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PRODUCER PROFILE

GROWING THROUGH GIVING BACK

Brokers looking to plant deeper roots in their community can certainly grow their business to new levels by following one charitable – and award-winning – broker's advice

Anyone who has ever doubted that “charity is its own reward” should take a few moments to listen to Graeme Moss.

Founder and partner at Verico Fair Mortgage Solutions in Hamilton, Ont., Moss offers clients a wide menu of services, from A-list purchases and private-money seconds to commercial deals. Two decades of experience in the industry, some of it with CIBC and Invis, have led to more than a handful of award nominations and awards, including the 2014 Canadian Mortgage Award for Alternative Broker of the Year.

Despite his pedigree, Moss's strongest competitive advantage in an increasingly originator-eat-originator mortgage marketplace is his emphasis on placing his professional and personal values ahead of simply closing a deal. He hopes other

brokers will take the same approach to better positioning themselves for professional growth, even through charitable deeds involving segments of the community most unlikely to become future clients.

“The kind of positive energy, or if you want to call it karma, you get by making an effort to help out people who need it makes you a better person and a better professional,” Moss says. “My focus has always been not so much on money, but on happiness and feeling good.”

WHERE CHARITY STARTED

His impressive dedication to charitable causes began when Moss suffered a medical setback early on in his career. Doctors told him the problem could be fatal, and the challenges he had to over-

GRAEME MOSS: A ROLLING STONE

1998

Joined CIBC and learned both mortgages and investments

2000

Started working for CIBC Mortgages and Invis Financial

2005

Founded Fair Mortgage Solutions

2007

Joined the Verico superbroker network

Earned the first of five National Mortgage awards

come as a result forced him to pause and reassess. By the time Moss's career began rolling again, he found he could understand the problems of his clients on another level.

"What I thought was an absolute curse turned out to be an absolute blessing," he says. "I started to look at every day as a bonus day, and I started to look at my clients' problems differently. I could relate to them better, advise them better and make more of a positive impact in their lives."

Moss built a solid reputation for, among other things, being a non-judgmental listener, and referral work began to pour in. The success sparked a desire to give back, so he began donating his time. At first he began working with Citykidz, a youth-oriented charity, before founding Maddy's Road-

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2011

Began working with Citykidz charity

2012

Founded Maddy's Roadmap, a triage for people to get financial help

2013

Started pilot project with Mission Services Food Bank in Hamilton

2013

Graduated from McMaster University's Commerce Program

2014

Won CMP Broker of the Year for alternative lending (complex work)

"It was unbelievable. The goal on the lender's side was obviously that the couple lose their home and sign all this equity over. It was a God-awful situation"

map, a triage service for financial advice. It was then that someone affiliated with Mission Services Food Bank in Hamilton approached him about donating his expertise to a pilot project. It was simple at first – Moss was asked to show up and give advice to down-and-out community members waiting for food.

"When they first suggested I go to help out, I had no idea what to expect. Everyone was sure I'd probably leave after a couple of weeks," he laughs. "I always believed in giving back, but I thought, 'How could I, as a mortgage broker, help these people?'"

The answer came quickly. Armed with the financial perspective of a seasoned broker, he found he could answer a variety of questions – everything from housing issues, leases and rebuilding credit to legal or, in some cases, marital situations. Irrespective of the issue, it was important for Moss to treat everyone with dignity and respect.

"The first thing I learned was, when a person is hit with financial issues, they are treated badly by the legal and financial profession. You know, there are so many reasons for someone ending up in a situation like that. I met a lot of smart people who were either downsized or divorced, or had other issues like illness, mental illness or housing issues. The list of reasons is long. I saw the reaction they had when I just spoke to them with respect, and the gratitude I felt as a result was tremendous."

Besides gratitude, Moss was fascinated by the life stories of his new charity clients, and in a few cases, he was able to offer substantial value for their mortgage-related issues. In one case, he met a disheveled man who was living out of a pickup truck

at the time. At first, the man said he was moving from place to place and asked if Moss could help him find housing. After Moss recommended he speak with a social worker, the man thanked him and turned to leave.

"Right before he left, he asked, 'Well, what do you do?' I explained to him that this was a pilot project, and that I was a mortgage broker here to provide life, legal or financial advice. That's when he told me he had a mortgage problem at a house where his ex-wife lived."

As Moss listened to the man's case, he felt they had been charged exorbitant broker fees. The second issue was that there was a substantial amount of equity on the house. The ex-wife was attached to the mortgage for this large home, despite her having no income and suffering from a stroke. The homeless man also had no income to speak of. In Moss's opinion, they had been set up to fail.

"It was unbelievable. The goal on the lender's side was obviously that the couple lose their home and sign all this equity over. It was a God-awful situation."

Eventually, he was able to help the couple, and they are now selling the home. But it struck Moss how poor professional practices can impact people's lives. He was elated at the chance to use the skills he had learned in his career to help those who needed it most.

"It's amazing the effect it has on you when you can directly change someone's life. I can't describe the amount of positive energy I receive from experiences like that. It's good for the soul."

GOING FORWARD

Moss continues his work with Mission Services Food Bank in Hamilton, and with Citykidz and Maddy's Roadmap. Juggling all of this while running a thriving brokerage makes for a busy schedule. But still, he finds himself advocating the personal and professional benefits of charity to anyone within earshot.

"You can get started on your journey of giving back by starting small," he says. "Donating time at a food bank, youth groups – there are programs everywhere. The amount of energy and positivity, the general sense of happiness you can accumulate by pursuing these activities will enrich every aspect of your career and life. If you're a better, happier person, you will create momentum in every area." **CMP**