



Executive of the Month: Beck, principal at Avison Young, leads the firm to become a commanding presence in New York

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New York, NY The New York Real Estate Journal recently sat down with Kirsten Beck, principal at Avison Young.

NYREJ: Tell us about what you do.

Beck: I am a principal at Avison Young, in charge of overseeing project management activities on behalf of the company's clients in the New York metro area. My work includes interior and exterior renovations, ground-up construction, and capital improvements.

WME | IMG Headquarters at
11 Madison Avenue - Manhattan, NY

NYREJ: How did you get your start in project management?

Beck: I joined a small regional office for an international company 20 years ago in the midst of an expansion. In my time there, I completed two expansions, including the buildout of a new, larger office to accommodate the company's growth. My next role was as facilities project manager for Champion Mortgage, where my responsibilities included construction of the company's 200,000 s/f corporate headquarters in Parsippany, N.J., as well as the build-out of three regional sales centers located in New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts. After the business closed, I joined The Walsh Company (acquired by Avison Young in 2010) and have been working with Ed Walsh and his brother Tom for almost a decade. I started in the New Jersey office as a senior project manager and have worked consistently on large corporate headquarters ranging from 50,000 s/f to 300,000 s/f.

NYREJ: After being in the N.J. office for years, you were responsible for launching the Avison Young NYC project management operation in 2011. What started as a two-person team has expanded into a successful ten-person group. Talk about the transition and how you were able to spearhead this significant growth.

Beck: Yes, it was somewhat serendipitous. I had always wanted to live in New York and in 2011 the opportunity arose in my private life to do so. I moved to Manhattan and commuted to New Jersey for

a few months but eventually Ed Walsh and I discussed starting an office in NYC. So, I rented a 10x12 office and got to work! Shortly thereafter, Avison Young acquired The Walsh Co., and I, along with my two employees, became the New York Project Management Group of Avison Young. The group has developed into a team of ten professionals – and growing!

Lounge at WME | IMG Headquarters,
11 Madison Avenue - Manhattan, NY

NYREJ: Can you tell us about some of the major projects you are working on and some that you have overseen?

Beck: I have been fortunate to work with some of the largest companies in the world, and am proud of all that has been accomplished in my years as a project manager.

As an example, I relocated 1,000 employees from a suburban campus environment to an urban low-rise in Newark, N.J. for the headquarters of Panasonic Corp. of North America. It was, at the time, the first new office building to be built in Newark in over 20 years. The buildout for both exteriors and interiors took over three years, and Panasonic accomplished a major culture change with the finished project: an 80% open work plan.

I've also had the opportunity to work on the design and construction of a new corporate headquarters for William Morris Endeavor (WME) on their 105,000 rentable s/f space at 11 Madison Ave. While completing this project, WME and IMG merged and we have since completed two floors in the IMG offices at 304 Park Ave. South and are now working on three additional floors of renovation, totaling over 100,000 rentable s/f.

Currently, my team is actively working on several interesting and diverse projects including a new, ground-up car dealership in Brooklyn, a 45,000 s/f office in the Gem Building for a division of Comcast, and several projects across the U.S. for Compass residential real estate.

Lobby for Panasonic Headquarters, 2 Riverfront Plaza -
Newark, NJ

NYREJ: What are the biggest challenges when overseeing a project?

Beck: I would say that undefined expectations and miscommunication are the toughest challenges. As project managers, it's our job to be honest and realistic with clients. Early in my career, I learned about the "triple constraint" and quote it to my team and clients to this day. It's like a three-legged stool. The legs/constraints are time, money and scope. If you want your project completed faster, for example, then the time and money "legs" have to compensate. And all of this is dependent on

communication. When clients have a realistic timeframe for completion of a project and communication is seamless, projects move along well.

NYREJ: What trends are you seeing these days in project management?

Beck: With regard to technology, I am seeing a much more fluid work environment throughout our industry. With everything available in “the cloud,” we no longer walk around with big rolls of drawings. Designers, engineers and project managers have tablets and pull up drawings on the spot, notate them and send them to the team before ever leaving the site. With regard to workplace, there is no longer a one-size fits all approach. Companies are more strategic in their thinking and, with the help of project managers, designers and furniture solutions, the work environment can truly be an output of their functions and objectives. An open work plan simply does not work for everyone. On the other hand, we are seeing law firms, as an example, embracing progressive layouts to attract the next generation of attorneys who are more focused on flexibility and amenities.

NYREJ: You’ve had a long-standing involvement with the charitable organization IFMA Cares. Tell us a little about what they do and your work for the organization.

Beck: I joined the International Facility Managers Association (IFMA) to network and meet other people in the industry when I first started work in New York. While attending my first IFMA Annual Dinner, I was fortuitously seated with the chair of the IFMA Cares Committee. She invited me to the next meeting and I have been involved ever since. We coordinate events throughout the year that support charities such as Dress for Success, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and St. Jude Children’s Hospital.

NYREJ: What is your favorite part of your job?

Beck: My favorite part of my job is collaborating and working with my talented team in order to meet the demands and needs of our clients. I have been fortunate to build a team from the ground up. Each person who works alongside me was hand-picked because they offer a solid background and a unique perspective.

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Newark, NJ

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