

# Celebrating top women: Yael Geffen, artfully uniting extraordinary properties with extraordinary lives

By [Fiona Wakelin](#)

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*"Never give up, don't be afraid of failure and be yourself - unapologetically." - Yael Geffen, CEO of Lew Geffen, Sotheby's International Realty*



Yael Geffen, CEO of Lew Geffen Sotheby's International Realty

## ***Congratulations on winning the Top Woman in Property Award 2020 at the Standard Bank Top Women Awards ceremony. What does winning this award mean to you?***

**Yael Geffen:** I am so thrilled to not only have won this category, but also to have been nominated for Businesswoman of the Year. The real estate industry is one of the sectors where women are still under-represented and female leadership in senior management positions is lacking. Considering that the majority of the agent population is female, I believe that recognition in prestigious awards such as these will serve to stimulate aspirant women to take the leap and strive for leadership positions.

On a personal note, it is my hope that the broader public profile garnered by being nominated as a finalist in two categories of such a prestigious award will allow me to further spread messages of empowerment and hope among South African women.

## ***How do you celebrate women in leadership?***

**Geffen:** The best way to celebrate women in leadership is to support them and to encourage other women to strive for top positions and to fulfil their dreams. Too many women still see other women in business as the enemy, as fierce competition to be knocked down. Additionally, we have been taught a "lack" mentality since we were little; that there is only space for a

few. It's such a self-limiting outdated belief, there is space for all of us because we have so many different attributes. It's only by standing together, breaking our inner glass ceilings and supporting one another that women will recognise their true potential and their considerable power.

### ***As an activist and speaker what are your main focus areas?***

**Geffen:** I advocate strongly against GBV and child abuse. My approach is a little different with regard to GBV because I feel we need to include men more in this conversation, not alienate them. I am busy completing my professional coaching certification with the Feminine Power Global Community. I would like to be seen as "The Queen of Authenticity" and have a keynote talk called 'Making it without faking it'.

The way we are currently promoting ourselves is hurting our business, sales and careers. Authentic confidence is what I advocate. It makes you likeable and more approachable and people want to do business with people that they like. The keynote talk I give empowers you with tools to access authentic confidence.



Yael Geffen awarded 2020 Standard Bank Top Woman in Property

6 Oct 2020



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### ***What have been some of your most memorable moments as CEO of Lew Geffen Sotheby's International Realty?***

**Geffen:** A third generation family business certainly has its pitfalls, but it's also a wonderful journey working alongside your family and creating a legacy. And whilst the pandemic has been enormously disruptive and challenging, leading in the time of Covid has really been a stand-out experience; I feel closer to my franchise business owners and agents than I ever have before.

### ***What have been the major obstacles in your career and how did you overcome them?***

**Geffen:** Age-old stereotypes and prejudices against which we have to battle daily, especially in male-dominated sectors. I experienced my lightbulb moment when I lived in New York several years ago and was the only female in management at the company at which I worked. The guys would toss a football around at every meeting but they never thought to pass it to me. One day I asked them to include me and, although they were shocked, they obliged.

I realised then and there that although I did want to be accepted by them as a peer, I definitely did not want to be one of the guys - because I'm not. I'm very much a woman; a feminine one with a unique skillset that contributes significantly to any table. I also struggled with self-doubt and I feel far more confident than I used to because I don't put on a façade, what you see is what you get. I am not shy and I love asking questions.

### ***With an international portfolio, what trends have you noticed in the property market this year?***

**Geffen:** The coronavirus pandemic will have a lasting effect on future real estate and design trends, and we are already seeing the shift in buyer priorities and design trends.

**Larger living spaces** - The past few years have been about compact, low-maintenance homes with small, water-wise gardens but, after months of confinement, many people are now beginning to realise the importance of having a substantial living space, a dedicated home office, ample outdoor space and amenities.

**In-house amenities** - We are already noticing an increased desire to create amenities within the home that offer authentic experiences of activities, such as movie theatres, gyms and restaurants/bars.

**Decentralisation** – As recently as last year, it was expected that by 2050, around 70% of the world's population would be living in cities, but it's a forecast that's probably going to need revision as we are already seeing a move away from urban living, with more and more people seeking suburban and even rural lifestyles.

### ***How do you relax?***

**Geffen:** Family is the cornerstone of everything. Quality time with my son and fiancé is what relaxes me most and whenever possible we do things like take walks in the park with our dog; it's one of our great de-stressors. I started mountain biking almost a year ago and I love it, it's such a great outdoor family sport. I thrive in nature and have always lived close to a park, no matter where I have lived in the world. If I am experiencing major burn out, a Netflix series binge while eating a peppermint crisp chocolate and wine gums seems to be the perfect antidote.

### ***If you had one extra hour in the day, how would you spend it?***

**Geffen:** Mountain biking with my family and then baking something wicked like chocolate brownies!



Yael Geffen delves into the dearth of female executives in real estate  
27 Nov 2018



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### ***What message do you have for the entrepreneurs out there struggling to survive?***

**Geffen:** Never give up, don't be afraid of failure and be yourself – unapologetically. Keep your eye on your vision and don't allow yourself to be distracted by external factors over which you have no control. Continually network and build meaningful relationships wherever possible. Make it your business to know who your competitors are and how you can better the same offer or add more value. Always be transparent, authentic and ethical so that nothing can ever come back to bite you – and you will more easily gain the trust and support of those with whom you work.

Be the person that people want to root for to succeed, not the person they want to bring down.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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