

# From The Locker Room To The Boardroom

An Interview with Mike Tepedino, Founder and Managing Partner, Blue Light Capital

**EDITORS' NOTE** Mike Tepedino has been in the real estate industry for 38 years. Prior to founding Blue Light Capital, he was an original partner at HFF and was part of the executive/management team that took the company public in 2007. He was also part of the executive/management team that completed the sale of HFF to JLL in 2019 for \$2 billion. Most recently, Tepedino ran the capital markets business for JLL in the Northeast with direct management responsibility for over 300 employees. During his 26 years at HFF/JLL, he completed over \$51 billion in transactions and was widely recognized as one of the leading intermediaries in the U.S. Prior to HFF/JLL, he spent six years at Travelers Insurance Company and four years at Legg Mason Real Estate Services. Tepedino graduated from Skidmore College and has an MBA from Fordham University.



Mike Tepedino

**FIRM BRIEF** Blue Light Capital ([bluelightre.com](http://bluelightre.com)) specializes in flexible, execution-driven real estate financing. Leveraging over 100 years of investment experience and over \$60 billion of real estate transactions, the firm's fully integrated platform enables it to provide solutions for borrowers with real estate opportunities that either fall outside the realm of traditional and/or larger institutional lenders or simply require a more flexible and straightforward capital solution.

## Will you highlight your career journey?

Growing up as a child I always used to stare at big buildings, and I had an infatuation with real estate. My father would take me into Manhattan, and I was fascinated with skyscrapers and knew that I wanted to get into the real estate business. After college and business school, I asked myself how all of these developers were getting the capital to build the skyscrapers that I had been so enamored with as a child. I went into the finance part of the business and started as a lender for six years which is where I learned the fundamentals of the business, including real estate valuation and underwriting. At the age of 29, I decided to get into the brokerage business and never really looked back. I became an original partner at HFF working with Mark Gibson who is an amazing salesman, businessman, and an even better person. We and others grew the business substantially over the years and eventually sold it to JLL. I stayed on at JLL for four years and then retired at the age of 59. I went

home and thought to myself, what now? This led to the idea of creating BL Next, which focuses on four areas that were important to me – real estate, sports, kids, and education. I had a vision that the DNA of an athlete was really special for all the reasons everyone knows: teamwork, collaboration, work ethic, resiliency, time management, and athletes are highly competitive. These are the characteristics that corporate America wants, needs and looks for when hiring talent. The challenge that athletes faced was that they did not have the technical skills

to compete with the students who took traditional business classes. BL Next was created to fill this void by offering free technical CRE training, resume building and interview prep, live monthly webinars, job and internship placement, mentorship programs, and industry connections. The focus is to supplement the athlete with the technical skills needed to succeed, provide mentorship, and then help with job placement. We are one year into this effort and have 140 student-athletes participating in the program.

I have been loving the nonprofit work, but was missing the for-profit part of the business, so I launched a credit platform. I have always believed that you need three things to succeed in business: you need a great business plan; you need capital; and you need a best-in-class team to execute your business plan. The business idea was to fill the void in the market by buying distressed debt and doing first mortgages for the middle market, lending between \$15 million and \$50 million – which is a less competitive space. I saw a market opportunity and had spent my entire life in credit, so it made sense to get into the business. We went out and formed a partnership with a very large insurance company who committed \$500 million to our idea which was great, and then we built the team around the idea. We have been fully operational for about six months, and have been actively closing transactions.

## How do you balance your time between building the business while building BL Next?

The reality is that you need to have a great team of people around you, and you have to be willing to delegate and trust others. This has always been a part of my management style.

## What are your plans on how to scale BL Next?

That is an important question. I have learned in the year that I have been doing this

that there is an insatiable demand on both sides of the equation – there is unlimited demand from the student-athletes for the technical skills, and there is unlimited demand from the corporations who are interested in hiring student-athletes who possess these technical skills. If you asked me how big we can make BL Next, I would say that we can do 500 kids a year if we had the resources and capital. This is our goal, and it is part of the reason we are having an event, The Starting Block, to help make people aware of what we are doing. The vision for the event is to merge the world of real estate with the world of sports, and my hope is that when people go home they say that it was a valuable experience with great people, and that they like what we are doing and that supporting student-athletes is a cause they may want to be involved with moving forward.

## Do you approach the nonprofit work the same way you approach your business?

I do look at it like a business and am always focused on how many schools we have, how many student-athletes we have, how many corporations we have, how much money did we raise. I am a scoreboard watcher – this is just how I am wired.

## Are you able to take moments to reflect on the impact that BL Next has made in a short period of time, and do you take time to celebrate the wins?

I look at what I refer to as the small wins, and then there are the big wins. The small wins we get every day when we receive a note from a kid telling us that they completed our program and how grateful they are to have learned the skills needed to put them in a position for success. We get these testimonials almost every day, and it is really gratifying. The big wins are when someone gets hired because they came through the program. The really big wins will be when we have more kids participating which means we will have more people behind us because ultimately, we will need more financial support and corporate partners to hire our kids.

