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Leah Kraemer

The Difference Between Mediocrity & Mastery

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARAH MEDINA
WRITTEN BY KENDRA WOODWARD



There's a certain kind of energy that can't be faked - a spark, a firecracker-level enthusiasm that fills a room before the person even walks in. That's Leah Wolfe-Kraemer - Managing Broker for Realty ONE Group, 20-year real estate veteran, and fearless adventurer. Unlike other agents and brokers, Leah isn't focused on selling homes, she's in the business of making things happen.

With a blend of fierce intelligence, bold authenticity, and the kind

of humor that can snap an agent out of a self-induced pity party in record time, Leah has built a reputation as a leader, mentor, and relentless go-getter who doesn't just navigate challenges - she eats them for breakfast.

But real estate wasn't Leah's original plan, laughing as she explains, "The running joke is that I chose the lesser of two evils." With degrees in English and Pre-Law, she was prepared to tackle law school when

motherhood threw a delightful wrench in her plans. Wanting more flexibility than a law firm would allow, she pivoted to real estate - a move that let her flex her critical thinking skills in an entirely new way.

It didn't take long for Leah to make a name for herself in the industry thanks to her unique perspective on the ever-evolving nature of the field. Her passion for helping others succeed, walking into the office every day without knowing what new challenges she might face, helping agents find their niche, and the joy she gets from seeing when an idea falls into place on an agent's face all play a major role in her success and her love for the industry. "I suppose for most this is equally exhilarating and nerve-racking, but this isn't a one-size-fits-all industry."

Her love for the unpredictable eventually paid off in a big way when Pat Kelly, President of Brokerage Operations at Realty ONE Group, asked to speak with her. And though she was perfectly content as a solo agent, after an intense three-hour meeting he took a chance on the "petite firecracker with no broker experience" and offered her the Managing Broker position at their Goodyear location! The results were nothing short of legendary.

Under Leah's leadership, her office shattered every production record in the West Valley and has held the #1 spot ever since. It turns out, the secret to success isn't just hard work - it's also a lot of heart, a little bit of stubbornness, and a willingness to FITFO (Figure It The F Out...as she puts it). It's this incomparable drive that makes Leah an industry standout, but it's her personality that makes her unforgettable to both friends and colleagues alike. Just ask around,

and you'll get a variety of descriptions, all equally befitting.

"My parents and sisters would describe me as controlling and bossy. My husband and close friends call me a unicorn princess...who is still controlling and bossy. And in the office? Wickedly smart, feisty, and boldly authentic - sometimes said in exasperation," she humors. But no matter who you ask, one thing is crystal clear; Leah is a force of nature with a mission to live life to the fullest.

That optimistic spirit extends well beyond the office and into Leah's daily life. An admitted Disney fanatic, Starbucks aficionado, bookworm, and world traveler, this native Phoenician spends her free time exploring and experiencing the world. On a mission to visit at least 50 countries and all seven continents before she turns 50, she insists on "Living a life of outrageous adventure! Do all the things, eat all the food, and nose-boop all the wild animals."



At home, she and her husband, Chris - her best friend, travel buddy, and partner-in-crime of nearly three decades - enjoy sharing their lives with their son, AJ, and their two very stylish bunnies, Armani and Chanel. But it's not all real estate and world travels. Leah also has a heart for giving back. Through Realty ONE Group's 501(c)(3), ONE Cares, she and her team contribute to countless initiatives, from Homeless Youth Connection to St. Mary's Food Bank.

Community isn't just a buzzword for her - it's a calling - and she is fortunate to work with likeminded agents who devote their time and energy into bringing about social good.

So what's next for this spunky powerhouse you might wonder? Well...it's quite simple...MORE. More growth, more impact, more adventure, and more education, which has become a staple in her everyday life. "Last year was one of the most challenging seasons





Despite 20 years in the industry, I feel like there is always something new to learn... some nuance to be discovered."

we have faced in real estate, and competence goes a long way in properly representing our clients," she explains of her passion for the in-depth content courses that help agents to better understand the required forms and processes within the industry. Her signature course, WTF (What's That Form), is a crowd favorite in which she takes agents line-by-line through crucial industry forms to demystify the fine print and help agents better understand them in plain English. "Despite 20 years in the industry, I feel like there is always something new to learn... some nuance to be discovered."

