

All About People

An Interview with Jennifer Buchholz,
Senior Vice President of Global Human Resources, CB Richard Ellis Group, Inc.



Jennifer Buchholz

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining CB Richard Ellis in September 2007, Jennifer Buchholz spent 10 years in a variety of senior leadership roles at General Electric. Most recently, she was Director of Human Resources for GE's Money division, and previously served as a leader in GE's Women's Network. Buchholz served in several other management roles while at GE, including Interim Director of Human Resources for GE Consumer in Mexico during the start-up phase and Integration Manager in Japan. Prior to joining GE, Buchholz worked at Lehman Brothers for five years in a variety of international human resources positions. She has a BS in economics from the University of Massachusetts and an MBA from Pace University.

COMPANY BRIEF CB Richard Ellis Group, Inc. (NYSE:CBG), a Fortune 500 and S&P 500 company headquartered in Los Angeles, is the world's largest commercial real estate services firm (in terms of 2007 revenue). With over 29,000 employees, the company serves real estate owners, investors, and occupiers through more than 300 offices worldwide (excluding affiliate offices). CB Richard Ellis (www.cbre.com) offers strategic advice and execution for property sales and leasing; corporate services; property, facilities, and project management; mortgage banking; appraisal and valuation; development services; investment management; and research and consulting. CB Richard Ellis was named one of the 50 "Best in Class" companies by BusinessWeek.

What role does the human resources division play in an organization like CB Richard Ellis [CBRE]?

The role is to align our employee base to help the company reach its business goals. The CEO creates the business agenda, and human resources assists in the fostering and cultivation of an environment that enables employees to best meet that agenda.

Has CBRE been successful in retaining the talent it needs?

When I first started here, I was most impressed with how many people said they loved working at CB Richard Ellis. We attract great people, and great people in turn attract other great people. We are also keenly focused on continuing to build as diverse a talent base as possible, and have been highly competitive in attracting and retaining diverse talent, due in part to the success of our many internal networking groups.

Diversity has long been a buzzword in human resources, and now we're hearing the term inclusiveness. What is the difference between these two ideas?

Diversity is about the "look" of an organization. Does your organization "look" diverse, in terms of gender, race, economic background, and other demographics? Inclusiveness is the "feel." It is about the company's culture and the environment of the company. Does your firm accept ideas from all places within the organization? Does a balanced culture drive the way work gets done? Do you have open and honest communication? These things create an inclusive and diverse environment – essential aspects of any highly productive workplace.

How do you keep your employees excited about their work?

We're very proud of our training. It's one of the reasons people choose us over other commercial real estate companies. We have a leadership center that offers many best-in-class training courses, and we also offer a significant amount of training on an individual level.

How have you embedded corporate responsibility and community engagement into CBRE's culture?

Corporate responsibility is often cited as one of the top three most important attributes that college graduates look for in an employer. Additionally, our clients often ask about our involvement in the community and our diversity. For many organizations, human resources

leads the corporate social responsibility effort, and our leadership team has and will continue to address corporate social responsibility efforts throughout our firm. Not only is it a sound business practice, but it's the right thing to do.

In hiring new people, what do you look for, in terms of intelligence, personality, and culture?

Intellectual power is very important to us, as is a good cultural fit. One of the primary characteristics we look for is emotional intelligence, which goes hand in hand with self-awareness – whether a person has the ability to understand his own behavior and how it affects those around him in the workplace. Self-awareness allows you to grow. So that's one of the critical elements we look for in new hires, as well as one of the most important elements of being a leader.

Are young people looking to enter HR as a career?

I hear from headhunters that many companies are actually creating new senior human resources jobs. Human resources has become more important to organizations, and will continue to attract more people to the profession. I think it's the greatest job in the organization, because there's something different to experience every day, and it's one of the few roles in which you can have a direct influence on people.

Does CBRE offer flex schedules to meet its employees' needs?

Absolutely. The more we offer flex schedules and remote employment, the more our population of prospective employees geographically grows. In addition, studies have shown that remote and flex workers actually work harder and they work longer hours, because they don't have to commute. They're grateful to the company for giving them the opportunity to balance the rest of their lives, and that increases their dedication to the organization.

Is it important to spend time with the employees themselves?

I am the ears of the business. A lot of times, employees might not want to tell someone else what they will tell me. It is my job to make sure other leaders in the organization understand what is going on with the employee base. I'm a huge proponent of spending time with the employees. We have about 150 HR people in the U.S. and about 250 worldwide, and they know that one of their primary functions is to be with the employees and understand what's going on in the workplace. ●