

Breaking Ground: The Rise of Women in Real Estate Leadership

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Abstract

This paper examines the rising influence of women in corporate real estate (CRE), a domain historically dominated by male leadership. It explores how women are not only entering the field in greater numbers but are increasingly occupying strategic roles, leading transformative workplace initiatives, and influencing sustainability and cultural direction at scale. While challenges remain, the trajectory of female leadership in CRE reflects a broader shift towards more inclusive, innovative and business-aligned practices. Empowering women in this space is not merely a matter of representation—it is a catalyst for progress.

Keywords: Women in leadership, corporate real estate, workplace transformation, diversity and inclusion, hybrid work, CRE strategy, sustainability, mentorship

1. Introduction

The corporate real estate industry is witnessing a pivotal shift—one that is redefining not just how workspaces are designed, but who leads that change. Women are now rising across the CRE sector, assuming leadership roles in strategy, execution and innovation. Once limited in visibility and influence, female professionals are now at the forefront of reimagining the built environment. As Sheryl Sandberg emphasized, “We need women at all levels, including the top, to change the dynamic, reshape the conversation, to make sure women's voices are heard and heeded.” This paper explores how women are increasingly shaping the CRE agenda and establishing a leadership presence that is driving both industry and organizational transformation.

2. Women Leading the Shift in Strategy

Women are no longer simply contributing to CRE—they are leading it. Across major organizations, they are heading workplace strategy, managing large-scale portfolios, championing ESG goals and steering post-pandemic return-to-office frameworks.

In my experience with companies like Booking Holdings, Coinbase, GitHub, Uber and JLL, I've witnessed the evolution firsthand: women who are heading workplace transformation efforts, integrating sustainability into facility management and designing inclusive hybrid ecosystems that reflect modern workforce needs.

Supported by industry data such as McKinsey's Women in the Workplace (2023), these leadership trends are not isolated, they reflect a consistent rise of female professionals into influential roles that were previously inaccessible.

3. Recognition, Visibility, and Impact

The progress is no longer anecdotal, it is being recognized at the highest levels. Women in CRE today are being acknowledged for their strategic influence through prestigious awards, thought leadership features and board-level presence.

Industry recognition such as the CoreNet Global Young Leader Award, BW 40 Under 40, and features in Forbes are some of my personal examples but it also puts a spotlight on today's generation of women who are setting benchmarks and redefining leadership norms.

This visibility is helping to inspire the next wave of female talent and proving that women are not only thriving in CRE, they are shaping its future.

4. Barriers Remain—But the Momentum is Stronger

Despite the rising trajectory, systemic barriers still persist. Women remain underrepresented in C-suite CRE roles and often face slower promotion cycles, lack of strategic sponsorship and implicit bias. These challenges, while real, are increasingly being challenged by women who are building momentum, demanding equity and delivering results that speak for themselves.

The path is no longer just open, it is being actively forged by women who are establishing leadership paradigms based on collaboration, resilience and holistic business thinking.

5. Inclusive Leadership as a Strategic Imperative

As Verna Myers noted, “Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.” In CRE, the business case for inclusive leadership is clear. Women are demonstrating the ability to blend operational efficiency with human-centered design and long-term strategic value.

Organizations that invest in gender-diverse leadership in real estate benefit from higher-performing teams, more innovative solutions and workplace environments that align with broader business goals.

6. Building the Next Generation of Leaders

With more women rising into senior roles, the focus now must shift to sustaining the pipeline. This involves not only mentorship, but structural support, clear promotion paths, access to high-stakes projects and visibility in boardroom conversations.

Women are already mentoring and sponsoring the next wave of talent, ensuring that leadership is not just a milestone but a continuum. Organizations that institutionalize this approach will continue to see women rise, lead and leave a lasting mark.

7. Conclusion

The rise of women in corporate real estate is not a trend, it is a turning point. Across sectors and organizations, women are demonstrating that leadership in real estate is no longer defined by tradition but by transformation. They are influencing how and where we work, redefining space as a business enabler and positioning CRE as a strategic engine for growth.

Organizations that harness the power of this shift, by empowering and investing in women, will not only lead the future of real estate, but also help shape a more dynamic, equitable and resilient global workforce.

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