## When you look at building more awareness for BL Next, what would you want people to know about its mission?

BL Next is helping student-athletes become better real estate professionals by taking the DNA of the athlete and providing them with the technical skills and mentoring opportunities to succeed in business. We want that kid to excel in the real estate business, just as they excelled on the field. ●



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# Building Community

An Interview with Steve Aoki, Founder, Aoki Labs



Steve Aoki

**EDITORS' NOTE** Counting nearly three billion music streams to his name, Steve Aoki is a true visionary. Billboard described the 2x-GRAMMY-nominated music producer, artist, fashion designer, entrepreneur, futurist, and Dim Mak Records founder as “one of the most in-demand entertainers in the world.” A Guinness World Record holder for the “Most Traveled Musician in a Single Calendar Year,” Aoki has performed at nearly every top festival around the world, including Coachella, Ultra Music Festival, Lollapalooza, Fuji Rock Festival, Tomorrowland, and Electric Daisy Carnival. Aoki also graced recent covers of Entrepreneur Magazine, Success Magazine, Electronic Musician, and Adweek as their “Visionary of the Year.” As a globally successful cross-genre solo artist, Aoki has collaborated with an impressive list of varied artists, including BTS, Maluma, Snoop Dogg, Linkin Park, blink-182, One Direction’s Louis Tomlinson, Machine Gun Kelly, Lil Uzi Vert, 2 Chainz and Daddy Yankee, on top of having released three Platinum singles, six Gold singles, and over ten Top 10 radio records. Aoki approaches each new endeavor with the same sense of dedication he’s put into his past achievements, including the Grammy-nominated Netflix documentary I’ll Sleep When I’m Dead and his memoir BLUE: The Color of Noise. In 2012, he also founded The Aoki Foundation to support organizations in brain science and its research. His influential record label Dim Mak, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2021, is known for being a

launching pad for the careers of prominent acts like Bloc Party, The Chainsmokers, Bloody Beetroots, The Kills, Zedd, and Diplo.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Aoki Labs (aokilabs.vc) is the venture platform founded by global artist and entrepreneur Steve Aoki. Combining strategic capital, brand insights, and community access, Aoki Labs partners with early-stage companies at the intersection of culture and innovation. The platform is actively investing across consumer, health, AI, and emerging tech – with an ethos rooted in collaboration, creativity, and long-term value building.

## Will you discuss your career journey?

My journey has always been about building community. I started out throwing small shows in my college apartment, just trying to create a space where people felt connected through music. That passion eventually grew into founding Dim Mak, touring the world as a DJ, and expanding into all kinds of creative and entrepreneurial projects. At every stage, I’ve looked for ways to push boundaries, whether that’s with music, technology, or philanthropy. It’s never been just about my career – it’s been about creating platforms and experiences that bring people together.

## When did you develop your passion for music?

Music has been a part of my life since I was a kid. I was surrounded by so many

“Aoki Labs was born from my curiosity about the future – how science, technology, and innovation can enhance the human experience. The mission is to back visionary companies that are reimagining how we live and feel, whether that’s through health, wellness, longevity, consumer products, or digital connection.”

different influences growing up – punk, hardcore, hip-hop, electronic – and I felt this drive to not just consume it, but contribute to it. When I discovered how powerful it was to connect with people through sound, I knew it was what I wanted to dedicate my life to.

**What was your vision for creating Aoki Labs, and how do you define its mission?**

Aoki Labs was born from my curiosity about the future – how science, technology, and innovation can enhance the human experience. The mission is to back visionary companies that are reimagining how we live and feel, whether that's through health, wellness, longevity, consumer products, or digital connection. At its core, Aoki Labs is about investing in ideas that make life better and more meaningful.

**How is Aoki Labs committed to enhancing human well-being by backing companies that are reimagining how we live and feel?**

We look for founders and companies who are deeply passionate about solving problems that matter. That could mean advancing health tools, rethinking nutrition, developing AI-driven solutions, focusing on next-gen consumer products, exploring new ways of connecting communities online, or investing in technology that will change the way we live. The through line is human well-being – every investment we make has to tie back to improving how people live, feel, and ultimately thrive.

**Will you highlight The Aoki Foundation's efforts to support organizations in brain science and its research?**

The Aoki Foundation is very close to my heart. Our focus has been on supporting brain science, regenerative medicine, and research that can change the future of health. We've worked with some of the world's leading institutions to advance studies around brain health, longevity, and ways to fight diseases that impact millions of lives. I see the Foundation as a way to leave a legacy that's bigger than music – one that hopefully contributes to breakthroughs in how we understand and improve the human mind.

**Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build your own business?**

Definitely. Even before music, I was organizing shows, starting small businesses, and trying to create something out of nothing. I've always had that drive to build, to take risks, and to bring people together around ideas. Music gave me a platform to do it on a global scale, but the entrepreneurial spirit was always there.

**With all that you have accomplished in your career, are you able to take moments to reflect and appreciate what you have achieved?**

I try to. My life moves really fast, and I'm always chasing the next project or idea, so it's easy to keep looking forward. But I've learned to pause and reflect, especially when I see the impact of what I'm doing. Seeing fans who grew up with my songs or seeing the breakthroughs of ideas we've supported – those are



the moments when it hits me, and I feel truly grateful.

**When you look back at your career, what are you most proud of?**

I'm most proud of the community we've built. From the earliest Dim Mak shows to the festivals and tours today, it's always been about

connection. I'm proud that I've been able to use my platform to not just entertain, but to invest in the future, support science, and inspire others to dream big. At the end of the day, it's not the awards or the records – it's the lives touched and the communities built that mean the most to me. ●