



Michael Kleinberg of MKDA is designing relationships and helping the mid-size family company grow

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"We're the perfect partners," said Jeffrey Kleinberg of his brother Michael Kleinberg, partners at the space planning and interior architecture firm their father founded more than 48 years ago. "I tend toward the creative side and he tends toward the business side."

As president and head of business development at MKDA (Milo Kleinberg Design Associates), Kleinberg has spent the past 29 years working side-by-side with his brother and father to help the family company grow from \$15 million to more than \$75 million in project valuations.

He has also transformed the firm, which at its inception had been focused on a single sector, into the most recognizable name in the Manhattan marketplace by expanding the firm's design reach to include the finance, entertainment and publishing sectors, to name a few, and also by developing lasting business relationships with brokers and landlords.

Kleinberg got his start in architecture early. During high school, he finished his days at MKDA under the tutelage of his father, Milo Kleinberg, learning architectural fundamentals: to measure, to draw and to design. "I was always under my father's creative influence, so architectural design is all I can ever remember wanting to do," he said.

He says the inclination to design was in his blood, but it was his interest and knack for the business side of things that would eventually take him by surprise. When Kleinberg officially joined the firm in 1978 after receiving his architectural degree from City College of New York (CUNY), he immediately started to assess how to help the creative company grow.

In only four short years Kleinberg etched out a place for himself within MKDA that had less to do with designing space than it did with designing business relationships. "Clearly, good design is paramount, but in order to offer our clients added value, we believe in the art of relationship design," he said.

Establishing and building relationships between landlords, brokers and corporate office tenants has always been Kleinberg's forte and the firm's manifesto. Under his direction, MKDA has not only helped a myriad of corporate tenants define their space, but it has frequently helped some of the busiest brokers in town, including brokers from CB Richard Ellis, Cushman & Wakefield, Newmark and Studley, quickly close lease transactions through visionary preliminary space planning.

Most notably, MKDA has helped some of the biggest landlords in the industry rent space, even during challenging market conditions. For example, MKDA recently subdivided and built out 100,000 s/f of office space at 14 Wall Street for Capstone Equities. The design resulted in the almost immediate leasing of spaces that had previously been difficult to lease because of large floor plates. MKDA is also coordinating with building ownership to prepare layouts and design plans for a number of its new tenants.

MKDA counts Vornado Realty Trust, Silverstein Properties, The Durst Organization, Rockrose

Development Corp., Blackstone and Westbrook among the high-profile landlords with which it has built lasting relationships. "When I see Michael's name attached, I know it is a quality landlord," said Barry Lewen, senior managing director of Grubb & Ellis New York Inc.

Kleinberg's strategy for relationship building has paid off. This year, MKDA was ranked sixth in Interior Design magazine's Second 100 Interior Design Giants 2007. An additional component to MKDA's success is Kleinberg's business initiative to keep the firm diversified like a well-rounded stock portfolio.

In the 1970s, MKDA designed Gloria Vanderbilt's famed showroom, which featured a canary yellow reception desk set in a vivid blue background. The Milo Kleinberg showroom was not only cache then, but it was what kept the business running. Today, the firm still designs showrooms, but it is just as likely to design office spaces for hedge funds, such as XE Capital, Saranac Capital Management, Primus, Bass Trading and Concordia Advisors, and private equity firms.

"When the market shifts, we move with it," said Kleinberg. "We use our experience in working with various sectors to stay flexible and to shift with changing market conditions. We did this, for example, when hedge funds and private equity funds exploded into the marketplace."

According to Kleinberg, today's changing economic climate has caused another shift to take shape at MKDA. "In recent months, as the real estate market has changed ever so slightly, we've seen landlords across the city become more flexible and willing to work with tenants," said Kleinberg. "As a result, more and more building owners are calling upon our expertise and service, and our landlord clientele base has expanded."

MKDA also seeks to expand its services into new marketplaces when conditions are right. In fact, MKDA recently celebrated the 18th month anniversary of its Stamford location. The office has already tripled in size and has secured a number of significant clients, including Heineken, Greenwich Associates, Reckson Associates (a division of SL Green) and Antares Real Estate, to name a few.

Kleinberg's skills at relationship building and business development translate easily to his 26 year-long role as a member of the Real Estate & Allied Trades Division Executive Committee of the UJA Federation of New York, for which he raises funds and engages some of the most influential entrepreneurs in the real estate industry with UJA. His philanthropic efforts have resulted in a number of awards and recognitions.

Additionally, Kleinberg is a chairperson of the Building Committee at Westchester Day School and a member of the Real Estate Board of New York and The Facilities Managers Association.

When asked the secret to his success, Kleinberg will cite focus, hard work and learning from the experience of others. His brother says it's his believability, honesty and intimate knowledge of the product he sells.

According to Bill O'Connor, principal of O'Connor Capital partners, it's the fact that he makes himself consistently available that's really impressive. "When you call, you deal with Michael, you aren't shuffled off to someone else," he said.

"Truthfully, it's the art of the relationship between myself and my brother, father and an experienced cadre of top executives, designers and architects," concludes Kleinberg. "In business, success is always a joint effort."