And if you ever find yourself in a moment of self-doubt, Leah has a few words of wisdom: "There's no crying in real estate!" Okay, there's actually a lot of crying in real estate, but if you're working with Leah, expect a well-timed quip, a reality check, and a reminder that the best in the business are the ones who can get out of their own way and figure it out. Because in Leah's world, knowledge isn't just power - it's the difference between mediocrity and mastery.



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Ruben Montijo: Innovating Homes with Tech Since '95

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SARAH MEDINA



“GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING.”

him the trust of many clients, allowing his reputation to grow quickly. By 2008, Ruben took a bold step and launched his own business, Integrated Home Technologies. His dedication to his craft, coupled with his ability to connect with people, made him a natural success.

In 2020, Ruben and his family decided to leave Colorado Springs and head to sunny Arizona. They were eager to be closer to family, but Ruben was determined not to return to California. Moving during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that more people were spending time at home and, as a result, many sought to improve their home offices and living spaces. Ruben saw this as an opportunity to expand his reach. He connected with people through local social media groups in Estrella Mountain, and soon enough, his business in Arizona was growing.

Ruben Montijo, the owner of Integrated Home Technologies (IHT), has always had a passion for technology and helping others. Originally from California, Ruben's journey to becoming a trusted expert in home technology began in 1995, when he and his wife decided to make a big move to Colorado. But the decision to leave California wasn't the only one they made during that year. On their way to Colorado Springs, they stopped in Las Vegas, where they celebrated their love by getting married with family and friends present. It was the beginning of a new chapter for the couple.

In Colorado Springs, Ruben began his career in the home technology industry. Working for others at first, he quickly developed an eye for detail and a drive to help people make their homes smarter and more efficient. His commitment to quality work and exceptional customer service earned

Ruben's philosophy has always been simple: “Great customer service is the most important thing”. He prides himself on going above and beyond for every client. Whether he's installing a new TV, mounting a soundbar, or providing security with video doorbells and surveillance systems, Ruben ensures that every job is done with care. Another major focus for Ruben has been creating backyard entertainment systems. With the beautiful Arizona weather, many homeowners love to host gatherings outside, and Ruben is there to make their patios and pool areas tech-friendly with the latest systems, including patio misters and shades.

As Ruben looks ahead, he is excited to continue growing Integrated Home Technologies, particularly in the West Valley of Arizona. One of his key goals is to connect with landscapers, builders, and renovators who are looking to



integrate home technology into their projects. He believes in collaboration, and he knows that working alongside professionals in other industries can result in amazing, innovative homes.

Outside of his business, Ruben is a proud father to three children—, Rubiana, Rocio, and Gabriel—and a doting grandfather to his two-year-old granddaughter, Adelina. Family is at the heart of everything Ruben does, and he enjoys spending quality time with them exploring the beautiful



Ruben's skydive in Puerto Rico.



Ruben and family.

Arizona landscape on e-bikes. Ruben's adventurous spirit shines through, however his desire to try paragliding was put on hold when he realized it would be difficult to do with his family. But knowing Ruben's adventurous heart, it's likely he'll try it one day.

Travel is also an important part of Ruben's life. The family often visits Puerto Rico, where his family come's



from. In fact, Ruben took the plunge and went skydiving during one of their trips to Puerto Rico. He describes the experience as "breathtaking." This year, they are set to embark on a family cruise around Alaska to celebrate his father's 80th birthday, another adventure to cherish with his loved ones.

For Ruben, his faith plays an essential role in his success. He is open about his Christian faith, often sharing, "Jesus is my Lord and Savior, and I give him all the glory and praise. I attribute all my success to Him and put Him first in everything I do." Ruben's humility, faith, and genuine care for others have made him a beloved figure in his community.

"JESUS IS MY LORD AND SAVIOR, AND I GIVE HIM ALL THE GLORY AND PRAISE. I ATTRIBUTE ALL MY SUCCESS TO HIM AND PUT HIM FIRST IN EVERYTHING I DO."

Ruben's warmth, commitment, and expertise are the cornerstones of his business, and he's ready to bring his passion for home technology to more projects. So if you're a landscaper, builder, or interior designer looking to collaborate with a dedicated and skilled professional to enhance your projects with cutting-edge home technology, Ruben would love to hear from you.

CONTACT US!

