

Creating a Sense of Community

**An Interview with Herb Engert,
Office Managing Partner, New York, EY**

EDITORS' NOTE *Herb Engert served as EY Global Private Equity Leader before assuming his current role. Prior to this, he served as EY Americas' Growth Markets Leader for five years during which he enhanced the EY brand as the leading organization in serving the entrepreneur and middle market. He joined EY in 2002 from Arthur Andersen and has held roles across EY's Transaction Advisory Services, Assurance and Advisory businesses. Engert has a bachelor's degree in accounting from the St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York, and is a licensed Certified Public Accountant in the U.S. states of Maryland, New York and Virginia and the District of Columbia.*



Herb Engert

FIRM BRIEF *EY (ey.com) is a global leader in assurance, tax, transaction and advisory services. In the Americas, it employs more than 71,000 people and generates \$14.5 billion in revenues. Globally, EY employs more than 250,000 people in more than 150 countries and as of 2017 generated \$31.4 billion in revenues.*

How do you define the EY difference and what makes the firm so special?

I strongly believe in our leadership – I wouldn't be here if I didn't. Mark (Weinberger, CEO) sets a really great tone. Kelly (Grier, U.S. Chairman and Americas Managing Partner) recently started her new role leading the Americas, and since I've known her a long time, I know we're not going to miss a beat.

I believe our culture sets us apart. I'm encouraged to speak my mind and be myself. The firm's leadership has always encouraged me to share ideas. We have a very collaborative, collegial and open culture that gives all of us the opportunity to share what we feel and to be comfortable about being open and authentic.

My goal is to further that environment here in New York. We're more entrepreneurial than the average professional services firm. Even with a 250,000-person firm, with 65,000 in the U.S. alone, we encourage our people to share ideas and be innovative. We are given a lot of latitude and flexibility.

Mark just sent an internal video about how much he values a positive attitude in employees that I was inspired by. It's what I'm looking for.

Positive attitudes are going to help us create more of a sense of community in New York.

What excited you about this new role and has your past experience helped with the transition?

This is the dream job for me. I always loved my job working in growth markets and with entrepreneurs. Now, it will be my role to lead the New York office. There are different challenges because there are 9,000 people handling a lot of different types of clients.

However, I also dealt with those challenges when I was running private equity with 4,000 people around the globe, so I do think I'll be tapping into many of the same skills.

I'm focused now on our partner and people agenda – I'm only going to be successful if I can engage and inspire our people. I can do that by focusing on which direction we're going to head and making sure people understand the vision.

I'm trying to define what that vision of the future is for New York and how we want to be known in the community and in the market and, ultimately, the image of our brand.

We're a people business – technology is changing our interactions, but it won't displace our people. We have to make them feel that they are part of something important and that we're all working toward the same vision together.

Will you discuss the direction you are taking for EY's offices in New York?

We've gone to a future work concept in design internationally. Our first phase of development here in the Tri-State area was in Hoboken where we built an open-air environment with flexible workspace. We're trying to design space that works well, not just for our millennials, but for the people who will be working for us in the future as well.

For instance, we think it's productive to have numerous lounge areas for people to meet. We find it promotes collaboration and teaming. We believe strongly in it as do our people, especially the younger ones.

We're seeing the designs for our next phases at One Manhattan West soon. They're coming up with even more innovative concepts to include.

We also have two EY wavespace innovation centers in New York— in Union Square and

Chelsea. Wavespace is a global network that brings together various talents across services and practices in high-tech, collaborative environments. These state-of-the-art centers leverage technology and new methodologies and are a great place to host our client meetings and workshops.

As a firm, we focus on customer experiences and how to innovate for customers as well as on employee experiences.

Is technology going to be an enabler for your people or will it change the workforce of the future?

Both. We are focused on our future workforce, which is going to comprise our employees, contract workers, use of automation and robots.

Right now, we probably have the most virtual bots in the profession.

Contract workers are also a really important piece because we are able to be flexible and leverage specific skill sets.

From an internal perspective, to support the changing technology landscape, we have an EY badge program that allows for our people to be trained and certified in a particular technology and get a badge that verifies their new expertise. We believe we're a first mover in this. Once people gain these credentials in various technologies, our contract workforce piece becomes much more focused.

This allows us to constantly upskill our workforce. We are educating our people to work not only with automation and robotics but also with independent contractors.

How important is it that EY's workforce in New York mirrors the diversity of your clients and the diversity of the City?

Huge. Forty percent of our promotions last year were awarded to minorities and women. Our recruiting statistic is somewhere in that same vicinity.

New York City is the hot bed of diversity so it's hugely important to me. We still have work to do. We're doing the right things to get there, but we have to continue to develop and promote diversity in all our roles.

I've worked with my own clients on unconscious bias training, which is really important. We have also started to roll out a series of inclusive trainings.

I am proud that the firm knows diversity is a priority for us in New York and continues to support our efforts. ●