

Finding the balance in Real Estate

Santander intranet article

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Santander is one of the newest members to Real Estate Balance, an association run by female and male leaders from different organisations and disciplines engaged across the real estate industry to address gender imbalance in the sector and help develop a pipeline of future female leaders. We are one of a growing number of organisations that have recognised the benefits of improved diversity and committed to change.

Kiera Tse, a Director in our Capital Solutions team and SSG Diversity Advocate, joined Real Estate Balance (RE:Balance) as a committee member earlier this year and told us what we are doing to promote the change.

"I'm passionate about my commitment to create a more inclusive environment within the bank and the real estate industry. Having worked within the sector for a number of years, including 11 at Santander, I've experienced first-hand the reasons why improving senior female representation is important in our front line - often finding myself the only female voice in the room. This brings with it a number of challenges which are too often left unsaid.

It's been proven that different strengths and skills sets leads to better outcomes for businesses and solutions for our clients. Harnessing our full talent pool makes sense from a business perspective, and is increasingly expected of us by our clients and stakeholders, as well as being the right thing to do. 'Ambition doesn't have a gender' the RE:Balance mission statement, I believe should be a key focus for us.

RE:Balance brings together senior leaders from across the sector to share ideas and strategies to influence change. A key aim is to seek to empower and support our female colleagues to enable a pipeline of future female leaders to come through. We are supporting junior colleagues now to expand their networks, share knowledge and encourage them to aim high – this is through various strategies including mentoring events and 'audiences with' events.

Importantly, RE:Balance is inclusive and it is great to see strong male sponsorship of the network also. Joining this network is just one of the practical actions we are taking within SSG to achieve our overall gender ambitions."

The vision for Real Estate Balance, is to see women represented in 33% of senior leadership in real estate industry by 2020 and then improve to reach a 50-50 split. Santander has also committed to the HM Treasury Women in Finance Charter, committing to a gender diversity target of 50% (+/- 10%) in Senior Management positions by 2021.

"We have a long way to go to achieve our goals to improve diversity but we need to make a step change and have made a commitment to measurably progress. In SSG, we have recently launched a People Board to focus on our diversity mix and we have made a commitment to Accelerating You and Women of the Future, two leadership development schemes. In November, across SSG we will be rolling out unconscious bias training to all S3 line managers and above. I am also pleased to be a mentor for the 30% club, a network supporting gender diversity at all levels.

This is a culture and mind-set change that is essential for our business and we are all responsible for making it happen." **Andrew Whelan, Head of Real Estate, SSG**