on it. You don't want to put your … don't want to tie yourself directly to the brand.’ But I said to myself, ‘You know, this is a huge moment for a lot of things.’ Because I'm also the first solely woman-owned Berkshire Hathaway in Houston, which is the fourth largest city in the United States. And for me, I said, ‘You know what, I'm going to put my name on it—not because it's my name, but because of what it represents.’ They are young women, young girls of color, young women of all generations and backgrounds, that need to see this moment. They need to see this level of success, and I don't need to hide behind a name that's not mine. They need to see the woman behind the brand.

**DZ:** I could just cry. That was all amazing. Tiffany, you bring your own. Like, seriously I’m emotional about this. I mean, you bring your own seat to the table. I love that. You know Zeke Morris?

**TC:** Yes, I know him.

**DZ:** You know, he's Illinois REALTORS’® first black president ever. And I was lucky enough when I—my first year serving on the Chicago Association of REALTORS® Board of Directors—Zeke was my president. And he always said to me, ‘To whom much is given, much is required.’

**TC:** Absolutely.

**DZ:** And it's one of my favorite sayings. And I have to say, I really love your comment, when you were talking to people, what you wanted to name your company. And you know, this whole concept of ‘let's not pigeonhole ourselves.’ It's really … you struck quite a chord with me when you said that. I think, as a female in our industry especially—I'm very proud of you for naming it Tiffany Curry & Co., because that is the company and you are the company.

**TC:** When I was going back and forth on the name—and we did this five times—I was encouraged to use a generic name, and we almost did. And I can tell you, even in Houston, about nine other companies have used parts, or teams or groups have used that name. And that was one of the things that my mom told me. She was like, ‘Why would you start something and hide from it? This is important, and it's really not about you. It's about the people that are going to be influenced that are going to see this and feel like they can, too.’ When this life is all said and done for me, what's left behind? What is a legacy that we leave? What do our children's children have to look forward to? And that's what I thought about.

**JB:** When I hear the two of you talk about your businesses and all that you're doing in your communities, I think you both hands-down qualify as boss women, right? So I want to ask: What are the secret ingredients that you would share with other women just getting started in the industry? Deena?

**DZ:** When I do see women entering commercial real estate, a lot of them are coming right out of college. Some of them had been interns and then transitioned into hiring. That's happened in my firm a few times. I don't care what firm they work for, you know, if it's a competing firm or not. We need to pay attention to that, and we need to reach out to them and let them know that we're there for them. I do that whenever I see a new name. Whenever I see a new face, I reach out. I say, ‘I want you to know I’ve been in the industry, I've been with a few firms. You know, you're working with a great firm, with a great group of guys.’ Sometimes whether I believe that or not, I will, you know, make sure I give them something very positive. But also, ‘I want to be very protective of you.’ And listen, all of them have—I've actually said these words: ‘I want to be very protective of you. If there's anything you ever need, please know you can come to me. There's a group of women that you can come to, you know, within this industry that I collaborate with a lot. It will always be confidential. It's a judgment-free zone.’ But we need to be there to help each other, not just to support but to really lift each other up and elevate each other. I remember the first few times I had said this to a couple of gals, the last time we were all together in person for a networking event. And I thought, ‘Oh my goodness, are they going think I'm this?’—you know, I'm 47—‘but are they going think I'm this crazy old lady?’ And all of them have been, to this day, very appreciative of that and, from time to time, have reached out to me. Because, interestingly enough, when I got into the industry, there were some women that had been in the industry quite a bit longer than me, let's say 20/30 years minimum. What's interesting is they weren't nice to me. They would look me up and down. I could tell I was being judged. And it was like, ‘Great,’ which shocked me. Because as a woman, we should automatically be supportive of each other. And I'm grateful that happened, right? Sometimes you have to … unfortunately, lots of bad things happen in life. I'm not all, you know, I'd love to say I'm all sunshine and rainbows all the time. But the reality is terrible things can happen. But if we can learn and grow from those, I'm grateful for them. And I would never change anything that's gotten me to this point.

**TC:** I love it. And you know, Deena, you bring up a great example because that's a big statement that you said, and I want to address that. Because I want we, as women, to be different. And I want us to learn and grow. When we recognize and see more of us coming to the table or in an industry, we need to embrace one another and not view one another as competition. There is enough for all of us. There are very few of us in certain key-level positions within the real estate industry. And in order for that to change, we have to support one another. You know, men support one another. They get behind closed doors, and they make deals happen and they help one another progress. And we have to do the same thing.

