



GET REAL

Some of Westchester's top commercial real estate brokers reveal the secrets to their success.

By Chuck Green

Perhaps more than any other industry, real estate—especially the commercial side of the RE coin—has taken a beating during the Great Recession. Slowly, however, things appear to be trending upward—with a recovery poised to advance in 2013, according to a report released in October by PwC US and the Urban Land Institute. Leading the turnaround are the industry's savviest and most talented brokers, who, despite all the challenges they face, still manage to make lots of deals happen in this unfavorable climate—and make lots of money for their clients and their firms in the process.

Tracking this never-ending horse race is a firm called CoStar Group, the largest professional research organization serving the commercial real estate industry. Based in Washington, DC, CoStar tallies the sales and leasing figures reported by brokers and their firms across the US. Each year, CoStar recognizes the top commercial real estate brokerage firms and brokers with its Power Broker Awards, presented to the firms and individuals who achieve the highest volume of sales and leases in their respective markets (of which there are more than 90 in total).

Here, a dozen of the top-performing commercial brokers, as identified by CoStar late last year, operating principally in Westchester County, share a little about themselves and dish on what got them to the top—and, more important, what keeps them there.

WILLIAM ANSON
President
Anson Properties, LTD



“Every real estate deal is a chess game.”

William Anson can cut a deal. But he has a hard time talking about himself. “It’s not really my style,” says Anson, president of Anson Properties, LTD in White Plains. So, instead of regaling anyone who’d care to listen about why he excels at what he does, he prefers to just do what he does. Says Anson, who’s been a commercial broker for 40 years, “I’ve always treated what I do with respect, as a full-time job and career. I’m not that person that came into the business because I got tired of being in some other business, [was] semi-retired, or wanted something else to do. I’d say I’m a lifer in this business, which can be the difference in reaching a level of success.”

His ability to connect with others also has helped him maintain his success, Anson believes. “I’d like to think that I’m humorous and get along with others. Being a real estate broker, you meet so many different types of people from

different walks of life, backgrounds, cultures, wealth, and power status. It’s such a diversified community of customers that, as a broker, you need to be able to adjust very quickly.”

Apparently, he’s reasonably nimble. Over four decades, Anson says he’s made deals with a number of the same customers four

or five, and as many as eight to 10, times. “In Westchester County, I’ve probably sold or leased the same building multiple times.”

Besides being a hard worker and fervently devoted to his work, Anson sees himself as a “team guy. I’ve made very few enemies. I’ve pretty much gotten along with everyone. I’ve had work relationships with the other brokerage offices and have established work habits. I care; people know I give their needs priority.”

They also know that he has two other integral qualities: “I can hear—which most people can do—but I’m also able to *listen*. So when [a client] works with me, they know their time isn’t going to be wasted. I’m not the type of person to throw everything against the wall and hope something sticks. I’m very focused, and I pay attention to what people’s needs are and deliver.”

Furthermore, he believes the fact that he’s at ease with himself and can carry on a sincere conversation goes a long way with customers. “My personality’s very real.”

As is his affection for the industry. “I don’t just really love the business, I enjoy it. I love the art of negotiating and I get great personal satisfaction out of winning the chess game. Every real estate deal’s a chess game.”

Which, it seems, he’d sooner play instead of harping on about how good he is at it.

“I’m not going to sleep until a deal’s done.”

Yep, Glenn Walsh is a Gemini, all right, multiple personalities and all. Perhaps Sybil didn’t get much traction out of it, but Walsh believes that having more than one personality to call upon has helped him ring up his share of deals. “In business, you have to have different types of personalities for all of the different types of people you deal with,” explains Walsh, senior director at Cushman & Wakefield, Inc. “Sometimes you have to be

hard, sometimes you have to be soft, and sometimes you have to be light. It’s never the same because you confront different situations and have to take a different look at each one.”

For instance, Walsh played it tough with one client who had no reservations about telling him exactly how frustrated he was with him. “I was trying to buy a building from him, but he didn’t want to sell. Every time I’d



GLENN WALSH
Senior Director
Cushman & Wakefield, Inc.

call, he'd scream and yell at me a little and hang up." Walsh let the tongue lashing roll off his sturdy back. "That went on for about two years. Then, one day, he picked up the phone and was nice to me."

However, Walsh, who rang up 300,000 square feet in leasing space last year, wasn't about to let his guard down. "I still had to play hardball with him." After all, some people like the challenge of dealing with others who play hard to get. In any event, Walsh's approach paid dividends. "At the end of the day, we made the deal and shook hands. He's become a good friend of mine," says Walsh, who is based in Rye Brook.

Ultimately, he believes his way of working with clients hits pay dirt because he's doing nothing more than

being himself—and clients notice. "It's just who I am," he says, nonchalantly.

