

Enriching Lives And Strengthening Community

An Interview with Seth Pinsky, Chief Executive Officer, The 92nd Street Y

EDITORS' NOTE Since joining The 92nd Street Y (92NY), Seth Pinsky has spearheaded a transformative rebrand and a \$200 million master redevelopment plan, positioning 92NY for a vibrant future while honoring its 150-year legacy. Under his guidance, 92NY has reimagined its programming and expanded its reach through innovative digital platforms, including Roundtable, which now engages audiences in all 50 states and over 200 countries. Prior to 92NY, Pinsky served as President of the New York City Economic Development Corporation under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, where he led major initiatives including climate resiliency planning and landmark redevelopment projects. Pinsky has also served as Executive Vice President at RXR Realty and held positions at Merck KGaA and Columbia University. Pinsky holds degrees from Columbia College and Harvard Law School.



Seth Pinsky

governments across the New York region to invest in infrastructure and to bring energy and vitality back to neighborhoods that had suffered from historic underinvestment.

Joining 92NY as CEO in January 2020 provided me with an opportunity to take another step in my journey. Here, I have had the opportunity to guide an historic institution that has profoundly impacted New York's civic and cultural life for 150 years to prepare for its next 150 years of success.

What excited you about the opportunity to lead 92nd Street Y and made you feel it was the right fit?

What immediately drew me to 92NY is that it truly is an institution like none other, holding within its unique structure a series of internal contradictions that, rather than undermining its impact, are the secret to its historic success. It is, for example, both a beloved neighborhood community center and a globally recognized cultural powerhouse. It is a Jewish institution that reaches out to millions of patrons, both Jewish and non-Jewish alike. And, it is a

very local institution, firmly rooted on the corner of 92nd Street and Lexington Avenue on Manhattan's Upper East Side and an institution with international reach, the original content of which secures literally tens of millions of views from patrons in all 50 states and over 200 countries around the world.

I love the sheer variety of programming that happens here daily – hosting luminaries such as Steven Spielberg and Bill and Hillary Clinton, educating thousands of K-12 students in the arts, providing welcoming spaces for seniors, and fostering civil discourse through moderated political debates. For someone who has spent much of his career focused on urban revitalization and civic life, leading 92NY has been an opportunity to do that work at immense scale and depth.

How do you define 92NY's mission and purpose?

At its core, 92NY exists to enrich lives and strengthen community. It does this through programming focusing on the arts, education, social impact and Jewish life – nourishing mind, body and spirit. For over 150 years, we have been a place where people from all walks of life

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The 92nd Street Y, New York (92ny.org) is a world-class cultural and community center where people all over the world connect through culture, arts, entertainment and conversation. For over 150 years, it has harnessed the power of arts and ideas to enrich, enlighten, and change lives, and the power of community to repair the world. As a proudly Jewish organization, 92NY enthusiastically welcomes and reaches out to people of all ages, races, faiths, and backgrounds while embracing Jewish values like learning and self-improvement, the importance of family, the joy of life, and giving back to its wonderfully diverse and growing community, both locally and around the world.

Will you discuss your career journey?

My career has always centered on my belief that the most satisfying and important work is work that seeks to strengthen and improve one's community. This conviction guided my ten years in New York City government, culminating in my role as President of the New York City Economic Development Corporation, where I undertook efforts to revive New York City and its economy following the 9/11 attacks, the Great Recession and Hurricane Sandy, as well as my work at RXR Realty, where I focused on opportunities to collaborate with



92nd Street Y on Manhattan's Upper East Side



The 92nd Street Y opened at its current location at 92nd Street and Lexington Avenue in 1900

come together to learn, create, and engage in meaningful conversations and meaningful experiences. Our mission goes beyond presenting world-class programs; it is about fostering genuine connection, sparking curiosity, and helping individuals to grow intellectually, spiritually, and socially.

What makes 92NY unique is that we bring so much together under one physical (and digital) roof: performances by world-renowned artists; rigorous educational programs; a deep commitment to Jewish life; physical activity and robust civic engagement. We do this with the conviction that culture, ideas and experiences, when shared, can powerfully build bridges between communities and contribute to a more thoughtful, inclusive society.

Will you provide an overview of 92NY's events and programs?

Every day at 92NY, one can find an incredible diversity in our programming – from a discussion with a leading author, to a ceramics class, to a dance or music performance, to a children's theater performance, to vital

conversations on global affairs. This breadth is central to our identity.

Our renowned cultural calendar features concerts, dance performances, and literary talks. Appearing at 92NY has become shorthand for relevance and influence. We also provide extensive classes and workshops in the arts, fitness, and wellness, alongside robust offerings for families, children, and teens. Older adults find connection through vibrant programs such as the Himan Brown Senior Center. Our Bronfman Center maintains our deep commitment to Jewish life and learning. And, our Belfer Center for Innovation & Social Impact leverages 92NY's global platform to advance dialogue, community engagement, and positive change across the U.S. and around the world through initiatives such as Share our America, which creates opportunities for bridging discussions in our hyperpolarized environment.

What have been the keys to the strength and impact of 92NY?

One of our greatest strengths is our ability to evolve while remaining rooted in our core

mission. For over 150 years, we have adapted to substantial changes in our city and country, in technology, and in how people seek connection. This adaptability served us particularly well during the COVID-19 crisis. Then, as we closed our physical doors, we strategically pivoted, moving all of our programming online. This decision created our global digital audience that continues to grow and today spans the full length and breadth of the country and circles the globe. Post-COVID, our in-person audiences returned, with over 3,500 people per weekday joining us on our Upper East Side campus.

From our founding in 1874 to today, we have created spaces, both physical and virtual, for people to connect across generations, beliefs, and backgrounds. Whether it is through a live performance, a class, or a civic program, we continue to foster the kinds of human connections that are essential to individual well-being and a healthy democratic society.

Will you highlight the talent and expertise of the 92NY team?

The strength of 92NY is our extraordinary staff. Our programmers consistently attract the most accomplished voices in culture, politics, and the arts – each week, we feature programming that would constitute an entire season at many other institutions. Supporting our programmers, our education, development, legal, and operations teams provide strategic insights that allow us to keep evolving. During the pandemic, it was the ingenuity and dedication of our staff that transformed 92NY into a vibrant global force online. We are so lucky to have the dedicated people who work on behalf of our community.

How do you approach your management style?

Having learned from my time working for Mayor Michael Bloomberg, I have developed a management style that focuses on building a bright and thoughtful management team, working with that team to develop an ambitious strategic agenda, and then empowering the team to figure out the best and most effective ways to achieve our goals. Meanwhile, when we collectively face disruptions – which seems to happen with alarming frequency in this environment – we lean into the challenge, developing new and innovative ways to accomplish our mission.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

I offer three key pieces of advice. First, don't wait. Get involved now, define the role you want to play, and start delivering for your community in whatever way you can. Second, stay relentlessly curious and commit to learning constantly. The world changes rapidly and adaptability is crucial. And above all, don't get bogged down in the tactical and the short-term – though obviously, the tactical and the short-term are important. To achieve great things, it is critical to remain focused on the horizon, remembering that each step might be hard, but that long and fruitful journeys ultimately make the effort worthwhile. ●