**DZ:** True. We have to be better. Yeah. And to go back to your question, Janelle. You know, that's the other thing—we have to prepare women for … we have to be better. And the reality is, when we're running meetings, I have to be 10 times more prepared than any of my male counterparts to this day. I've been in the industry for 17 years. And I still have to be more prepared than any man. But you know what? So I know my stuff. I'm smarter, and there's nothing wrong with that. And I think that's the reality, as well. And the whole—especially with commercial real estate, you know—there's this notion that it's not very emotional. And it's not right. We work with a lot of businesses, but I've had men say to me in the past, ‘Stop being so emotional about this.’ And I used to sort of shrivel up and take emotion out of it. I thought that's how I had to be. No, embrace your weird. Be yourself, because people will relate to that. It's OK to fumble. It's actually OK to get emotional. And it's OK to be a woman.

**TC:** I want people to understand you can elevate yourself to any level that you want. It's what you set your mind to. And it's how hard you work for it and what you go after. But the most important caveat I will tell people is you have to know how to carry yourself. And just as important, you have to be prepared to work for what you want. There is no elevator to the top; you have to take the stairs.

**JB:** You guys just represent all that we aspire to be. So I love that. Where did you learn the skills to be a leader in your company?

**TC:** I would say coming through WCR is where I really cut my teeth. What I loved about WCR, it says leaders made here, and it is right on the money. And they also teach you that the task is to ask, and you don't ask, you don't get. But what I loved about the organization is it didn't have a staff. And that's what makes the leaders strong, I would say, in comparison to any other organization that I've been a part of. Because as Women's Council of REALTORS®, you are ways and means. You create fundraisers. You create programming. You create sponsorships. You create opportunities within the communities. You do charities. You do the financing. You do the treasurer, the secretary, the banking, the recruiting for membership. Every aspect and component of running a business you do if you go up the line through Women's Council of REALTORS®. It helped me as a real estate agent. It helped me as a professional and honed my skills. It helped me with marketing my business and marketing myself.

**DZ:** I feel the same about Women's Council. The fact that we didn't have any staff, you know, I was the Chicago chapter president in 2010 and 2011. So at the time, we just we couldn't find leaders that wanted to move up. And I was the first and I think still the only commercial-specific president, which was great for my industry in general, but it was great for me to just collaborate with such a diverse group of women. But I learned how to run a business, and I still to this day. Running the chapter, you learn how to run a business.

**TC:** Women's Council—and most real estate … people in real estate, they don't like to see or hear themselves talk, which is the biggest component of your business. Video, especially now with video more than ever, that's what we're gearing towards. But Women's Council teaches you public speaking, how to carry yourself, how to do press releases and things like that. And I will say, in our first two years as a brokerage, I was hit with a lot of people wanting to do interviews, and some of them wanted to control the narrative in those interviews in a not so positive way. And that wouldn't have been beneficial for my agents or my company. And so without Women's Council, knowing firsthand how to deal with the media, that was critical.

**JB:** Don't go anywhere. We'll be right back after a chat with our sponsor.

**JB:** I am super excited to be joined today by Silvia Seabolt, president of the Women's Council of REALTORS®. Hi, Sylvia.

**Sylvia Seabolt:** Hello.

**JB:** So I have a question. Women dominate REALTOR® membership, with over 60 percent being female. So why do we have a Women's Council?

**SS:** Women's Council started because women were not afforded a seat at the table, let alone a leadership position. However, now that we've established that, Women's Council is the place to hone in on your leadership skills. You're going to learn how to run your business more effectively. You're going to learn how to build up your public speaking skills. You're going to learn how to increase your referral network. And you're going to have women and men across the country cheering for your accomplishments, knowing that you'll also be applauding their successes, too. Women's Council gives you the skills to lead and the confidence to succeed.