At the same time, customers appreciate the fact that Walsh devotes as much time as needed to deals. "They can always find me. I'm not going to sleep until a deal's done. Saturday, Sunday, or the holidays, they know they can call me."

They also know—or should—that Walsh almost never calls a deal dead. "My associates and I have found deals that were dead and brought them back to life just because we were able to go the extra mile. You have to have the diligence to find out what's killing a deal and why and then fix it."

Geminis...

"My mindset is to think like both parties."

Clifford Simon appreciates detective novels as much as the next gumshoe. And, like any good sleuth, he has a knack for unearthing the hidden value in the most seemingly innocuous details. In the process, he saves his clients time, aggravation, and, of course, money.

"I love being a detective, especially when it comes to discovering difficult-to-find information that helps put deals over the edge—whatever kind of research that might be required by a tenant or landlord," says Simon, president of Rye Brook-based CNS Real Estate.

Simon, who favors author James Patterson and a character he features in many of his novels, Detective Alex Cross, thrives on dismantling details as a mechanic does a finicky engine. There's just about no hood Simon wouldn't pop if it meant making himself an indispensable member of a transaction team. "I find that I prove my value at transaction. I stay with my deals, from reading leases on. I'm all over the details."

Case in point: Burlington Coat Factory, one of his primary clients. "I have a strong relationship with them. I make sure that information is flowing and that I'm there to answer questions or run down details, whatever's needed to make a deal happen."



**CLIFFORD
SIMON**
President
CNS Real Estate

Simon, who characterizes himself as simultaneously serious and outgoing, says he's instinctively driven to maintain peace and harmony for all involved. "My mindset is to think like both parties and to bridge any possible gaps between them," he says. "I try to help one side see the other's position and find solutions."

Simon, who leased more than 785,000 square feet of retail space last year, says his personality and approach have given him a lift in many deals, including one particularly important to Burlington. That, of course, dramatically heightened the stakes, and Simon delivered. "We'd known each other for about twenty years, but had no real relationship to speak of," Simon says of Burlington's landlord group. But, by the time the deal was done, "we were great friends."

"I have a lot of patience for doing the right thing and a lot of impatience for the wrong things."

Lou Klein is nothing if not empathetic. "I can relate to every single tenant I talk to," says Klein, a retail specialist with NAI Friedland in Yonkers. "I've dealt with every type of person."

One thing that's aided Klein's success is that he takes the peaks and valleys in stride, a mark of his even, unflappable disposition. He's not easily impressed, either. "Say, hypothetically, that I get a call from CBS," says Klein, who leased about 75,000 square feet of retail space last year. "Well, you don't fall over yourself [just because they're a major television network.] You work with them just like you do anyone else. Otherwise, they might sense your eagerness and try to take advantage of it." By the same token, he says, you might hear from another client "who isn't exactly the flavor of the month, but you have to give them the same time and respect you would the, quote-

Photo this Page by Ray Karaman Photography

LOU KLEIN
Retail Specialist
NAI Friedland



Klein maintains his calm demeanor even when circumstances around him are anything but. "I never get rattled, no matter what's coming at me or how many things are going on at once. I was in the advertising business when we were making cash hand-over-fist. You'd pick up the phone, and before you had a chance to dial, there was someone on the other end asking to buy [ad] space. When it got that crazy and everyone else would get swept up in it, I would slow down, relax, talk about what we were dealing with, and do it correctly."

Everyone, he says, "likes to hurry up: 'Let's do this, and let's do that.' It might be just a lease, but it might go back and forth for months, and I might not get paid for a year. But I have a lot of patience for doing the right thing and a lot of impatience for the wrong things, when people aren't paying attention to detail."

unquote, 'big guy.' I don't fall out of my chair when Enterprise calls, and I don't get rattled when Hertz is after the same property as them."

"We're selling a compelling rationale for a client to buy and why they should pay what they're paying."

Jeff Dunne is not one to be cocooned at home after a hard day at the office. Instead, Dunne, vice chairman of Stamford, Connecticut-based CBRE, Inc., prefers to spend the evening out with his wife, mixing with the people.

"I love to go out every night. If my wife and I don't have something going on, I'll create something." Whether it's dinner, a movie or comedy show, or going away on the weekend, Dunne says he'd rather socialize than, well, veg. "I don't like to sit at home."

Sure, he gets that some need a respite from the rat race. "Some people would rather go home and take a break from others, but I like to be active almost every night," notes Dunne, who, fittingly perhaps, is particularly fond of action movies—especially anything featuring Matt Damon. "If it's a serious movie, and you have to think too much, it's probably not for me," he chuckles.

