

## How I Made Firm Executive Chairman: 'I Grew Up in Queens, NYC, and the First in My Family to Go Beyond High School. No One Would Have Predicted Where I Am Today,' Says Richard A. Rosenbaum of Greenberg Traurig

**"Success is not a destination; it is a journey that never ends and must be earned every day."**

By Tasha Norman

**Richard A. Rosenbaum, 65,**  
**Greenberg Traurig.**

**Job title:** Executive chairman.

**Practice area:** Real estate, corporate.

**Law school and year of graduation:**  
St. John's University School of Law,  
1982.

**How long have you been at the firm?** I joined the firm in 1985 as a



Richard A. Rosenbaum, third from the left, with colleagues outside Mel on Wheels, in honor of Mel Greenberg. The Mel on Wheels Getting Together Tour travels to 30 U.S. offices and makes donations to local food banks or charities. Greenberg Traurig CEO Brian L. Duffy is to the right of Rosenbaum. Photo: Marsha Halper

young associate and our 90th lawyer. After a brief stint in our West Palm Beach office, I moved to the new Fort Lauderdale location, which was the firm's third office in South Florida. I became a shareholder, and ultimately the fast-growing office's managing shareholder, relatively early in my career. Soon after we opened in New York, Larry Hoffman and Cesar Alvarez asked me to become that office's managing Shareholder and lead the growth of what was then a 30-lawyer location in the world's largest legal market and my original hometown. In many ways, the firm's unlikely trajectory from just three attorneys in Miami to where we are today, in 40 offices with over 2,200 attorneys, is similar to my own. Growing up in Queens, the first in my family to go beyond high school, studying psychology and philosophy at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and then attending night school at St. John's University School of Law while



Richard A. Rosenbaum.

courtesy photo

supporting my family, no one would have predicted the firm or me would get to where we are today! But we did not listen. We just worked hard and committed to excellence, teamwork and living our values.

**Were you a partner at another firm before joining your present firm?**

No. But prior to going to law school, I was an entrepreneur in the title insurance sector, where I was an independent service provider and, later, a key participant in two successful agencies active in New York City and Long Island. Everything that I did before coming to Greenberg Traurig helped

prepare me to grow here and help others do the same.

**What year were you elected chairman at your current firm?** On Jan. 1, 2016, as part of our succession planning, I stepped into the executive chairman role, having previously served as the firm's president and then CEO.

**What's the biggest surprise you experienced in becoming chairman?**

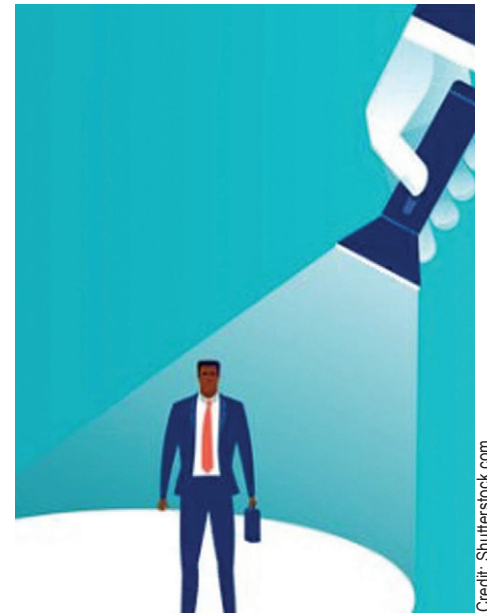
Not a real surprise, but every day, after so many years, I still experience the confirmation of the value of our respectful, trusting, empowering and collaborative culture as it becomes clearer every day. I see it internally and especially as we recruit attorneys who look to us for a new home for their careers and clients throughout the U.S. and around the world. Also, it is amazing to see the extreme sense of ownership that has also grown among our business staff, particularly during crisis situations, so clear during the pandemic. The deep passion for justice, diversity, equality, and inclusion that exists at every level of the organization—so many people eager to embrace new programming, initiatives, and involvement to move the needle forward. It's a great feeling.

