

Built On Trust

An Interview with Robert Wotczak, President and Chief Executive Officer, Freedom Capital Markets

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to Freedom Capital Markets, Rob Wotczak was the founding partner of the Wotczak Group, a capital markets advisory firm for small-cap public issuers and IPO candidates. During his career he has operated as president of a Nasdaq-listed environmental solutions company and a senior executive at the New York Stock Exchange within the listings group. In addition to serving as an NYSE Institutional Floor Brokerage Firm senior trader, during his tenure at the Exchange he was responsible for the oversight of over 600 issuers, new listings, strategic planning, and a \$40 million revenue base that involved over 200 listings of OTC up-listings, SPACs, and IPOs. In conjunction with his duties at Freedom Capital Markets, Wotczak is the Chairman of the Board of Directors of ITS, an international equities liquidity hub operating in Central Asia, and is a member of the board of directors of the Green Impact Exchange (GIX), a new U.S. equity exchange expected to serve as the nexus between sustainably-minded companies and investors. During his career he has also formed a broker-dealer inside a private bank and served as its securities principal and Compliance Registered Options Principal (CROP). His 30 years in the capital markets space have made him a much sought after financial markets advisor and international subject matter expert, guest speaker, and panelist, appearing at global financial conferences. Wotczak earned his bachelor's degree and a bachelor of business administration in management and finance at Baruch College.



Robert Wotczak

FIRM BRIEF Freedom Capital Markets (freedomcapmks.com) is a full-service investment banking and capital markets advisory firm. With a team boasting over 500 public listings to their credit in the past 25 years, Freedom Capital Markets offers a comprehensive range of services, including initial public offerings, mergers and acquisitions, debt and equity financing, corporate banking, trading, hedging, and research. The firm prides itself on partnering closely with clients to understand their unique requirements and customize strategies that best address their needs. Its expertise spans various industry sectors, including clean energy, healthcare and life sciences, technology, and consumer goods. Freedom Capital Markets is committed to providing creative, compliant financial solutions that clients can rely on, leveraging the rich experience and dedication of its leadership team.

What interested you in the opportunity to lead Freedom Capital Markets and made you feel it was the right fit?

I initially worked as an advisor to Freedom Capital Markets' parent company, Freedom Holding Corp., as they sought to list the company's shares on Nasdaq. With Freedom Holding's decision to establish a beachhead in the U.S., my advisory roles for the parent were diverse, but primarily, taking the company from an initial listing application through to the bell ringing of a successful listing on Nasdaq under the ticker symbol FRHC, was the goal. During this process, I began to learn more about the company's principal, Timur Turlov, the vision he wanted to achieve, and his company's operations overseas.

The primary objective was to become an international, diversified financial services organization with a universe of products, including investment banking and capital markets advisory services. The more I thought about this, the more I realized how in synch I was with the company and how much of my 30-year career in the capital markets business could positively influence its plans. Having spent over a decade at American stock exchanges, overseeing hundreds of issuers, and creating and leading a broker/dealer organization myself, I gained a deep knowledge base of the processes required to become publicly traded and to stay listed. As all parties came to the table after Freedom Holding Corp.'s debut on Nasdaq, we recognized how valuable we could be to one another in helping the company establish its U.S. footprint. It was the right fit for me, for the company, and it all happened at the right time.

How do you define Freedom Capital Markets' mission and values?

Our mission is to empower our clients to achieve their corporate growth goals. Whether through providing a better understanding and access to the capital markets, or through advising them on their corporate governance and compliance infrastructure, our mission remains the same. Our values are encapsulated by the words trust, experience, patience, collaboration, and delivery. To succeed in this business, you need to establish trust with your clients, your team, and the overall network of partners you deal with. To achieve this, you have to appropriately manage expectations and consistently deliver credible and actionable advice that clients and team members can count on. In thinking about these relationships, we're a "big picture" kind of organization

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that takes a long-term, patience-based view conducting business in a way that brings diverse pieces of the capital markets puzzle together to create a win-win environment. The foundation behind all of this is the hard-earned experience of our expert team of bankers, advisors, and administrators, all working to achieve the common goal of creating the best client experience possible.

Will you provide an overview of Freedom Capital Markets' business?

We deliver a comprehensive suite of investment banking, research, and capital markets advisory services to our clients. The experience of our team members and their commitment to client service are our most significant differentiators when dealing with issues relating to equity capital markets, mergers and acquisitions, debt capital markets, and corporate access and research. We operate in various industry verticals with team experts in clean energy, healthcare and life sciences, industrials, and technology to name just a few. Our specialty lies in enterprise value creation by increasing access to capital markets – finding the right investors, for the right client, at the right time. Our long-term vision is to be a bespoke middle-market investment bank, and we get there by forging trusted strategic partnerships with our clients throughout the entire life cycle of their capital markets journey. From early-stage financing to executing complex transactions, we aim to provide seamless end-to-end solutions that adapt to our clients' ever-evolving needs.

What have been the keys to Freedom Capital Markets' industry leadership, and how do you describe the Freedom Capital Markets difference?

I know that it might sound cliché, but the differentiator for us is in our people and our

corporate culture. Investment banking is often considered cutthroat, both inside and outside an organization. We've learned that by hiring the right kind of team members who buy in to our corporate culture of client service and teamwork, we're better able to retain good people and gain and retain good clients. There are many ways to get across the finish line; we prefer to get there together, intact, and with the best interest of our clients in mind. We've learned that hiring right, and by the same token, firing right, is the key to our success and what sets us apart from the pack. We want our team members and our clients to enjoy being engaged with each other.

How important has it been to continue to build the Freedom Capital Markets team?

I mentioned patience a little earlier in our discussion. This is a critical factor in a highly competitive talent market. Don't get me wrong, we never lose sight of the sense of urgency in hiring the right people to deliver on our promises and our financial advisory services and products, but we've also learned the lesson behind the adage, "haste makes waste" when selecting the right individuals to join our team. It's for this reason that not everyone makes the cut in our hiring process. We've passed on some very seasoned individuals to ensure we have the right combination of team members to deliver on the client experience. In addition, we have a robust internship program here at Freedom Capital Markets that allows us to identify talented individuals at an early stage of their careers. It's essential to build the kind of cohesive structure like the one we have here, and we believe it will continue to be the key to our success in the future.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you approach your management style?

It's my belief that there are several keys to effective leadership, and they are all based on the foundation of integrity. Leaders with integrity are trusted to do the right thing, even when no one is watching, setting the tone for a team. Leading in this way is a kind of silent communication that underlies an individual's ability to generate trust, gather information, create strategy, and communicate effectively in providing direction. Good leadership also requires a certain degree of empathy which helps a leader connect with their team members by identifying and understanding their challenges and motivations, and providing them the tools they need to elevate their strengths and face their challenges head on. This sort of thing takes a self-aware individual who can turn the lens on themselves to evaluate their own strengths, weaknesses, and blind spots, which ultimately helps them make better decisions and build stronger relationships. It's not complicated but it requires thoughtful and consistent effort. With this kind of managerial posture underpinning your activities, you can motivate employees, generate innovation, and foster a high-caliber working environment, without micromanaging which can be the death of a working relationship. It's this sort of leadership style that brings into focus a common goal, and for Freedom Capital Markets, it's satisfied clients who come back to us for their next transaction and who refer their associates to us for their capital markets' needs. When a leader creates this kind of internal authenticity centered around trust, patience, and ultimately, gratitude, their organization almost automatically transmits this attitude to the client relationship, which is good for everyone. ●

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