**JB:** How has the Women's Council helped you as a REALTOR® and as a leader?

**SS:** I have found that members join for all different reasons, whether it's referrals, education or leadership. But they stay a member because of the relationships they formed. I'm a better mother, REALTOR®, leader and friend because of Women's Council. With Women's Council of REALTORS®, I have a family of sisters and brothers across the nation that I can call on at any time. And they will answer the call. They will inspire me, they will encourage me, they will empower me, and they will equip me to expand my toolbox of skills. This isn't something that is always found in your brokerage, your networking groups or even sometimes your association. But this is the heart of the Women's Council.

**JB:** What advice would you give women starting in the real estate industry?

**SS:** The old saying is true: The more you give, the more you get in return. So get involved. Jump in with both feet. If there's something you need to learn, another member probably has that expertise. Ask for help. One of the phrases we teach all of our leaders is ‘the task is to ask.’ If you don't ask, you're not even giving the opportunity for someone to say yes. If you can run a Women's Council network, you can run a successful real estate office. So take all of those tools we teach and use them to increase your business and know that we are all supporting you along the way. For more information or to join the Women's Council of REALTORS®, visit our website at [WCR.org](http://wcr.org/).

**JB:** Both of you have a vast amount of experience in the luxury markets, the high-end markets, those huge transactions. I would like to hear from the two of you, is that the glass ceiling now for women in the industry, in terms of getting into those types of transactions and that market? Deena?

**DZ:** I don't think about it that way. I think that can be an impression, certainly. And I think, you know … interesting you ask that because I think for those who are newer in the industry— women—I think that's what they actually … I'm training a gal right now who's new, and we were listening to the top 10 in our company. You know, one of the guys that within the first two months of last year, he'd already made 3 million in GCI. She goes, ‘Oh, I can't wait to, like, even just do a sale that's $3 million.’ I said, ‘Stop with that right now. Because you will do that. But you have to walk before you run. And you have to learn how to do everything the right way in order to do those larger transactions. But don't ever let being a woman stop you from thinking you can't do those transactions.’ I think she gets that in her head. I think it could be perceived as a glass ceiling. But I think it's really important: Let's just not think of it as that—that you put the right team together. You know what you're doing, and anything is possible.

**TC:** I agree. I don't think it's a glass ceiling. I think right now, we're seeing more and more women are—more people—starting to up their price point. And I think the biggest part of that are millennials. Because the millennial generation, they have now entered into the luxury market, you know. They're moving up. So they're selling and buying. So I think when you're looking at getting into a luxury or higher-dollar market, you have to look at your surroundings. I think that's what it comes down to. Your network is your net worth. If you can look at your circle, and nobody in that circle can buy a million dollar-plus home, you need to have a different network for what you're trying to do in business. And that circle has to expand if you're going to grow. I've always been taught, you know, in life, some people are with you for a season. And you have to know when that season is up. The hard part for us as women is we do have that emotion, which is what makes us the gems that we are. But it also holds us back in a lot of ways. Because oftentimes in my career, I knew when it was time for me to let certain people go and you have to be loyal to yourself first. I would say that, Janelle, it's not hard to make it in the luxury market. It's hard for people to mentally make the adjustment to get to where they want to get to in this business.

**DZ:** In my end of the industry especially, most practitioners—while everyone's licensed—most commercial, especially in Chicago, they don't adhere to the MLS and their listings are not in the MLS. So commissions are all over the place, right? So each deal we do, we have to negotiate our commissions ahead of time, especially if I'm representing a tenant, you know. I'll even go to the listing agent or the landlord and say, ‘Well, what's, you know, what's my split? And like, what do you want?’ And I think that's very hard for women. But it took me many, many years, and I used to negotiate my value down. And I have a lot of women who call me and say, ‘Well, what would you do for this deal?’ What are we seeing in the industry right now? What's the standard in this market? That's what you're asking for. You ask for what you're worth and then some, because you're worth all of it. But it's a mindset thing, right? And I think sometimes I get in my own head on that. ‘Oh, probably not worth that.’ Be prepared to get it, put it out there, write it down and come up with a plan. I think that's a really important thing. So I think, as women are out in the workforce, or they're switching careers, or they're switching companies or whatever, this is a really important hot button that that they need to remember.

**JB:** Those are powerful words. You know, last question here, but there are several reality shows. And I know you guys have seen some of them currently out there, some in the past. But they feature women in the industry, and often there seems to be a focus on this outward appearance and how they look. Is that a real challenge for women in the industry? Or, you know, was this just something we're seeing on TV? I'd love to get your take on that.

