

# Tere Blanca on forming her firm during a real estate recession

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**Brian Bandell**  
Senior Reporter  
South Florida  
Business Journal



It seemed commercial real estate broker [Tere Blanca](#) had reached the pinnacle of her profession when she became senior managing director for Florida with Cushman & Wakefield. But she's truly had a bigger impact on the market since starting her own firm.

Founded in 2009, Miami-based Blanca Commercial Real Estate now has 11 full-time brokers and six support staff members, including a research and marketing team. Its revenue growth has averaged 30 percent the past three years. Blanca expects 2017 to be even better.

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The firm represents some of the most prominent commercial properties in Miami-Dade and Broward counties, including Brightline's MiamiCentral Station, Flagler Station, Riviera Corporate Center in Miramar, 1450 Brickell, 1111 Brickell, 1400 Biscayne and the Royal Palm Office Park in Plantation.

**When did your family come to the U.S.?** In 1979. In 1961, nine months after I was born, I left Cuba with my brother and my maternal grandparents. We went to Puerto Rico, where my grandfather had contacts in the banking industry. A year later, my parents left Cuba and joined us in Puerto Rico. My dad was a practicing attorney in Cuba. My mom had one year left to graduate from architecture school. In 1975, we went to Venezuela. I finished high school in the American school there. My mother and my dad relocated to Miami in 1978, and I joined them when I went to the [University of Miami](#) for my undergrad degree.

**What was your first job?** I was fortunate to get my first job at TotalBank at 17. I worked behind the teller line. We used to file checks. We used to read the signature and account number manually. My first job out of UM was at Barnett Bank. They placed me into the operational area of the bank, which I hated, so I went back to UM to get my master's degree. After I graduated, I worked [in sales] in San Diego, California for Burroughs [Corp.]. I used to get up at 4:30 or 5 in the morning and drive from city to city. Denny's restaurants became my satellite offices.

**When did you know that real estate was your career path?** Someone said to me, "You have really solid sales experience and you should look into commercial real estate in Southern California." I came across John Burnham & Co. and I decided to go with them because their top producer decided to take me under his wing and teach me the business.

**Did anyone serve as a mentor for your career?** Certainly [Hank Klein](#), [Armando Codina](#) and [Jeb Bush](#). When I joined Codina in April 1989, [Hank Klein](#) called me and recruited me.

**You founded your firm during a real estate recession. Did you view the timing as a challenge or an opportunity?** An opportunity. I had a gut feeling, which to me was years of experience and listening to clients and the market. I had so many friends in the business that were experiencing worry and distress, and I felt like people with experience and who cared about their clients could really make a difference for their businesses.

**How do you identify talented brokers and staff?** On the brokerage side, it's people that have that fire in the gut and also are inquisitive and are willing to learn and are team players. The real estate industry you can learn, just like people learn the pharmaceutical industry and the health care industry. We want to know there is a willingness to learn, that you are hungry for knowledge and for growing. I also believe, first and foremost, there has to be a willingness to be engaged with your community.

**How has it been rewarding for working with the mentoring organization City Year?** Anytime I hear about one student that was failing math or English or had disciplinary issues, and a member has been able to connect and make an impact and that student has been able to excel later and re-engage with the school in a positive way, it fills my heart with joy that one young person is on a path to contribute and change the path of a family that could be living in serious poverty.

**Where do you like to go on vacation?** Annually, we do a trip to the Bahamas. I am booked for two weeks. We go with a group of friends and take our boat along. We sleep on the boat and cook on the boat. We spend a lot of time navigating and going from island to island. Those long crossings are meditative and you can connect to nature, and it really recharges me mentally and physically.

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## TERE BLANCA

Age: 56

Birthplace: Havana

Residence: Coral Gables

Current position: Chairman, CEO and president, Blanca Commercial Real Estate

Community involvement and boards: Immediate past chair and current board member, City Year; board member, Miami Foundation, [University of Miami](#) real estate advisory council; board, BankUnited

Previous positions: Senior managing director for Florida, Cushman & Wakefeld; senior VP, Codina Realty Services

Education: B.B.A. and M.B.A., University of Miami

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