

Optimistic About New York

An Interview with Stephen B. Siegel, Chairman, Global Brokerage, CBRE, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to the merger with CBRE, Stephen Siegel was Chairman and CEO of Insignia/ESG. He initially rose to prominence in the industry at Cushman & Wakefield, where he became President and CEO at age 37. Renowned in the industry not only for the amount of deals he has closed, but for his philanthropic activity, Siegel at one point in his career sat on more than 16 non-profit boards. In 2015, he was celebrated, along with fellow honorees



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Queen Latifah and Danny Meyer, for his contributions to the Young Women's Leadership Network's CollegeBound Initiative, a program that creates opportunities for low-income students to attend college and serves nearly 13,000 students each academic year. He is regularly among the Commercial Observer's Power 100, a yearly ranking of the most powerful people in New York commercial real estate, and has been named by Crain's as one of the 100 Most Influential Business Leaders in New York City. In 2005, Siegel was featured in the Urban Land Institute's book, Leadership Legacies: Lessons Learned from Ten Real Estate Legends and, in 2011, he was featured in the best-selling Commercial Real Estate Brokers Who Dominate: Eight Traits of Top Producers. Siegel has also been honored with Commercial Property News' Lifetime Achievement Award.

FIRM BRIEF CBRE Group, Inc. (cbre.com) is the world's largest commercial real estate services and investment firm based on 2019 revenue and has more than 100,000 employees (excluding affiliates). CBRE offers a broad range of integrated services including facilities, transaction and project management; property management; investment management; appraisal and valuation; property leasing; strategic consulting; property sales; mortgage services and development services.

The world is fighting a public health crisis that is impacting all countries and their citizens. The pandemic is being fought on the front lines by healthcare workers, first responders, those providing supplies and meals, transportation workers and all other essential workers. What do you say to these true leaders and heroes that are risking their lives to protect others?

I say, "Thank You," and we need to continue to thank them as time goes on. When people in New York would bang pots and pans at 7:00 PM every night to acknowledge and honor these front line workers, it was an important way to show our appreciation and gratitude. As time passes, we need to continue this display as their efforts and jobs do not stop and they continue to show the true meaning of leadership.

New York City has been heavily impacted from the pandemic and faces a difficult recovery. What is your outlook for New York City and are you optimistic about its future?

I am always optimistic about New York City. This City has gone through many challenging and difficult times and always comes out stronger. This is clearly a time that is unprecedented. There will be a lot of hardship for many businesses and workers, especially for restaurants, hotels, and retail among others. It is going to take time for things to recover but once we get the virus under control and we have therapeutics and, ultimately, a vaccine, we will recover. We need strong leadership from state and local government, including supporting and funding law enforcement.

It is critical to have a strong public/private partnership to bring New York City back as we have had in the past during challenging times.

History has shown that out of crisis comes opportunity and we need to work together to bring New York back.

What is your outlook for the commercial real estate market in New York City?

People working from home is not a new phenomenon and will continue after the pandemic, but people will want to come back to work and to be around their coworkers. Facebook is a great example. They told their people that they can work from home, but they have also taken an additional 700,000 square feet of space in New York City because they know that people want to interact and socialize with others. In addition, even if less people are coming to the office, with social distancing and changes in the design of offices, companies will be using the same amount of space and, in some cases, will need more space.

I believe that young people from around the country will continue to want to come to New York to live and work and the investment that Facebook and Google have made in New York City proves that it is a place where talent wants to be.

How has CBRE adapted the way it works in order to address these challenging times?

It is difficult because we are in the relationship business. While technology has helped with Zoom meetings and e-mails, there is nothing that can take the place of sitting across the table from a client and looking them in the eye. I am a hugger and I miss hugging people – you can't hug virtually.

I am proud of how our team has found new ways to interact with each other and with clients, and CBRE is a leader in technology and has made major investments in our technology platform, but we look forward to once again seeing our clients in-person and building on our relationships.

What do you tell young people during these challenging times about a career in the real estate industry?

I recommend that they try to intern at a leading firm and to try to work for senior people within that firm to gain as much experience as they can and learn everything possible about the business. This is a difficult time, but real estate is not going away and if you have a good attitude and work hard, you will find opportunities. This is a great industry that plays an integral role in the economy and in our communities. ●

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