**TC:** Two things I'm going to say with that. The first thing is if you lead with your body, expect to get that in return; expect to be approached the wrong way. Because that's one of the things that I will say. For women in real estate, especially younger women in real estate, you have to know how to set boundaries for yourself with your clients, particularly your male clients. And that's a big thing. People need to understand that and know that. I think TV is fun, because it's for TV, but it's not reality. It's not the reality of what's going on in the industry.

**DZ:** I completely agree. It's all TV, in my opinion. And I feel bad, actually, for some of those women on those shows, because I bet some of them are really, really talented. And I think that we get lost in the lipgloss, the collagen and the Louis Vuitton, to be really honest with you. And I think some of them are a lot brighter than that, right? Your appearance should really be your personality coming out. But don't be an actor; don't dress for a part. Be that professional and be that part. Dress how you want to dress, right? So…and I think that just attracts any level of wealth, but people you want to work with.

**JB:** I love that. To wrap up, we'd like to do something called ‘In the Trenches’ here on the show. What's that one story that you'll always remember where you were really in the trenches to complete a transaction? I want to hear it, ladies.

**DZ:** For me, the greatest ‘In the Trenches’ story is how we all pivoted because of COVID. During that time and leading up to actually this afternoon, the majority of the deals that I'm working on—whether it's a leasing transaction or a purchase transaction—we are getting both parties in touch with each other early on. I mean—I don't know if you deal with that, Tiffany—but there's a lot of deals I do where obviously the parties will never meet, especially if they're in different states. And when I say meet, I'm not saying just in person or on Zoom, but even on a phone call. Like, there's no communication, right? We’re the brokers, we have attorneys. But now there's a lot of nuances because of the current state of what's going on in the world. You know, I have businesses I work with, where … last week one of my clients, we were supposed to sign a lease. Well, because of the supply chain issue, she has no idea when we'll even be able to build out her space, how she's going to hire employees. And so they're very nervous about signing the lease. You know, we're including COVID language now as part of force majeure in leases, which we never did before. So it's dragging out deals. It's making things a bit contentious, a bit nerve-wracking. Well, you know, what we're doing, we're getting landlords and tenants on the phone with each other mid-negotiation. I mean, I actually negotiated a deal, where we're getting parties together earlier, which is really a beautiful thing, because none of it's been contentious. A lot of it's been like, ‘Gosh, I see where you're coming from.’ And that … before it was contentious, because we're, you know, emailing, you know, redlined responses, and we're negotiating and people are taking things personally. But then when you get them on the phone, they understand. ‘OK, this is what's happening, you know. Let's try and work together.’

**TC:** I love it. Well, I will give you an ‘In the Trenches story’ of a current client that I'm working with, who actually happens to be from Chicago. And once we find his home, he will be our largest sale, which he's shopping up to $15 million for a residential home. And he's African American, in tech. So I think that's a huge thing. And he found me online; his people found me online. So this goes back to promoting yourself. Because there are people that are actually looking for people who are just like us. So being authentic is important. But what we're looking for … he's looking for something very specific, and it's not on the market. So we're having to dig and get in the trenches and call and rely on our relationships with agents in the market who we know, who have clients or have had clients that have something or may have something or may know of something that may benefit him or be of interest. And so we've looked at several properties off market, which has been a very interesting experience. I'll say ‘in the trenches’ because I don't know if you've ever dealt with—I'm sure Dena, you have dealt with—off-market properties. But you know, sometimes the agents on the other end can be very interesting when something's not listed on how they do business and their practices and things like that and wanting the information for your clients. So being in the trenches is knowing how to handle yourself, knowing how to protect your client, their information. Because when you're working with a certain price point, that person requires a high level of privacy. And so making sure that we secure him the right place, but also keep this information off the market is just as important. So that's a part of right now being in the trenches working with someone of that level.

**JB:** Wow, this has been an amazing conversation, and I so appreciate it. That's it for today for all our listeners. I'd like to thank Deena Zimmerman and Tiffany Curry for joining me today.

**JB:** Thanks for joining us on this episode of Drive With NAR. Tune in every month on [magazine.realtor/drive](https://magazine.realtor/drive) or subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. Get more tips to boost your business at [magazine.realtor](https://magazine.realtor/).