

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

"I'm using my voice as a leader to drive change across our industry."

Meghan Vallis

Group Sales
Vice-President, Western
Canada and myFlex
Equitable Life



"You don't have to play a role to be in leadership. You can be yourself."

Sofia Colaiacovo

Group Sales
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What was your journey to your current role?

Sofia: In 2005, I joined Equitable on the front line, where I maintained high service standards with plan sponsors and plan members. This role as a group service representative laid a great foundation for later career development opportunities. I then became a group account executive, where I pre-sold our value proposition to advisors and developed partnerships—all the while leveraging my expertise in Equitable's processes and policies to facilitate solution-based selling to our mutual clients. Stepping into the role of group sales vice-president was a natural progression, based on my service and sales background, as well as 18 years of Equitable experience.

Meghan: "Luck happens when preparation meets opportunity." I live by that quote. Since joining the industry in 2006, my career has been very intentional. I've prepared for opportunity, worked hard and earned everything I've achieved. Fuelled by continuous learning, genuine curiosity and networking, my success is rooted in this foundational preparation. I started in sales as a group account executive for an insurance carrier, then spent time on the advisor side in sales and leadership. I'm now back with Equitable Life, a mutual insurer. Networking within and outside the

organizations I've worked for has been key to my career progression—and I can't express enough how important networking is for women at any stage of their career.

How does Equitable Life support women moving into leadership positions?

Sofia: When I started at Equitable, there were as many women group account executives as there were men—and both the group sales vice-president and executive vice-president of the entire group department were women. Stepping-stone roles that provide the experience needed to move into leadership roles were very much open to women. For as long as I've been here, Equitable has been great at promoting from within and allowing people to explore different roles and lines of business. It's always encouraged me to see other successful women in leadership roles within our organization.

Have you seen shifts in the industry at large that support women's career growth?

Meghan: Definitely. In group benefits, we're breaking the stigma on how people outside the industry perceive the sales process. And instead, we're talking about what sales actually is: relationships and partnerships. Today, there's a better understanding of

skills like high emotional intelligence and empathetic listening, which are associated with higher closing ratios. I'd say the benefits space is unique in that there are a lot of women on and leading the insurer wholesale teams. On the other hand, we're still underrepresented on the advisor side of the business and at executive leadership levels—but there are more of us now than ever, and we're carving a path for others.

How are you taking advantage of your leadership role to drive positive change for women at work?

Sofia: I focus on leading by example, with authenticity, honesty and confidence. Knowing I got to where I am based on my skill and merit allows me to earn respect and credibility in and outside Equitable. I want to show other women you don't have to play a role to be in leadership. You can be yourself.

Meghan: I'm using my voice as a leader to drive change across our industry—big and small. From day-to-day things like getting free menstrual products in our washrooms or simply being in the room to share a different perspective, to building products that meet the needs of not just women but Canada's diverse population.