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Q&A with Jeri Ballard:

What needs to happen to draw more women to careers in corporate real estate?

There is no silver bullet for getting more women into corporate real estate and it will take a number of different actions to fill the pipeline at all levels:

- Target awareness of real estate as a career option at colleges and universities.
- Targeted recruitment to bring in women from other disciplines outside of real estate and have a plan to develop them into the role.
- When hiring, if you don't have any qualified women on the short list of candidates, you will not be in a position to hire a woman. Start looking for qualified women before you need them. "We had no time" is a terrible excuse for missing an opportunity.
- Have some diversity on your selection panel/making the hiring decisions.
- Men and women need to mentor and to **sponsor** women within their company. There is a big difference between a mentor and a sponsor. A mentor advises the mentee; sponsors advocate for their protégés. A mentor can be anyone in a position of experience, while a sponsor is a senior-level executive. Mentors help build a career vision and coach. Sponsors are personally vested in the upward movement and professional development of their protégé. I got where I did in my career because I had sponsors who were advocating for me when decisions were being taken.

How did you establish your career in corporate real estate?

I started my professional career in supply chain and real estate was never on my radar screen. At a previous company I was offered the role of Director of Global Real Estate and Facilities by the company CAO. I said I was flattered but I knew nothing about this area and that I did not want to disappoint him by failing. He had to talk me into that job by highlighting all of the transferable skills I brought to the role: broad integrative business leader, problem-solver, fast learner, strategic thinker, commercial and negotiation experience. I ultimately took the role and found out that I loved real estate!