



Robby Browne

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to his career as a real estate broker, Robby Browne owned and operated Broune-Ladd Tours, which organized student trips to Europe. He worked for the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee from 1983-1984, and was director of the Olympic Village at the University of California, Santa Barbara for the 1984 Olympics. In addition, he has worked as a teaching fellow at Andover and was a part-time admissions officer at Harvard Undergraduate. He has served on the board of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and The Gay Games, and has been actively involved with the Student Sponsor Partnership Program in NYC. He has been a sponsor for more than 10 years of the "Teach for America" program. Browne is a graduate of Phillips Academy, Princeton University, and Harvard Business School.

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

How did you get started in this business and why did you stay?

Even though I went to Princeton and Harvard, I'm not a particularly good student. However, I am an excellent listener and remember almost every conversation I've ever had. I can't remember movies, songs, or historical facts yet I have a photographic memory for floor plans, spaces, and sales prices, which helps me in what I do.

After moving to New York, I found myself regularly walking by the new Halstead office on Columbus between 79th and 80th Streets. One stiflingly hot day, I walked in to cool off for a moment and wound up talking with Clark Halstead, who hired me on the spot. They had just switched from an analogue system to using computers and data entry

Being Who I Am

An Interview with Robby Browne, The Corcoran Group

listings, and I was hooked on the revolutionary technology. Clark still took the time to have regular lunch meetings with every broker and I learned so much from him, and from Dinah Modiano. Clark always said that my early success was attributable to being both well connected and a "closer," but I also worked morning to night, seven days a week. Hard work is something that successful people in any field have in common.

The real estate business worked for me because I never felt I had a boss – although in many ways I have hundreds of bosses because every client is a boss and I feel profoundly responsible to them. This is the perfect fit for a free spirit like me, because I don't feel like I have a job. There are no health benefits, and no paycheck, nor pension; only commission earned if one rents or sells a property. It has allowed me to always be honest and true in my work, wholly and uncompromisingly myself, and to have a platform to help people connect with a home that is a perfect fit with who they are.

There is the perception that all New York agents are out there selling \$50-million apartments because those are the sales that make the headlines. But that's not true. The \$50-million dollar apartments are actually very few in number. New York has a wide range of properties for sale at all different price points. There's just as much satisfaction in matching someone who has a modest budget with their first home.

What makes Corcoran so special to you?

I love my colleagues. I trust and respect them. I'm at a company that celebrates diversity, so I've always been able to be myself, which is a rare combination.

I appreciate learning new things and staying ahead, and Corcoran is always ahead of the curve. That has been important, since technology has changed the world more so than the Industrial Revolution. Corcoran makes it possible for me to be completely current and always learning something new, which is a value that passes through to my clients.

Pam Liebman (President and CEO) has taken what Barbara Corcoran created and developed it, establishing a prominent Corcoran presence citywide. I went to see our new Chelsea office and flipped out. It reminded me of my visits to the Google offices. The atmosphere

makes people want to go to work. I hear the new Corcoran Soho office is even better.

One of the things that has always been valued at Corcoran is the feeling that by being the most authentic version of oneself, one has the ability to be at the top of his or her game. I have a special fondness for the company because of that attitude.

The best way to achieve one's goals is to be true to oneself, and my work at Corcoran has really allowed me that freedom. I believe it is the core component of my achievements.

What makes giving back so important to you?

My mother was a huge giver. She became a residential real estate broker, rising to partner in the late 1950s, at a time when women were typically not in the business world. She used to babysit me at open houses and I would draw floor plans of how I thought homes should be designed.

Partly as a result of my brother's death from AIDS in 1985, and the death of so many of my friends from AIDS, and the fear that I was going to die myself, I channeled my energy into Gay Men's Health Crises, Act Up, God's Love We Deliver, and many other causes. One that I started was a holiday toys for tots party, which was a way for gay men to meet each other rather than at a bar or a gym. They wanted to do something for others because the technology and legality of having kids of their own was not there. Many people met at those parties who are still partners today. This will be our 31st year of hosting the toys for tots party.

When I was turning 60, I wanted to have a big cool party, inviting everyone I knew from childhood in Louisville to now, and have the Village People perform. I wanted to celebrate that I was alive and celebrate the lives of the people I desperately missed who didn't get a chance to see their 60th birthdays. However, instead of a birthday celebration I asked Corcoran if I could accept the Corcoran broker of the year award while dancing to the Village People, dressed in a lady's one piece bathing suit and silver heels. It was a release for me, a remembrance of people I lost and a lesson for those in the audience that they too can achieve great things by keeping a sense of humor, maintaining their dignity, and being honest and true to their own spirits. And don't be fooled, it's a lot of hard work. ●