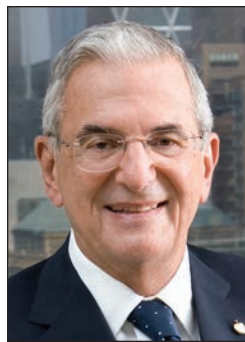


A Seat at the Executive Table

An Interview with Howard J. Rubenstein,
President, Rubenstein Associates, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE In 1954, Howard Rubenstein founded Rubenstein Associates, Inc. Rubenstein provides strategic communications counsel and has advised leaders of multinational corporations, nonprofit organizations, and civic entities. Rubenstein serves on the executive committee of the Association for a Better New York, which he helped to found, and is a trustee of the Police Athletic League, the Foundation for the National Archives, and the Inner-City Scholarship Fund of the Archdiocese of New York. In addition, he is a Co-Founder and Vice Chairman of the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. Rubenstein holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania and a doctorate of law from St. John's University School of Law. Early in his career, he served as Assistant Counsel to the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee.



Howard J. Rubenstein

COMPANY BRIEF New York-based Rubenstein Associates, Inc. along with Rubenstein Communications, Inc., and Rubenstein Public Relations, Inc., (www.rubenstein.com) represent a roster of more than 450 clients, including global corporations, media and entertainment companies, sports teams, financial services organizations, real estate concerns, educational and cultural institutions, law firms, health care providers, and not-for-profit organizations, as well as business executives and other public figures. Current clients include the New York Yankees, NewsCorp, Pfizer, the Metropolitan Opera, New York-Presbyterian Hospital, and Tishman Speyer.

Public perception of corporate leaders today is largely unfavorable. Why is there not a better understanding of all the good that business leaders do?

There is an inherent distrust of corporate wealth and the people that are running the corporations on the part of so many in the community who are struggling even with middle income salaries.

Sometimes, there is an underlying current of jealousy or aspirations that haven't been met, so the very wealthy are frequently seen as uncaring of others even though they have done enormous good and taken positive action in our cities and our country.

Should we be optimistic about that perception changing?

Wealthy achievers have not promoted what they have done in a positive way so that the community can understand it. They have become somewhat reclusive when it comes to personal publicity. You don't find these wealthy achievers publicizing what they're doing as individuals because they are concerned with how it will be perceived. So in a downturned economy, that's even more evident.

When the economy was doing well, we had middle income families earning well and unemployment was

down. But with the changing economy, there was also a changing attitude that you have to blame somebody, so some have looked to blame those of wealth regardless of what they have done or whether or not they have lost substantial money themselves. That is unrealistic finger-pointing.

In terms of the challenges we're facing in education and health care reform, can these issues only be solved with the help of the private sector?

Yes. The corporations I deal with and the very wealthy take a long view based on optimism. People in real estate, for example, are patient in terms of outlasting the downturn. They keep their efforts going even though they may be reduced. So I have an optimistic view that long term, the economy will turn around, the demand for goods and services will increase, and you'll find a softening of the mistrust and dislike you see today. It will depend on how the people of moderate means are doing; if they're doing well, the attitudes will slowly change.

In building Rubenstein Associates, there was a focus on lending your expertise to nonprofits. Why has that been so important?

I always look at that part of our society as critical to the strength of New York. Once I decide to take on a cause, I give it all I can, despite the fee or lack thereof. That is also good business. While I do a great deal of volunteer work, I always find that it comes back around. The community is willing to recognize our efforts and, if they can afford us, they will retain us since they have developed a trust that, in good or bad times, you're ready to help them.

Today, there seems to be a better understanding of the benefit of aligning philanthropic efforts with business strategy. Do you see that taking place?

When you do good, people point it out and think about retaining you or buying your product. Corporate leadership recognizes that and they don't have to say it – they just have to act on it.

Are expectations different now for public relations at the level you provide or are they the same as in years past?

Public relations today is far more essential to a corporation or an individual than it was years ago. When I first started, the public relations person did not have a seat at the executive table. Today, public relations professionals are invited into the executive meetings where decisions are made at the highest levels.

What are the most important attributes you look for hiring?

We analyze what they bring to the table and that doesn't mean they have to know public relations. They have to show a sense of integrity and a desire to do good things. Generally, we look to see if they can express themselves verbally in a very strong, positive manner and if they're really interested in a career in communications. From that, we can gather whether they will be a good fit.

Is it challenging to find the time for personal client interaction as your business has grown?

I've never lost my enthusiasm for client interaction. But you also have to run the business and understand how to make a reasonable profit, while keeping your employees happy and surviving in a downturn – those are business elements that I learned about. If you can marry a good business sense to a good communication sense, you have the makings of a superb public relations business.

At your size and scale, how do you maintain a family culture?

In comparison to some of the huge companies, we're moderate in size. We're at the size in terms of numbers of employees that I want. I still know virtually everyone here.

I never wanted to open multiple offices and I have not done so. I never wanted to be acquired by a big ad agency that would offer me substantial money because I want to control my own destiny.

My first goal is providing service – not making money. Once you provide the service, you will make money.

I have bypassed opportunities to open in other cities or franchise my name. New York is the center of communications worldwide, so you can project an idea, tell a story, and communicate effectively in this home base and that is what we do. ●