

Greenberg Traurig Co-Founder Placed Firm Above Himself

By **Madison Arnold**

Law360 (September 12, 2025, 4:58 PM EDT) -- Larry J. Hoffman cared so much about the firm now known as Greenberg Traurig LLP that he wanted to remove himself from its name.

After having founded the firm with Mel Greenberg and Robert Traurig in 1967, Hoffman later approached shareholder Marvin S. Rosen — whose name was also in the masthead — about shortening the firm name to Greenberg Traurig.

"My name was in the firm, and he said, 'It has one real advantage to it: When we bring in other partners from other firms, they're not going to insist that their name's in the firm.' And I remember saying, 'Larry, a brilliant idea. I have no problem removing my name either,'" Rosen told Law360 Pulse on Friday.

"His personality was such that he cared more about the firm, than he cared about himself in every way," said Rosen, adding that Hoffman "cared more about what was good for the firm than his own appearance."

Hoffman, who died Thursday at the age of 95, helped found what was then known as Greenberg Traurig Hoffman in South Florida. The group met for lunch at a deli where they dreamed up the idea to establish a firm that mirrored a New York-style law firm.

Hoffman and Greenberg and Traurig — who died in 1994 and 2018, respectively — each had their areas of expertise that set the new firm up for success.

"They each had unique roles," said Richard A. Rosenbaum, executive chairman of Greenberg Traurig, in an interview with Law360 Pulse on Friday. "Mel was a tax and business lawyer who really was the leader at the time. Larry was one of the leading corporate and securities lawyers in the country. Bob Traurig was real estate and land use [and] famous throughout South Florida for being the leading zoning and land use lawyer in Miami. So the three of them started the firm."

Hoffman didn't take the lead right away and instead filled whatever role the firm needed because he was a team player, Rosenbaum said. In those early days, that meant he handled much of the business and financial responsibilities.

It wasn't until 1991 that Hoffman got the opportunity to serve as CEO of the firm.



Larry Hoffman

"You could see there was so much more to Larry than met the eye initially, because he let Mel take the lead, and he played his part. He stepped forward, and you saw that he had really grand and amazing vision for the legal industry, for what was going to happen in Miami specifically, and that it was going to become a more important city across the U.S. and across the world," Rosenbaum said.

He added that one important lesson he learned from Hoffman at the time was that leaders should always be looking ahead and not reacting.

"You should think independently for our own firm. And he didn't want to wait until the New York firms et cetera entered Miami and started taking over, and he didn't want to wait for a competition to act before he did. And he said, 'Instead, number one, we're going to become the best firm in Miami,' which I think he has clearly done. 'Number two, to expand in Florida,' which we had not previously done, and we expanded across Florida. 'Number three, we had to be in New York and Washington,' which was a big step for a Miami firm. And that really took confidence [and] strength," Rosenbaum said.

During his tenure as CEO from 1991 to 1997, Hoffman helped expand Greenberg Traurig from 92 lawyers in three offices to 325 attorneys in nine offices. The firm established itself in key markets such as New York, D.C. and Philadelphia, as well as in Orlando, Tallahassee and Boca Raton in Florida.

He built those successful offices in part because he did so in a way that maintained the firm's culture, which includes respect, trust and the empowerment of one another, a lack of politics, a lack of bureaucracy, an ability to be entrepreneurial and an ability to collaborate, Rosenbaum said.

In the case of the New York office, that meant that Hoffman chose to build it person by person instead of simply acquiring another firm already based in the state. That's why Hoffman as well as Rosen convinced Rosenbaum to move back to his home state to launch the office, which is now Greenberg Traurig's biggest.

"Larry was always on airplanes, always talking to people. He always wanted to know the people. And I can think of a number of cases over the years in New York, but also in a number of other cities, where Larry would meet someone who seemed to have a big book of business, but just was not the kind of person that would be collaborative or respectful or trusting, and he would say no. He would say no, even if he had a lot of business," Rosenbaum said.

Those accomplishments showed that Hoffman was able to win the trust of successful partners to trust him and respect him and his judgment enough when he made those big moves, Rosenbaum said.

In one instance on an airplane, Rosenbaum told Rosen that he probably didn't want to sit next to Hoffman because he was in coach instead of first class. That's because he thought sitting in coach looked better to the younger attorneys at the firm.

"I said 'Larry, OK, I want to talk to you. If we can sit together, I'll fly coach next to you.' Again, That's an example [that] he cared more about what he was helping to create at the firm than his own comfort," Rosen said.

Hoffman is also known for creating staff positions for the roles of marketing, professional development and information technology before they were common across the legal industry, the firm said. Having professionals to manage the business side of the firm meant lawyers were free to practice law.

Under Hoffman's leadership, Greenberg Traurig also has been on the front lines of technology use in law firms. For example, the firm was among the early users of Blackberries, Greenberg Traurig said.

Hoffman also had commitment to continuing education of his firm's lawyers. As a result, Greenberg Traurig named its attorney development program after him, The Hoffman Center, as well as the Larry J. Hoffman/Greenberg Traurig Distinguished Professorship in the Business of Law at the University of Miami School of Law.

He is also the eponym of The Larry Hoffman/Greenberg Traurig Startup Practicum at the University of Miami School of Law. And Hoffman and his wife, Deborah, supported The Hoffman Forum a Leadership Symposium, with the Aspen Institute Artist-Endowed Foundation Initiative and the University of Miami School of Law.

On a human level, Hoffman was known for putting others at Greenberg Traurig first. During Hurricane Andrew in 1992, Hoffman was the only person in the office and spent his time making phone calls to check on attorneys and business staff.

He led the firm's hurricane relief efforts to ensure employees were taken care of by finding homes for the displaced, making food, water and ice available and finding generators, the firm said.

Hoffman also led the firm's efforts to rebuild three Head Start schools in Homestead, Florida, during a weekend of services and completely refurbished the schools.

"The most important lessons I learned from Larry was to trust and respect one another, to empower individuals to be the most they could be," said Rosenbaum. "We were there to support them, but we wanted them to have the dreams that they knew better than we did what was happening in the various cities and practices, and our job was to serve them, not for them to serve us."

Rosenbaum joined Greenberg Traurig 40 years ago as an associate and has since worked his way up the ranks. His relationship with Hoffman was an important one after Rosenbaum's father became ill when he was young.

"Larry really became my second father. It's not just an expression with me. I have those kind of emotions towards him, but also he taught me about life, about people and about our business. It wasn't just he taught me about law. He taught me about business and about life, and I can tell you this, I went to night school. He took a chance on me, and my life would not be the same if it weren't for Larry Hoffman," Rosenbaum said.

--Editing by Bruce Goldman.