

A Legacy of Sincerity and Integrity

**An Interview with Howard J. Rubenstein,
President, Rubenstein Associates, Inc.**

EDITORS' NOTE Howard Rubenstein founded Rubenstein Associates, Inc. in 1954. Rubenstein provides strategic communications counsel and has advised leaders of multinational corporations, nonprofit organizations, and civic entities. Rubenstein sat on the Mayor's Committee on Business and Economic Development for New York City Mayors Abraham Beame, David Dinkins, and Rudy Giuliani. He serves on the executive committee of the Association for a Better New York, which he helped to found, and is a trustee of the Police Athletic League, the Foundation for the National Archives, and the Inner-City Scholarship Fund of the Archdiocese of New York. In addition, he is a Co-Founder and Vice Chairman of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. Rubenstein holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a doctorate of law from St. John's University School of Law. Early in his career, he served as Assistant Counsel to the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, and has also served as a consultant to the United States Foreign Claims Settlement Commission.



Howard J. Rubenstein

COMPANY BRIEF One of the United States' largest independent public relations agencies, New York-based Rubenstein Associates, Inc., along with Rubenstein Communications, Inc., and Rubenstein Public Relations, Inc., (www.rubenstein.com) represent a roster of more than 450 clients, including global corporations, media and entertainment companies, sports teams, financial services organizations, real estate concerns, educational and cultural institutions, law firms, health care providers, and not-for-profit organizations, as well as business executives and other public figures. Current clients include the New York Yankees, NewsCorp., Pfizer, the Metropolitan Opera, Museum of Modern Art, New York Presbyterian Hospital, Columbia University, and Tishman Speyer.

In light of the economic crisis, do you feel that New York City is still strong and vibrant today?

I do. There was a great feeling of pessimism a year and a half ago, when people that were solid financially yet experienced the downturn showed signs of timidity in terms of new investments and ideas.

Today, I have noticed a dramatic change in

the psychology of people of substance. They've started to plan new projects, and the banks have opened up a bit where, before, the window was shut.

Small, start-up businesses will still have a bit of a hard time. But the sense I get from businesspeople in New York City is there is only one New York and they're not going to look ahead with pessimism at the next 10 years. So there is a sense of optimism. New York City under Mayor Bloomberg has a stability that most big cities facing economic crises might not have. Because of his

business experience, he has steered a very clear path, and he has not lost his confidence.

From a communications point of view, what advice do you give to clients during these times?

I have always believed that it would be a mistake for any client or aspiring client or businessperson to overdo their publicity. Some build themselves up and then demand even more publicity. I always warn them to vary it. Take the decibel level up, but only towards a goal that you're seeking – not just as self-aggrandizement or an ego trip. After you achieve a certain level of attention, ease up. If you don't do that, you will become a target of people who are jealous or who are competitive with you.

So now I'm finding that more of my clients want moderate publicity built around achievement, not predictions.

Is the message getting out there today about the good that business is doing?

I've always encouraged both larger and smaller clients to do good, with or without public attention to it. Sooner or later, without looking like they're on a publicity campaign, their good deeds do get attention. In bad times, it's harder for them to focus on that. But those that maintained a reasonable level of civic and charitable effort now appreciate that they didn't bale out because they see the results of their efforts.

Having been in this industry for a long time, has it been hard to change?

This is my 56th year in my own business. It is challenging to keep up with all the changes, but my staff is very sophisticated in the use of new media. So while I might be able to talk with understanding about the field, I rely on their judgment and technical know-how.

But it's your intellect that governs. Any ad agency or PR firm that doesn't understand and help

shape the goals and direction of a client is missing the boat. When a client asks for something, you have to help them understand what will help them reach their goals. Then you bring the tools to play.

So there has to be an interrelationship and a willingness to cooperate and help each other reach the goal of your own firm as well as the goals of your clients. Failing that, you're never going to reach a height that you desire.

How do you define the key characteristics that are required by CEOs today?

First is integrity. For people in those positions who don't value integrity, sooner or later that catches up with them.

Second is intellectual curiosity. If people are mired in the past and will not look to the future, they're going to run into difficulty.

Third is how they relate to their staff. I have seen some leaders with brutal personalities. They should set an attitude and atmosphere of appreciation of the contribution their staff is making and could make.

Fourth is an ability to follow up on the directions you have set. Too many CEOs spell out the direction they want to take and then they're off doing something else. The successful ones come back and analyze and evaluate where it's going and are willing to change. Rupert Murdoch and the late George Steinbrenner fit these qualities.

Most good CEOs will welcome the ideas of others in their company and outside and will evaluate them. They may not agree with them all, but as tough as they may be, they usually listen and then either cast it aside or accept all or part of it.

How critical is a close working relationship within the business community in New York City, and between the Mayor and the business community?

It is somewhat unique, from my experience, that competitors can work together. I've been involved in four or five of the major organized business groups, and when they get together, people speak their piece, even though the competition is intense when they leave the room. But I've never seen goals that aren't focused on New York being successful; those groups are an essential element for the strength of our city.

Do you think about legacy?

If I leave any legacy, it's a legacy of concern for the people that helped me build our name and build my business. I'd like to leave the legacy of sincerity and integrity in a field that, too often over the years, has been slammed for not having that. ●