You can reach him at Integrated Home Technologies at (602) 772-2391 or via email at Ruben@IHThome.com





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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ENSUEL KOLA: PICTURE MY LISTING
WRITTEN BY KENDRA WOODWARD

Awakening The True Potential in Others by Shattering Self-Imposed Limitations

Justin Thorstad's journey starts out not so ordinary. Raised in a small town of southern Oregon, once he turned 18 and with only a few dollars in his pocket, he moved to Arizona in pursuit of a career in Architecture. Justin quickly realized that he didn't fit the mold...he craved far more out of life and of himself. He wanted something different – something he could invest his passionate personality into – where he could create, build and grow something that would serve others and continue to thrive for generations.

After reading "Rich Dad, Poor Dad," everything clicked into place for Justin. He realized the opportunity to dictate his schedule and provide unlimited income potential could be accomplished by investing in real estate. Licensed in 2003 to ease his

journey through investing, he had a giant obstacle, he didn't have the money to start investing. Justin has purchased dozens of investment properties including several multifamily and never utilizing bank financing to acquire his portfolio. "I bought properties with no money, because I didn't have any. Out of necessity, I used creative seller financing opportunities. I never allowed myself to say why I couldn't do a thing, rather how can I do it?" Justin recalled.

Justin found great success as an agent by relying on the "hustle and grind" mentality he had at that time. Yet the success he achieved from that mindset came at a high cost, admitting that level of awareness he used required sacrifices in his personal life. It left him feeling burned out and thinking there had to

be a better way. "It made it difficult to want to get out of bed in the morning, I just felt stuck," Justin stated.

In his pursuit of finding a better way Justin fully immersed himself in personal development seminars, reading countless books and hiring coaches. By implementing everything his coaches encouraged him to do, he transformed his personality causing the areas of suffering to begin thriving with little effort. This transformation ignited a new purpose - to awaken the dormant potential in others. Already having the desire to support agents with business mastery, he blended the personal development aspects and decided to start The Thorstad Team. By sharing the concepts, principles and strategies he had actual experience with and caused the greatest

impact, agents who have a desire to become aware of their self-imposed limitations which drive behavior and are responsible for sabotaging and prevents people from experiencing the results they truly want in life. After the third year as a successful team leader, Justin wanted to support even more agents. So, in February of 2018 Justin founded his brokerage - Libertas Real Estate. He wanted to create an environment where agents would be empowered to release their perfect self-expression and awaken their true potential in life and business, simultaneously. "I wanted a completely different culture with a unique energy dynamic. Everything we do at Libertas is in support of agents to win. There still exists the mentality that the agent works for the brokerage. It's time to see the situation for

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AGENTS.”



what it is... The brokerage is in the agent business, the agents are our clients, and we only exist to serve and support agents with perpetual holistic growth. We truly are a brokerage created by agents, to serve agents”.

This commitment to holistic perpetual growth became the cornerstone of Libertas where the guiding principle is simple: “who you surround yourself with, matters!” In building their community of like-minded individuals,

Justin spends his time coaching agents on a weekly basis while his Designated Broker, Robert Shaw handles the daily operations and agent transaction guidance so Justin could launch his newest venture, the Real Estate Integration Network (REIN). With a focus on adding value to agents like offering profit share, part of that becomes helping brokerages win as well, Justin explains “with this hybrid model of collaborative partnership,

we significantly reduce operating expenses, enhance agent items of value and increase revenue without increasing the cost to the agents. Instead of brokerages functioning as independent competitors with one another, let’s come together to create purchasing power for agent services and shared resources so we can operate at a higher level and produce confident and financially sound agents who create stronger communities and boost the economy.”

Taking only a select number of private coaching clients at a time, Justin coaches a wide variety of entrepreneurs in breaking through their own mental barriers, reframing their belief systems, and achieving quantum leaps in their results with less effort and time. From his three-hour masterclass series to his two-day workshop “Success by design”, Justin offers a range

of coaching opportunities that include private one-on-one sessions, mastermind pods, and is a featured instructor with an upcoming app called Fuel inc., which is set to rival their competitor - Masterclass. “The only reason why someone doesn’t have the results they want is because those results don’t yet fit how they think and feel about themselves. Energy flows where attention goes,” he often says, emphasizing the importance of cultivating a mindset where having a vision of your future self and reality becomes a clear intention to focus your attention in the present moment coupled with an attitude of gratitude, and emotional intelligence are vital to being a conscious creator who enjoys the quality of their life experience.

