

Women's Day: Turn challenges into opportunities

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"Women create a massive impact with their professional contribution. Let us use positive energy to overcome every hurdle and continue improving ourselves and our teams," shares Graziella Rocella, Chief Research and Product Design Officer, Planet Smart City in an interaction with 99acres on the occasion of Women's Day.



By **Graziella Rocella**
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Women have traditionally undertaken domestic responsibilities and succeeded in making a considerable impact on their families. The same applies to their professional life as well. Real estate, like any other field, has been taken to newer heights, with women at the helm of departments, verticals and companies. It is important to challenge the hurdles we face and continue chasing our dreams.

What inspired you to make a career in real estate?

I was studying foreign languages when I realised I wanted to build something beautiful and tangibly useful for people. My inclination was towards designing and planning creative spaces. Hence, I decided to listen to my inner calling and enrolled at a polytechnic institute.

How has your professional journey been so far, and what delights you the most about your career?

It was at a small architectural practice near Turin in Italy, where I learned everything about designing and building residences for people with different tastes and different strata. That experience was so delightful that I knew I just needed to know more about the culture of housing and its social aspects. I decided to pursue architectural design at doctoral and post-doctoral levels. That is when I got introduced to the concept of smart cities. I went on to teach Architecture and Urban Planning as Adjunct Professor at the Polytechnic University of Turin, where I enjoyed interacting with students and their desire to dream of creating better places. As a professor, I missed contact with the sound and material reality of the residents' needs brought up by the real estate industry. That's when I decided to leave education and join Planet Smart City, where I lead the Research and Product Design Unit.

Any tips for women venturing in real estate?

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Do not think about the differences between genders as problems. Think about them as opportunities. Women traditionally carry comparatively more domestic responsibilities therefore, women are the ones who create a higher impact on the happiness of family members. The same applies to work in any industry, including real estate. Let us use positive energy to turn challenges at work into opportunities and continue improving ourselves and our teams.

What are the challenges you faced in the industry?

At Planet Smart City, the main challenge is to ensure the utmost quality and standards of smart solutions that we integrate with our projects while balancing the economic aspects of delivering an affordable product for the low and mid-income families across our core target countries, namely Brazil, India and Colombia. The environmental impact of PropTech solutions we adopt and its impact on the society while enabling transparent and fair governance is the main challenge of the industry today, which spans across genders.

What strategies did you adopt to tide over the crisis in the last two years?

The term, 'crisis comes from a Greek word meaning choice, decision, and transformation. Those of us who are best prepared to face crises and challenges are those who can see opportunities in a problem. We adopt a problem-solving attitude. During the pandemic, we focussed on research and design to deliver a better product- a product that integrates resiliency with smartness. That is how we shaped our smart solutions to work even better than the product we had before the crisis, totally in line with ESG and PropTech trends.

How do you maintain a work-life balance?

The work culture we drive is sensitivity and empathy for the needs of an individual while driving superior standards of delivery. If you ignore your workforce's personal needs, your professional output will suffer. I follow this myself where I reserve time to focus on myself and seek help where needed from the right people, both professionally and personally. I practice gratitude as a philosophy of life, and I never forget to read a story to my children before going to bed.

What have you enjoyed most about your career?

I joined the company in 2016 after having taught at Polytechnic University of Turin. I was eager to apply my skills as an architect and urban planner to realities and vital expectations of living. I was uncertain about the future as I was changing paths while being a mother to twins. It was not easy and it took a lot of courage to join a startup. What I enjoy most is my professional journey. When I design processes at work, I am fully aware that I am writing a particularly important page in the history of our company and possibly also in the wider sector of aspirational, smart housing for tomorrow.

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