

# WOMEN IN BUSINESS

On International Women's Day, we caught up with Knight Frank's Residential Director Rena O'Kelly, to talk about her experience in the property industry.

## **How did you get to the position you're in?**

Ambition, hard-work and determination. I have a genuine passion for what I do and my competitive edge ensures I'm always striving to do one better. I'm tenacious and am always looking to get the best result for my client, which I suppose has paid off for me over the years.

## **After all this success, is there anything specific you struggle with in the workplace now?**

Believe it or not, I still get very nervous before public speaking and presentations. I'm very comfortable in one on one situations but standing in front of a room of people still terrifies me! I'm actually doing an advanced presentation skills course next week to help with the nerves!

## **Is a work life balance high on your priority list? How did you balance being a mother and professional?**

It's very high on my priority list and something I'm conscious of all of the time. I am driven by my loyalty to my family and to my work colleagues. There have been times when I am torn between the two. There's a sense of obligation and not wanting to let people down. This has become much easier to balance as my children have gotten older and their needs have changed.

## **How has the role of women changed in your industry over the past 10 years?**

I think there are more opportunities available for women in the property industry now; it's particularly noticeable in the Commercial Sector. Seeing the SCSi have women in top roles such as Claire Solon as president last year and Aine Myler as Director General sends a really positive message about the role of women in the industry.

## RENA'S TYPICAL WORKING DAY

**6.15am** - I get up and tend to have a family breakfast, but I'm out the door by 7.20am.

**8.30am** - I'm normally in work and as we're a global business the first thing I do every morning without fail is check my emails - I frequently have emails from colleagues in different time zones, this morning I had one waiting from a UAE colleague.

**After 12PM** - My day to day set up varies but will usually include some element of business generation, pitching development, advance planning, liaising with internal teams, and lots of meetings. No one day is the same as the next!

## What Keeps you motivated?

*I am motivated by achieving results in work.*

*There's also the importance of 'me.com' - Rena O'Kelly, I'm always looking at areas I can improve, and things I could do better.*

*I will make the most of any self-improvement opportunity I can find, the advanced presentation skills course I mentioned earlier is just one example of this.*

*Continued self-improvement has always been a priority for me - it's that competitive spirit coming through again! I want to be the best in the Industry.*



## **If you had to start over, knowing what you know now, what would you do differently?**

I would have gone to college to become a surveyor. At the time I did an apprenticeship to qualify, (it's no longer an option), but I feel I missed out on the formal education side of it, which is why I recently undertook my APC exams, despite my years of experience I always felt the need to formalize my qualifications. Also, it's a small thing, but I'd retain the contacts of all the clients I've had. I've been fortunate to have a successful track record from early on in my career, but I underestimated the value of my network. It's the one piece of advice I always give to young surveyors - get a little black book!

## **What has been the role of luck in your success?**

It's that old cliché of the right place at the right time. I joined HT Meagher O'Reilly which became Knight Frank in 2013. Knight Frank afforded me the opportunity to become a Director and help to establish this global brand in the Irish market. You could say that all my stars were aligned.

## **What's one of the toughest decisions you've had to make and how did it impact your life?**

I think it was cutting the umbilical cord and taking time out to be a parent. It was a really big decision to leave my last company, Sherry Fitzgerald. I had been with them for 15 years and I decided, with the birth of my third child, to take time out. It was a fantastic opportunity for my boys to experience what it was like for Mum to be waiting "at the school gate", to get my then baby on her feet and to get my home in order for the next phase of my career.

## BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

## **What are three events that helped to shape your life?**

They are mostly personal really, but getting married, having children and the loss of someone close to me. It really puts things in perspective and emphasises the need for a work life balance. I think realizing I'd found my vocation shortly after starting my apprenticeship also had a massive influence on my life.

## **Who in particular has inspired you in your career?**

Too many to mention - I'm in the game a long time and have met some amazing people. I always try to emulate the traits and good working practices I see in them. I've learned a lot by doing this over the years. I think imitation it's one of the biggest compliments you can pay someone!

## **What was your dream job as a child and why?**

Well there were two things that interested me; Advertising and Architecture. I think it was the buzz of advertising, the colours and the fast paced environment that attracted me. My Dad was an Architect - I clearly inherited a love for buildings from him! It's funny really as I see property as a hybrid of both, my job is really to market and advertise properties.

## **And finally, what advice would you give to young women who want to succeed in the workplace?**

To be honest it would be the same advice for anyone starting off in the workplace; don't underestimate the power of personal communication. There's a tendency to rely on email and communicate electronically and I worry that the art of building a relationship with clients is getting lost. Oh and don't underestimate the power of a hand-written note!