

Ask the boss

What benefits do female brokers bring to the workplace and to the profession? *The Adviser* asks Acceptance Finance's director **Daniel Di Conza** to share his perspective

ACCEPTANCE FINANCE'S

Daniel Di Conza has always been a strong supporter of hiring women, having employed female brokers ever since the company opened its doors back in 1990. Female brokers are reliable, hard working and good with customers, he believes. In fact, one of the company's best performing brokers is a woman. Sally Whitworth made *The Adviser's* top 50 Elite Business Writers list in 2010, a feat she hopes to replicate later this year.

The Adviser asked Mr Di Conza about his reasons for recruiting Sally and what she brings to the team.

Q. WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO RECRUIT SALLY?

We had worked with Sally before and were aware of her solid work ethic and attention to detail.

Q. WHAT IS SALLY LIKE TO WORK WITH?

Like all good salespeople, Sally can be both a pleasure and a challenge to work with – often in the same day. Having said that, Sally's input to our business has been invaluable.

Apart from consistently being our top loan writer, Sally has contributed significantly in building the systems

and procedures that have helped other team members improve their day to day results.

Q. WHAT DO CLIENTS SAY ABOUT SALLY'S SERVICES?

The feedback has been excellent: we survey our clients and when the results come in we often joke about the number of family members Sally must do loans for as some of the positive feedback we receive is bordering on the unbelievable.

In almost 10 years, I don't recall receiving any negative feedback from clients about Sally. Having said that, the feedback from staff is another issue. Sally is a high performer and has extremely high standards and expectations, with little patience for those around her who just don't measure up. This has led to some negative feedback from staff in the past.

However, each time this occurs it has always been Sally's push for better service or results for her clients.

Q. HAVE YOU SEEN ANY SPECIFIC BOTTOM LINE BENEFITS TO YOUR BUSINESS?

I'm sure we have. Some clients prefer female brokers, but I believe the biggest impact of having a female broker on staff is greater stability.

Female brokers seem to offer a sense of stability to a great deal of our clients and key business partners.

Fortunately for us, our two standout female brokers, Sally and Giulia, are still with the company after nine years and have built loyal relationships with clients, referral sources and the suppliers that are essential in developing a sustainable, profitable business.

Q. HOW DOES THE COMPANY BENEFIT FROM FEMALE REPRESENTATION AT WORK?

Having females in our workplace has really helped us develop a culture that we believe is special.

We are family-orientated and, as such, we operate during normal business hours, providing flexibility and support when needed.

Our culture is a benefit to all of us. I know it's made a very positive impact on my life outside of work.

Q. WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE GREATER FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN THE BROKING INDUSTRY?

I think the industry would benefit – the more diverse we become, the wider audience we can service.

I certainly would not suggest anyone recruit based on gender; all of our team were selected based on their attributes and their ability to fulfil the role we were after.

As it turns out, two of our best performers are female.



“ FEMALE BROKERS SEEM TO OFFER A SENSE OF STABILITY TO A GREAT DEAL OF OUR CLIENTS AND KEY BUSINESS PARTNERS ”

DANIEL DI CONZA
Director, Acceptance Finance

Ask the employee

Flexible working hours and good financial rewards make broking an ideal profession for women. But what exactly is it like being a female in the broking industry? Acceptance Finance broker **Sally Whitworth** explains

Q. WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING A WOMAN IN THE BROKING INDUSTRY?

Having the opportunity to provide a female's perspective on business ideas and projects.

When both gender perspectives are considered, it provides a more balanced outcome for clients and also within the business culture.

Q. WHAT'S THE WORST THING?

As a female in a male dominated industry, I can say the biggest challenges over the years have not come from clients but instead from colleagues.

When I first began in the industry

over 10 years ago, it would be fair to say that despite performance equal to my male counterparts, it took a longer time – and a tougher attitude – before I was taken seriously.

On a positive note, this has become less and less of a concern over the years and it's been great to see the growing acceptance of females at higher levels of management in both broking and in the banks themselves.

Q. WHAT GENDER ARE A MAJORITY OF YOUR CLIENTS?

It's definitely an even mix – couples, single males and single females are all included.

Q. RESEARCH SHOWS THAT WOMEN MAKE THE BIG FAMILY PURCHASING DECISIONS (HOUSE, CAR ETC) AND THAT WOMEN PREFER THE ADVISORY SERVICES OF ANOTHER FEMALE. HAVE YOU FOUND THIS TO BE THE CASE?

Actually, I find the coordinating of finance is split down the middle where gender is concerned.

Half the time, the primary coordinator of finance is the female partner; the other half, it's the male. As for the actual decision making, I would hope in any family that it's really a joint decision!

With the coordinating or decision making, I think it really just depends on who has the greater aptitude for understanding finances.

This is usually the person in the household who manages the bills or who has the most disposable time available.

Although in years past it wasn't always this way, where finance is concerned I don't think that gender plays a very big role for a woman or man when they select an advisory service.

At the end of the day, if the customer feels the person providing the service is knowledgeable, trustworthy and truly looking after their best interest, I don't actually think gender comes into play anymore.

Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO WOMEN INTERESTED IN ENTERING THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY?

My advice for males and females is the same.

It takes the same attributes to have success and longevity in the industry, regardless of your gender.

If you have a good knowledge of the industry and the lending products you are offering, and you have a keen eye for detail and can determine your client's needs and then meet them, then your chances of success are high.

It can be a job that comes with a higher level of stress so it's best suited to those that work well under pressure, and it also requires someone who can work on several things at once.

Q. DO YOU FIND YOU HAVE FLEXIBLE HOURS? IS THIS A BONUS?

These days, I do have flexible hours, which is always a good thing.

That being said, to be successful in this business the hours still have to be put in. So a later start time usually just means a later finishing time. Still, flexible hours do help manage life in general. ■



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SALLY WHITWORTH
Broker, Acceptance Finance