**What do you think was the deciding factor in the firm making you chairman?**

As previously noted, Greenberg Traurig has a long history of succession planning that creates a natural evolution, just like the family we are. As Cesar Alvarez moved to senior chairman, and Brian

Duffy to CEO, the Executive Committee confirmed my position as executive chairman. We are a team, each having distinct roles, but also working together with a deep level of respect, along with our business professionals. Having continuity, team support, and the ability to act nimbly during sudden change has been key during these stressful times. For more than 35 years, I have been blessed with the best mentors, role models and friends in Mel Greenberg, Larry Hoffman, Cesar Alvarez, Marvin Rosen, Matt Gorson, Bob Traurig and Rob Ivanhoe, and in more recent decades, Brian Duffy, Rich Edlin, Ernest Greer, Lejb Fogelman, Lori Cohen, Brad Kaufman, Paul Maher and others. My daily relationship with Cesar and Brian, the combined strengths and total trust we bring to the firm, cannot be overstated in explaining the success of Greenberg Traurig. The list goes on; we are a large and connected family worldwide.

**Describe how you feel about your career now that you've made chairman.** My career is a product of the investment of many people. I work just as hard today as ever before to make sure I honor that investment. I am also excited at the opportunity to further influence the practice of law globally, particularly regarding innovation, excellence in client service, and creating a more diverse and just society. I wake up excited every day, but instead of opening new offices in Chicago,



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Washington or Texas, now it might be Europe, Asia or beyond. I spend particular time in Poland, not only because we have the No. 1 law practice in the market, but it is where my wife and dogs live!

**\*\* Richard's advice to the next generation of executive leadership is:**

- Success is not a destination; it is a journey that never ends and must be earned every day.
- Success comes from your character, your quality, your loyalty, your affirmation of culture, your integrity, and delivering value and results every day, no matter your current position.
- Always keep in mind that leadership is found in service and not in titles. We have a service mentality because we think that "power" needs to be close to the ground with the people who are dealing with the clients every single day and ready to change.

- A good leader will understand that supporting a firm culture where respect, trust, collaboration, integrity, and empowerment are paramount, while not easy in today's world, will pay off tenfold and multiply financial metrics.

- Additionally, never underestimate the importance of diversity, whether related to ethnicity, gender, geography or legal areas of practice. It is the right thing to do; and it is good for business, for you, and for your clients. We believe that a diverse team will provide clients with the best and most creative approaches to their matters and concerns.

Our firm practiced what I call "Intentional Diversity Leadership" early on. We have always been a very diverse firm and encourage all our lawyers to be open and authentic, bringing their whole selves to the table. However, until you put people in real positions of authority and leadership and give them a seat at the table, they will not feel accepted. Our early firm leaders mentored and promoted our current diverse leaders, not overnight, [but] through years focused on culture and mentorship. The result? From New York to Miami, Austin to Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., to London, and beyond, we have diversity

represented in our leadership positions, creating a unique connection and synergy to the fabric of the firm.

**What's been the biggest change, day-to-day, in your routine since becoming chairman?** There is a great deal more interaction with other firm leaders across borders, time zones and practices. This may be one of those unique places where it is NOT lonely at the top, because collaboration is a core value of who we are as a firm. I am proud of what people have become and how many have succeeded. I am pleased that after so many years and so much growth, we still feel like a family.

**Who had the greatest influence in your career that helped propel you to chairman?** All of those mentioned above and many others have together contributed to the firm's and my own personal success. Most particularly, Mel Greenberg, Bob Traurig, Larry Hoffman, Cesar Alvarez, Matt Gorson and Rob Ivanhoe were great role models over these many years for setting our core values: working hard, superior client service, being fair and respectful to one another and all levels of the firm, and giving back to their local communities. From the beginning, we together

pushed boundaries, forging our own path, and creating a new paradigm for large law firms. These values made a tremendous impact on me and my career. But Cesar and Larry, by believing in me so deeply from the very beginning, will always be the most important enablers of any success I have been fortunate to have at this great law firm, whose story continues to be written. And working daily with Brian Duffy, Ernest Greer and others to reach for new heights as true partners and family is a pleasure that I am so fortunate to experience at this stage of my career.

**What would you tell your younger self/What I wish I knew then?** I might have said a word or two about 2020. Most importantly, I would have told my younger self that the sacrifices would be worth it, not just for me personally, but also for the more than 4,000 people who make up the Greenberg Traurig family and the many communities in which we live and work. And I might have said life goes fast, take a little more time to enjoy your family, make sure they know how much you love them and just enjoy the ride! I am so busy most of the time, and so focused, that I still haven't really learned that one!

