

CBRE's Commitment

An Interview with Mary Ann Tighe,
Chief Executive Officer-New York Tri-State Region, CBRE

EDITORS' NOTE *Mary Ann Tighe has been CEO of CBRE's New York Tri-State Region since 2002. She is a seven-time winner of the Real Estate Board of New York's Deal of the Year awards for ingenious brokerage and received the Louis Smadbeck Memorial Broker Recognition Award, REBNY's highest award in brokerage, and REBNY's Bernard H. Mendik Lifetime Achievement Award. She was also honored by the NYU Schack Institute of Real Estate with its Urban Leadership Award, the first woman to receive it. In January 2010, Tighe was named Chairman of the Real Estate Board of New York, the first woman to hold this position in REBNY's 114-year history and the first broker in 30 years. Tighe began her real estate career as a broker at the Edward S. Gordon Company, ultimately rising to the position of Vice Chairman of Insignia/ESG. Prior to entering the real estate field, she served as a Vice President of the American Broadcasting Companies.*



Mary Ann Tighe

COMPANY BRIEF *Headquartered in Los Angeles, CBRE Group, Inc. (www.cbre.com) serves real estate owners, investors, and occupiers through more than 300 offices (excluding affiliates) worldwide. With approximately 34,000 employees (excluding affiliates), CBRE offers strategic advice and execution for property sales and leasing; corporate services; property, facilities, and project management; mortgage banking; appraisal and valuation; development services; investment management; and research and consulting.*

What is the secret to CBRE's consistent leadership?

It starts with the people. We have been rigorous in our hiring and promoting practices and we have a commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

The second element is an attempt to institutionalize knowledge. So rather than having various silos of information or expertise, we have worked hard to make sure that the extraordinary repository of information we have, among our professionals and all our staff, is brought to the right person to use for the benefit of our customer.

Are the traits that you need coming into this business different than they used to be?

When I came into the business, brokers threw space at people – there was no attempt to understand their business or their strategic plan and align real estate with that; there was no effort to figure out how people accounted for real estate whether public, private, or not-for-profit – brokers just offered space.

Space remains important, but I sometimes think the pendulum has swung too far the other way, because now people think they can go online and know space, but there is no substitute for physically walking the space.

Now with the array of services we provide, space comes at the end of the journey, after the planning process, except in rare cases when something odd pops up and you have to act on it.

How much of an impact did you see on the real estate market as a result of the recession and has it come back strong?

It has come back strong, but not in the ways we expected. It's interesting to watch New York City evolve. WPP's CEO says the world is suffering from a shortage of intellectual capital, that the global markets are exploding so that there aren't enough people who are talented and trained in a 21st century environment to service all the businesses out there. Clearly, that is New York City's advantage. That is why the Mayor put so much effort into opposing the immigration restrictions with how damaging they are to the U.S. economy and how harmful they are to New York City.

Financial services have historically accounted for about 30 percent of our market. Since 2008 and the Lehman implosion, the larger financial service companies have been frozen and are just beginning to defrost. But it's definitely a shrinking market to the point where we'll end the year with that market at 25 percent of the occupied space.

What is growing is New York's presence in the technology sector where there has been great job growth, as well as in the communications and design worlds.

New York's resilience comes from its ability to make itself hospitable to businesses other than its historic core industries and from having a physical environment that can adapt as those industries move up and down in our business world.

Have you seen the opportunities change for women at senior levels and what kind of career can this industry offer?

We reached a tipping point some years back and if you look at the ranks of our junior and mid-level people in any of our operations, you're going to see that women are fully integrated into CBRE. Here, women are in positions of authority.

We recently won Deal of the Year and it's worth noting that the three of the senior-most transactors on all three Deal of the Year awards were women, two of whom were from CBRE.

Catalyst has said that for women to feel comfortable at a company, 40 percent of senior management has to be women. That is how CBRE operates so we have women that are building great careers here.

How important is having your people engaged in the community and is that a responsibility of companies today?

I can't imagine how anyone could justify being in the real estate industry and not have deep commitments to the well-being of the community as a whole. I feel confident that the New York real estate industry is the most philanthropic of all industries. In our firm, it's something we promote from the junior-most level.

We even ask our summer interns to do a project collectively, which raises a few thousand dollars that is committed to a charity. It's such a basic part of how we operate here that we want the people who are with us for just six weeks to be making a contribution in some way.

You now serve as Chairman of REBNY. How important is having such a close knit community there even though you're competing?

REBNY has 12,000 members who operate in every conceivable sector of real estate in New York. I am proud to be associated with the Board because it represents our industry's neutral ground, the place where our industry comes together to address challenges to our city and to our businesses.

We play offense in trying to make certain things better and defense in trying to deal with the unintended consequences of misguided ideas. Because we have such a broad range of experts, we can vet an idea really well and we all take it seriously because we will live with the results of our efforts, our successes and failures, every day. ●