At home, Justin finds balance by spending time with his fiancée, Priscilla and tending to his bonsai trees, both are a chance to calm the noise. Together, Justin and Priscilla have a blended family of six





Justin and Priscilla

children, three of whom still live at home. While the kids are at an age where they pretty much do their own thing...Justin and Priscilla enjoy nature and love to go camping and hiking and stay committed to weekly date nights. For Justin however, every morning begins with a ritual consisting of gratitude journaling, breathwork, mediation and visualization, movement, and a cold

plunge. He explains "The value is in the daily reminder that I am the witness in there maintaining control and directing my mind and body as instruments of consciousness." I understand how loud the 'inner roommate' can be, and for most, they allow it to run the show, producing the predictable personal reality with its undesirable results. we have the ability

"IT'S NOT ABOUT HAVING THE BEST STRATEGY THAT CAUSES SUCCESS, RATHER THE VERSION OF YOURSELF THAT SHOWS UP, MOMENT BY MOMENT."

to reclaim our dominion. My morning practice reminds me of this, my intention for the day, raises my vibration establishing my energetic tone for my day. It's not about having the best strategy that causes success, rather the version of yourself that shows up, moment by moment."

Looking ahead, Justin's three year goals include significantly growing Libertas valley wide while maintaining its ethos. "At Libertas we don't hire every agent, we're about quality over quantity." Through his leadership, countless agents and entrepreneurs are finding the courage to dream bigger, achieve more, and embrace the journey with confidence and purpose.



Justin and his Designated Broker Robert Shaw

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Take it from the ones that KNOW!



Susanna Bressner
- eXp Realty

Incorporate Real Estate into Your Lifestyle

- Engage in activities you love, like going to the gym, hiking, or walking with friends.
- Naturally share your passion for real estate while connecting with people.

Create a Community-Focused Network

- Develop a neighborhood networking flyer promoting local businesses for free. (Keep it simple, mine is under 300 homes in my immediate neighborhood.)
- Host quarterly events (with the invitation on your flyer) in your neighborhood to bring the community together and foster relationships. (Again keep it simple, I host happy hours and ice cream socials.)

Build Trust Through Volunteering

- Get involved with a local charity to give back while forming genuine connections.
- Relationships built through service often lead to referrals from people who trust you.

Focus on Relationships, Not Transactions

- Be present in your community and consistently nurture connections.
- People do business with those they know & trust.

Genuinely Give, Without Expectations, But Share That Your Business Is Successful on the Referrals of Others

- By promoting others and supporting local businesses, you build authentic relationships.
- When people see your generosity, they are more likely to refer you in return.



Jen Polansky
- Realty ONE Group

Specialize: Find your niche market (e.g., first-time buyers, luxury homes, Secondary homes, commercial properties) Become an expert and stand out!

Build relationships: Network with other professionals (lenders, attorneys, contractors) and potential clients to generate referrals and leads.

Provide excellent customer service: Go above and beyond for clients to build trust and encourage repeat business

Stay informed: Keep up with market trends, regulations, and new technologies to provide the best advice to clients

Be organized and detail-oriented: Manage your time effectively and pay attention to the details of each transaction to avoid costly errors.

Be ethical and honest: Maintain high ethical standards and always act in the best interests of your clients.

Set realistic goals: Focus on building a solid foundation and gradually increasing your business over time.



Ruben Luna
- The Luna Team

Build Strong Relationships – Real estate is a relationship-driven business. Stay connected with past clients, engage with your sphere of influence, and always provide exceptional service to create repeat and referral business

Leverage Social Media & Content Marketing – Consistently post valuable content, market listings creatively, and engage with your audience across platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Master Lead Generation & Follow-Up – Develop a structured lead generation strategy, whether through cold calling, online ads, open houses, or networking. Effective follow-up is crucial—use a CRM to stay organized and nurture leads over time.

Invest in Personal Development & Education – The best agents continuously learn. Stay ahead by attending industry training, reading market reports, and improving negotiation and marketing skills to offer more value to clients.

Create a Strong Brand & Reputation – Define what sets you apart and make it known. Provide top-tier service, ask for reviews, and consistently showcase your expertise and success stories to establish yourself as a go-to agent in your market.



Nancy Muslin
- Home Realty

Listen to your client. They have a lot to tell you whether they are buying or selling! Let them know they are the only ones that exist at the moment!

Be flexible. That is why I got into this business because I like my time flexibility, everyday is a new and different day. Change is always happening with appointments so being fluid and accommodating is a must!

Be genuine and be yourself. People love and trust you when you are natural and your caring for them shines through.

Know your profession. Stay up to date on the market, technology and marketing strategies.

