



Women from YM/WREA discuss their careers: Melissa Libner

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Name: Melissa Libner

Title: Director of Marketing

Company/firm: SL Green Realty Corp.

Years with company/firm: 10

Years in field: 12

Years in real estate industry: 10

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Real estate organizations / affiliations: Chairman of New Leadership Division for Israel Bonds, YMWREA member since 2004

Professionally, where were you ten years ago and where are you now?

Ten years ago, I had just transitioned from the advertising agency world into an in-house marketing role with eEmerge, a wholly owned SL Green subsidiary. I had no idea where real estate would take me. All I knew was that the agency world was not for me.

What single event professional or personal has most significantly impacted your career?

The death of my father 16 years ago has had the most profound impact on my career. I subsequently carried around a lot of responsibility at a young age that forced me to rise to every occasion professionally. I did not have a family business to fall back on or a career carved out for me at a young age to follow. I made things happen for myself and it's the most gratifying and rewarding part of my journey.

What was the best decision that you made in the last year?

I started doing Bikram yoga 4-5 days / week. It's a series of 26 postures taught in 105 degree heat. Yoga has become my religion and source of focus personally and professionally. No matter what happens during my day, good or bad, I am able to breathe easier and concentrate on only those things that matter as a result of the Bikram. If you can do the postures in a hot room, the chaos that ensues in our daily lives is meaningless.

What award or recognition has been the most meaningful to you and why?

As Chairman of Israel Bonds' New Leadership Committee, I am able to have an impact on my peers and future leaders of industry, while at the same time supporting Israel in a time of need and growth.

How do you stay ahead of the curve?

Networking and helping others look for work in real estate keeps me connected to my contacts.

Managing all of the corporate communications and marketing for SL Green enables me to help set the tone for the way space is marketed in NYC and beyond. As the largest landlord in Manhattan, I have access to resources that I take full advantage of to improve the way our company is viewed in an ever-changing market.

Who has been the strongest influence on your career and why?

Andrew Mathias, president and chief investment officer of SL Green Realty Corp. Andrew and I met 16 years ago and reconnected again later in life during my first SL Green interview. He put me in a very pivotal role with his start-up company, eEmerge, and let me take the reigns to run the business at a young age. He was also instrumental in carving out a new role for me as Director of Marketing after the 2007 merger with Reckson.

What impact has social networking had on your success?

In terms of my career success, very little. I'm a child of the dot com's not Facebook or Twitter, although I love reconnecting with people that way. I think for the right real estate niche, especially residential, an open forum of online opinion and general sharing can be lucrative in many ways. For tride and true commercial real estate giants, like SL Green, it's very hard to monitor up-to-the-minute postings with so many properties. The last thing any owner wants to do is put his or her neck on a public chopping block inadvertently thru a social networking site.

How has the need to create a more sustainable environment influenced the way you do business?

When I volunteered to lead my company's in-house Green Committee in 2008, I never dreamed that a few key people from every department could have such a meaningful impact on how we do business. We all take for granted what the smallest of change at the building and office management level can mean across a company of our size. My team and I looked at everything we were using from toner to coffee supplies and realized where we could make changes. People have a tendency to fear change and associate cost increases with "going greener." It's usually the opposite and the long term gains have spewed into SL Green's building operating procedures and capital redevelopment programs. The reception and support from tenants and press has been phenomenal.

What obstacles have you overcome to get where you are today?

Switching gears and roles within the same firm was an obstacle I had to overcome when leaving the eEmerge subsidiary business, which I ran and grew for six years. The exposure at the corporate level, which my current role allows me, is unparalleled in this industry. I work to get to work with almost every department at SL Green in some capacity. Joining as director of marketing during the pivotal Reckson merger was a milestone experience from a brand redevelopment standpoint. Gaining the trust of my superiors to execute has been an exciting journey.

What advice would you give to a woman just starting a career in your field?

Try brokerage. I always think of it as a great way to learn multiple aspects of the business while coming into contact with the maximum amount of people. Brokerage also forces you to hone in on your sales skills and negotiation skills, which are always useful. Lastly, if you can get comfortable early on with a commission based pay structure, you leave yourself open to bigger pay day potential.