

Continuous Reinvention

An Interview with Joseph C. Shenker, Chair, Sullivan & Cromwell LLP

EDITORS' NOTE *Joseph Shenker joined Sullivan & Cromwell upon graduation from Columbia Law School in 1980, became a partner in 1986, led the firm's global commercial real estate practice for more than 20 years, has been a member of the firm's Management Committee since 1996, and was named Vice Chairman in 2006 and Chairman on January 1, 2010. Among his pro bono and community activities, Shenker is a member of the Dean's Council of the Board of Visitors of Columbia Law School and served on the Board of Trustees of the Mount Sinai Medical Center and as a trustee and Chairman of the Met Council on Jewish Poverty.*



Joseph C. Shenker

FIRM BRIEF *Headquartered in New York, Sullivan & Cromwell LLP (sullcrom.com) provides the highest-quality legal advice and representation to clients around the world. The results the firm achieves have set it apart for more than 140 years and have become a model for the modern practice of law. Today, Sullivan & Cromwell is a leader in each of its core practice areas and in each of its geographic markets. The firm's success is the result of the quality of its lawyers, one of the most broadly and deeply trained collection of lawyers in the world.*

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?

THANK YOU! None of our communities could have gotten through this without you. I very much hope that this gratefulness will also translate into better health safeguards, equipment and appropriately scaled pay for you.

How critical is it for there to be a strong public/private partnership to ensure a safe and effective reopening of New York?

It is completely necessary and is an opportunity to bring together private enterprise and government to deal with the existing problems that surfaced during the pandemic as well as those caused by it. Each have something to contribute, and by combining our resources

and our skill sets, we can accomplish much more.

How concerned are you about New York's future and its ability to remain a leading global city?

It all depends on our ability to bring together the public/private partnership to deal with the existing and new issues.

How has Sullivan & Cromwell adapted its business to effectively serve its clients during this unprecedented time?

Following our experience in Superstorm Sandy, when we had to close our downtown headquarters for almost 2 weeks and move our lawyers to other sites in the city, we decided to create a technology infrastructure that would avoid the need for any office site should an even more widespread interruption take place. In the years since 2012, we spent heavily building that remote work technology infrastructure. Thus, we were able to successfully pivot on short notice from a largely in-office model in our 13 offices around the world to remote work.

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How critical is it for Sullivan & Cromwell to have a diverse and inclusive workforce in order to bring different experiences and ideas to the table when making business decisions?

The New York legal graveyard and indeed the corporate graveyard – the annals of bankruptcy cases – are filled with organizations that looked inward and were insular. Our goal is to continuously reinvent ourselves in order to maintain our model of innovative, creative and outside-the-box thinking in every aspect of our management and practice. You can only have that if you reinvent from the broadest possible “pool” of people with the most divergent backgrounds. Otherwise, you miss out and ultimately perish. We look very different today than we looked 140 years ago, and even 10 years ago, and it is my hope and expectation that we will look different 10 years from now as well – just as the world will. We can't get there unless we constantly look to hire people different than those doing the hiring, and make them feel 100 percent welcome and included.

How proud are you to see the way Sullivan & Cromwell's people have performed during this difficult and uncertain time?

This has understandably been a stressful time to be a CEO of any organization. But what has more than made up for the stress and has been so extraordinarily uplifting to all of us at Sullivan and Cromwell is the way people have pulled together and supported each other and our clients to get through this period. We are better and stronger for it.

What do you see as a company's responsibility to the communities it serves?

It is important to create a safe, respectful and equal opportunity environment and influence the wider community which it touches to do the same.

What are the keys to effective leadership during challenging and uncertain times?

Transparency, leading by example, and admitting what you don't know.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers during this difficult and unprecedented time?

This too shall pass. Hard as I know this undoubtedly is, particularly for you, it's important to look for the opportunities to learn and grow from the experience. ●