Have fun! Life's too short to not enjoy the ride. This business can run you, so stay in charge of your life. Take "me time", self care, enjoy your family time. It's not worth losing your health or relationships.



"Zach and his crew landscaped my neighbors and my yard with rock. They were very prompt from giving us an estimate and then coming to do the work. We couldn't have asked for any other firm to do any better work. They answered our

questions and worked diligently to do the best possible job for us in a timely fashion. I highly recommend calling Keating Konnection for all your landscaping needs."

-Gary Bender

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Melissa Twitchell

*Real Estate,
Reinvention,
& Resilience*

WRITTEN BY KENDRA WOODWARD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAUNE FARRAR



If there's one thing Melissa Twitchell doesn't do, it's play by the rules of a traditional real estate agent. Sure she's got the expertise, the drive, and the experience - having been licensed since 2018 - but she's also got something extra. Something most agents don't have. And that's a refreshingly down-to-earth approach, a knack for business, and a personality that makes people want to grab a coffee and chat about life, not just listings.

Melissa, an Arizona native, was born in Flagstaff and has lived in Surprise since 1996. Her local roots and connection to the community has enabled her to build a career on the foundation of her ability to connect with people in a way that feels more like friendship, rather than business. Real estate wasn't always the plan though. For 14 years she worked in banking, climbing the ranks from teller to management, before moving into a new department where she managed

complex financial services and learned the ins and outs of lending, credit, and home mortgages - skills which would later set her apart as an agent who truly understands the financial side of a real estate transaction.

Melissa's first introduction to real estate came earlier than most when she purchased her first house at the young age of 19 while attending college. Convinced that renting was a waste of money, she made the leap into homeownership before most of her peers had even thought about what classes to enroll in, with the help of her father supporting her as a co-signer. That early experience gave her a much different perspective on the industry, one that would eventually shape the way she interacts with her clients to this day.

When she finally made the transition into real estate after working in banking for nearly two decades, it was an entirely new world - one that pushed her far out of her comfort zone. "I like the people - getting to know them and making new friends. Real estate has pushed me out of my comfort zone...doing things I never would've approached before," Melissa says with enthusiasm. "It's definitely an interesting learning experience... because clients can make you question your choices."





Once Melissa got the hang of talking to strangers and became comfortable with creating those new connections on a daily basis, she started learning as much as she could from the high producing agents that she worked alongside in the eXp world. But that's not to say that real estate has been an easy road for Melissa, as she quickly learned that it came with its fair share of challenges.

"There's definitely been a few trying moments while dealing with what you think might be the most challenging clients, and then it gets worse," she laughs. Those moments, however frustrating, have taught her patience, resilience, and - perhaps most importantly - to not take things too personally. She's learned to understand where clients are coming from, recognizing the stress they're

under and helping them navigate through it, joking, "Clients can make you question your choices." But if anything, those tough situations have only made her a better agent.

At home, life is busy but fulfilling. With a passion for learning and a relentless drive to be the best mother she can be to her two sons, Charlie and Johnny, Melissa took her real estate career to the next level when she invested in an AirBnB, followed shortly by purchasing a sewer inspection business for her



Melissa's pickleball team at the national competition in South Carolina 2024.



Melissa, Mike, Charlie and Grace at spring training.

kids and boyfriend to run together. Joking that she met her boyfriend, Mike, through what used to be her primary lead source generator - online dating - the two have been inseparable since and are looking forward to purchasing a new home together this year.

A few years ago, Melissa added even more to her plate when she partnered with Turkeys for Teachers, a program that was started by her lending partner, Kevin Grampp. What began as a way to donate turkeys for teachers during the holidays has now expanded into full meal donations for over 1,000 teachers - including donating a portion of every transaction to the cause. "It's been growing over the last five years," she says proudly of the organization that allows her to give back to the community in a real, tangible way.



Melissa's son Johnny (Marine Corps Reservist) with nephew Alec (Air force).

As for what's next? Well, Melissa is in a bit of a transition phase admittedly. But one thing hasn't changed - her commitment to doing things her way. Whether it's real estate, business ownership, or giving back, Melissa approaches it all with a mix of humor, heart, and a willingness to step into the unknown. And if her track record is anything to go off of, whatever Melissa takes on next is sure to be just as unique and successful as she is.



"I like the people - getting to know them and making new friends. Real estate has pushed me out of my comfort zone... doing things I never would've approached before."

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