

Corcoran's Culture

An Interview with Pamela Liebman,
President and Chief Executive Officer, The Corcoran Group

EDITORS' NOTE Pamela Liebman was appointed to her current position in 2000. Shortly after joining The Corcoran Group as an agent in 1985, she was named Director of the company's first downtown office, which grew from 12 to more than 70 agents under her guidance. Liebman studied at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and at the European Business School in London. She is recognized by The New York Post and Crain's New York Business as one of the 50 Most Powerful Women in New York.



Pamela Liebman

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 1973, Corcoran (www.corcoran.com) is the largest residential real estate firm in New York. After expanding into other luxury markets, acquiring leading firms in New York, the Hamptons, and Florida, the firm now operates 42 offices and employs more than 2,200 agents.

Has the real estate market in New York fully recovered?

We're well beyond the recovery and in the midst of one of the strongest cycles I have ever seen.

Our transaction volume in Manhattan and Brooklyn is near the 2007 peak and, in some cases, we're exceeding it.

Is the pricing more sustainable than it once was?

It feels stronger than it did last time; it feels more real. Last time, the market was filled with speculators and flippers. This market is more about true ownership, which always makes for a more stable market.

We're also not seeing the huge double-digit price increases that were happening before; it's a steadier climb in prices, which gives me more comfort. Additionally, we don't have the crazy mortgage loans that created a lot of transactions but not necessarily good ones.

Does it surprise you to see how popular certain areas of the city have become?

It doesn't surprise me. Since I started in this business, New York has continued to grow. As certain neighborhoods become too expensive or established, pioneers push them out further. So there are always neighborhoods that are coming into vogue. This is part of the fabric of New York life.

Are we approaching the point where a large percentage of the population is going to be priced out of Manhattan?

I certainly hope not. This is a discussion that has been going on for many years, but people always find a way to stay here. They are going to be priced out of certain neighborhoods so it's important in the long-term planning of the city that more affordable housing is created. Nobody wants to see the diversity of New York ruined by creating a city of only the

wealthy.

Is further growth more difficult to achieve now that you have gained such size and scale within the industry?

We don't have trouble growing, but as markets evolve, we grow in different ways. We build different types of offices and we look at different types of expansions. However, we always focus on what we're best at, which is organic growth through continuing to grow our core business in Manhattan and Brooklyn. We just expanded in Brooklyn Heights and our Corcoran Sunshine business is currently going through a tremendous expansion to meet the needs of the emerging new development market.

With the increased use of technology, will there still be a need for a brick-and-mortar establishment?

We have a lot of agents that work virtually – they don't have assigned desks. But they have assigned managers and they're welcome to come into the office whenever they like. With the great technology we have at Corcoran, it's very easy for them to be mobile.

We have over 50 people in our technology department and we consider that one of the most important areas of the company. If you fall behind on technology, it's very challenging to catch up.

I also oversee the Citi Habitats brand and we're doing things differently there. The new offices we're building are what we consider to be the offices of the future. While there are assigned desks, there are also several lounge areas and hotspots, as well as iPad stations throughout. It is a sexy office, one which we think a lot of people will want to have their office environment look and feel like in this new age of technology.

Should buyers and renters thoroughly research brokers and is there enough awareness of how critical it is to find the right broker?

Many buyers find their homes, and the brokers that come with them, online. We want to find the home that is right for each client and we do that by matching them with the right agent. Our Web site gives us a lot of opportunity to match a client with the proper agent.

Finding a home is an emotional process and we want to make sure we have the right person for each client.

Does the investment in market research greatly differ from firm to firm and how important is it to be known as a leader within that space?

We have four full-time people in our research department and it is important for our agents to be up on all of the statistics and market trends, as well as all historical information. We do a very good job of putting this information into the hands of the agents and the public.

Buyers and sellers today are well-informed given the amount of data that is out there. So we need our agents to be smarter about our market than the buyers and sellers, and to be able to bring pertinent information to light personally. If you only see it on a computer screen, it's not nearly as meaningful as when someone translates it – and this is what our agents are terrific at.

How important is corporate responsibility for Corcoran?

Corcoran has the heart of a small company and the power of a big company – and our culture is very well-defined. I have been at the company since we were only 30 people. We felt like a family back then – and we feel like a much bigger family today.

When we started Corcoran Cares, it was because we were very involved in the communities in which we do business and wanted to be an active participant in what helps build the foundation of the community. Most Corcoran brokers and agents donate a share of their commissions to Corcoran Cares. The company matches these contributions, which are sent directly to local, nonprofit groups and organizations in the neighborhoods Corcoran serves.

Working at Corcoran is different than working elsewhere – it's a collegial atmosphere. We like to hang out with each other as well as be successful together. ●