

SOUTH FLORIDA BUSINESS JOURNAL

Executive Profile: Key International Sales CEO offers advice for future leaders



Key International Sales CEO Liliana Paez

By [Brian Bandell](#) – Senior Reporter, South Florida Business Journal
Dec 26, 2019, 7:11am EST

Editor's Note: Executive Profiles offer insights into the management styles, hobbies and inspirations of the South Florida's c-suite. These Q&A's are featured in our weekly print edition.

LILIANA PAEZ

Age: 43

Birthplace: Bogota, Colombia

Residence: Key Biscayne

Current position: CEO, [Key International](#) Sales

Previous positions: Owner, Global Smart Products

Education: Bachelor's degree, [Florida International University](#)

[Liliana Paez](#) always loved sales and marketing, but her career in real estate got off to a slow start. She didn't sell a single unit during her first year as an agent.

She didn't get discouraged.

Her mother, who was the CEO of Sun Microsystems in Latin America, taught Paez to be persistent.

She has since led the sales of such prominent condominiums as Eden House, Jade Ocean, Jade Beach, the Grand Venetian, 1010 Brickell and the Harbour.

As CEO of Key International Sales, she oversees sales and marketing for developer Key International's condos, along with third-party developers. She also does marketing for the company's hotels.

As Paez shifts her focus to the company's next project – Boca Beach House – she reflected on how she overcame obstacles in her career.

Why did you choose a career in real estate? I never ever thought I would end up selling real estate. I was selling all these other products. I started with buying pearls, and trying to sell them. Then I bought ties and tried to sell them. I sold art. I sold decorations. I met [Dora Puig](#) [of Luxe Living Realty] through offering her art and decorations. She told me, 'You would be amazing selling real estate.' That is how I got to know her and got to know [Edgardo Defortuna](#) [of Fortune International Group], who is the first person I worked for. My first year in real estate ... I had no idea what I was doing. What I learned was: I had time to know my market. I would print out the MLS [information] about all available condos and drive around Miami to see every building. I was learning so much. After a year, I closed four units in one day. I learned: When you have a client, you show him what's right for him; you don't show him all of Miami.

What career were you interested in growing up? I always liked advertising and marketing. I liked the creative part of it.

How did having a mother who was a business executive influence you? I saw a mom who was amazing. She was always there for all the important things, if I had a show at school or if I was sick. Everywhere we went, she was the only woman CEO. I really admired what she was able to do, and it inspired me that I didn't want to work for anyone.

Why did you move to the U.S.? I came to study. From Colombia, you want to go to universities outside to get a better job. I went to FIU and I ended up staying here.

When the recession hit in 2008, how did it impact your career? I was selling at Brickell on the River and [Jade Brickell](#). People would just throw checks on our table. It was like selling hot dogs. Around 2008, when the market came down, the party wasn't so nice anymore. I thought: I can stay and cry, or I can do something else. That is when I made up Global Smart Products. I used to manufacture different products in China, and I would distribute them to companies that did informercials around the world. At the time, I had a baby and I saw these shoes with this weird sole to make posture better. I changed the sole and I patented it. I did a drawing on paper and sent it to the guy in China, and asked them to do a sample. My first order was 8,000 shoes. To my first client, I sold 10,000. I didn't even have enough inventory. I ended up selling more than a million shoes.

What did marketing products teach you about marketing condos? The first time I went to knock on the doors of Walmart in Mexico, they were like, 'Who are you?' Everybody threw me out. I got so many no's. I would sit down forever at the bottom of the office of the guy in charge of buying at Walmart. One time, I caught him, and I'm like, 'Please give me 5 minutes.' We made a deal. That is one thing I say to my salespeople. We all hear: 'Don't give up!' People say it, but they don't believe it. The client will tell you, 'I'm not interested' and hang up the phone, and the salesperson will never call the client again. Maybe a week later, you call the same client and he's relaxed and he has time to hear you out.

Do you ever disconnect from your job for relaxation? I play team tennis. I wear a uniform and everything. It gives me energy. That's my medication. I also give as much quality time as I can to my kids.

What advice would you tell a woman seeking to become a leader in business? Always believe and visualize. Don't be afraid to think big.