

Interview series.

## Leaders making a difference, 2024

International Women's Day Edition



### Nathalie Viens

Managing Director and Head of Asset Management Private Infrastructure, CBRE Investment Management

**Nathalie Viens** has worked in operational and asset management across several industries — renewable energy, transportation, fiber — before landing at CBRE Investment Management, where she is responsible for developing and managing private infrastructure, asset management, strategy and implementation across its portfolio. Her skill set throughout her career has included risk management, operational excellence & transformation, and value creation. Nathalie recently spoke with dss+ about why pragmatism has served her well, why female leaders should always ask for what they want, and why successful leadership is about empowering employees to thrive.

 Find **Nathalie Viens** on LinkedIn

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Your background is in private infrastructure. What influenced your early career and how did it lead to commercial real estate and portfolio management?

I always liked math, science and solving problems. I'm quite a structured person, I like to understand where I'm going, and the steps required to get there. I've used that methodology throughout my career to understand impact, risk, and outcomes. That led to engineering, construction, and understanding much more from a hands-on technical point of view how to address different problems, to then running an operation where it's about large-scale transformation. To do so requires understanding many variables and then defining both the right solution and the right people. The next logical step for me was how to incorporate financing and governance.



To drive operational excellence, we often talk of changing mindsets and behaviors. How can company culture and good leadership make a difference to operations management?

It's absolutely critical. Good leaders are both decisive and empowering. They are also key to successful execution and organization. You must have somebody who can empower a team, put together a strategy and a vision, and guide people so they deliver on it. I've seen indecisive leaders and that's very detrimental to an organization. Good communication is also important as is understanding how the company works and thinks. It is important for a leader, who comes into her role or into a new company to take time to understand how that company thinks and breathes and how information gets disseminated.

If you have a terrible company culture, people are not going to believe in what you're trying to do and they're not going to work toward same common goal. For that reason, it's important to create a trusting environment, to empower people, to make sure they know where you want them to go, and to give them the tools and the support to get them there. As a good leader your role is to make sure that you provide those guardrails.



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Describe your leadership style. How do you stay motivated and inspired as a leader?

People typically describe me as passionate, energetic, direct, and pragmatic. I focus on making sure I have an environment where people can freely talk and voice their opinions. I will always listen and always seek feedback. As a leader, you need to know when it is time for you to make a decision and when to move the team along. I also believe in putting the right people in the right seat and empowering them to be the best they can be. And that comes from a very diverse team because you need a diversity of opinions and diversity of experience, to bring the best out of people.

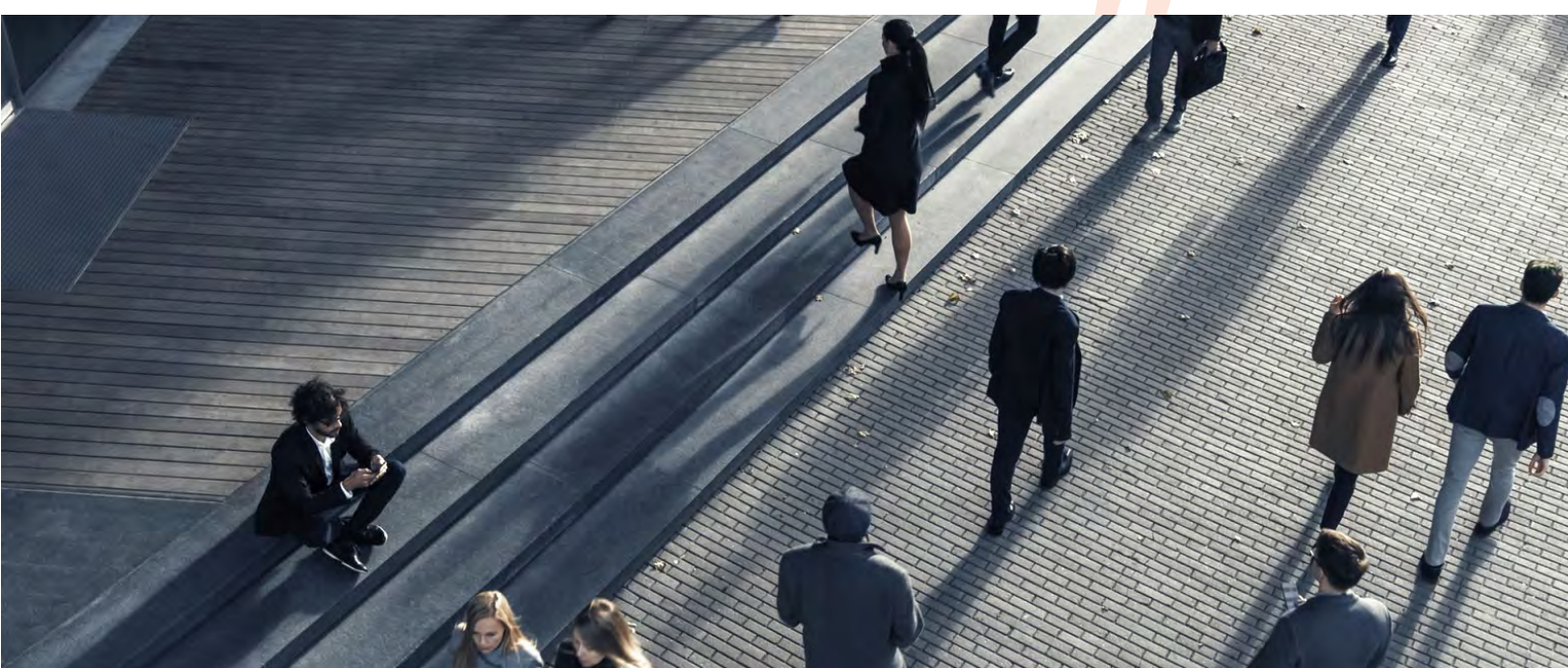
What fuels me as a leader is people. I really like working with people, seeing how they want to grow and how I can help them get there. I also like to learn all the time. So I continuously read, exchange with people, focus on value, and understand how I can do things differently.



In your current role, you are responsible for developing and managing CBRE IM's Private Infrastructure asset management strategy and implementation across the portfolio. How do you juggle your day-to-day responsibilities while still managing your overall responsibilities as a leader?

It's about understanding your priorities. A mentor once told me it's not about speed, it's about pace. Pace is more important than speed when you're trying to transform something. Being very structured and organized, I have the ability of seeing the bigger picture and then defining priorities. So understanding what's critical, what's non-negotiable, and then taking the time to have conversations to make sure that you can still focus on the key goals while not forgetting the smaller, more employee-focused activities that are necessary. It's a balance. And sometimes you do get off balance. I think that's just human nature. But it's all about how to rebalance yourself.

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## What is the best leadership advice you have ever received?

Somebody once told me it's very important to look at a situation from everybody's point of view. And that's an exercise I often do. When I'm sure of a direction, I pause and try to see how someone with different experience might view it. Being authentic is something that I also think is important for every leader. You must be you and you can only be you, so why be somebody else?

Finally, as you grow as a leader, your voice will impact people quite differently. When you say something, you must be very careful because your voice carries a lot of weight. You need to be aware of the impact your statement will make, and how it will be perceived and acted upon. Being aware of tone is also important. Understanding who is the right person to deliver a message to reach your desired outcome is also crucial as a leader.



## Why do you think health and safety is important in your industry?

Health and safety are always important in any industry. In the investment world, being further removed from some operational realities, it is important to focus on the message and emphasize the tone at the top. For me, health and safety within our portfolio company is their license to operate. It's our duty to make sure that the employees are going back home the same way they came in the morning. It is not only good for business, it is also the right thing to do.

There's a correlation between a safe culture and employees caring about what they do. That has repercussions on everything, including the financial, because people caring about doing their job the right way, the safe way, so they can go back home, will put that same care into everything they do. And it always translates in better financial results. The management team needs to focus on emphasizing the importance of health and safety, but it also needs to come from the top as well.



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