While it all might seem exhaustive, Dunne, who's also active with several charities, thinks his personality lends itself well to the workplace and helps spike his level of productivity. "Our business involves talking to and dealing with people. Whether it's over the phone, in person, or preparing for a presentation, I'm constantly

in front of very powerful, very successful people with big personalities. I'm passionate about what I do and think my enthusiasm comes through when I'm dealing with them," says Dunne, who, along with his 11-member team, sold over 9 million square feet last year.

He also enjoys problem resolution, which comes in handy especially nowadays "with most people finding reasons not to do deals," he says. "It's important to effectively communicate compelling stories and work through people's objections. We're selling a compelling rationale for a client to buy and why they should pay what they're paying. It's a matter of not letting obstacles get in the way of an ultimate closing."

It's not always easy, but Dunne's ready. "Sometimes you have to convince an owner to accept something they're not ready to accept. We might not get them to agree to everything we want them to do; it's getting



JEFF DUNNE
Vice Chairman
CBRE, Inc.

them across the finish line and to bend their position. It seems, in this world, we spend more time doing that because people are nervous, concerned with the way things are going, so they hesitate. They're not 'all in,' so to speak."

As in, "in for the evening"? Dunne wouldn't hear of it.

"It's essential to keep buyers and sellers focused on their end game."

When you've worked at a top talent agency and have done editing in Hollywood, it's hard not to be creative. Just ask Jason Winokur.

Before breaking into commercial real estate, Winokur, vice president of J.H. Winokur, Inc., a boutique real estate firm in White Plains, worked in the literary department at Creative Artists Agency, where he sold the film and television rights to novels, screenplays, and life stories. Not only did that experience give him the ideal opportunity to flex his creative muscles, it also helped him grow more comfortable in effectively dealing with other creative types. "Working with creative people and celebrities gave me the background to be even-keeled when navigating difficult situations," says Winokur, who sold more than 450,000 square feet last year.

Of course, difficult situations can percolate in commercial real estate, as well. "In the entertainment industry, with so

many 'unique' personalities, the unexpected often occurs, so I'm well prepared to quickly adapt and come up with creative solutions to challenges like an unraveling deal," he says.

In cases like that, Winokur has the ability to become almost myopic. "It's essential to keep buyers and sellers focused on their end-game goals and not on how they personally might feel about one or more of the parties involved," says Winokur. The industry, he maintains, is rife with challenges, but keeping things together and everyone satisfied is in his broad wheelhouse.

And that "everyone" includes clients with whom he's already completed a transaction. For example, a property he



JASON WINOKUR
Vice President
J.H. Winokur, Inc.

sold turned out to have a roof issue. Instead of walking away, figuring his role in the deal was done, Winokur made sure the new owner got \$3,000 of his money back, six months after the closing. "Not all brokers would have still been involved in that. It's a matter of having the patience and sense of responsibility to follow through after a deal's done and maintaining a relationship in a relationship-based business."

"You have to know your boundaries."

PAMELA STRAUSS
Owner/President
Retail Strategies LLC



radar before her clients utter a word to her about it. Mind reader? Not exactly.

Strauss, owner/president and broker at Retail Strategies LLC in White Plains, merely has a knack for knowing when something is off with a client. But, more important, while others might hesitate to broach an imaginary line and ask a customer whether anything's niggling at their mood, Strauss, because of the bond she forms with clients, has no such compunctions. "My concern is very genuine," says Strauss, who notes that customers tend to be drawn to her personality, which she calls strong. "When it gets to a point where you're speaking to someone two to three days a week, you can tell, just by the sound of their voice, if they happen to be having an off day."

You either have it or you don't, right?

In any case, Strauss believes she's "quite pleasant to work with. I have a sense of humor that seems to resonate with people." And it's not just skin deep: Strauss notes that red flags would fly if clients doubted her sincerity or intentions. Her way of doing things simply is an aspect of her personality that happens to go a long way in helping her relate to clients and, ultimately, do her job more effectively. "It's why I have a long list of very good clients I've had for ten years," she says candidly. "It's just a personality click that I happen to have with most people."

While Strauss is persistent and bulls full steam ahead until a deal is done, she knows when to apply the brakes and avoid over-aggressiveness. "That's a turn-off to most people. You have to know your boundaries."

That, Strauss does. Just as she knows her clients.

Asick child? Snag in travel plans? Flooded basement at home? Hey, it happens.

If a client of hers is having one of those days, even before, grrrr, his or her first jolt of caffeine, chances are good—excellent, in fact—that Pamela Strauss knows about it. No, more like *senses* it, actually, because it pops on her

"If you invite someone out to play golf, you have their ear for four hours."



LAWRENCE RUGGIERI
Director
Cushman & Wakefield, Inc.

It might mean breaking in his new eight iron at the local golf course. A ball game? Sure—whatever it takes for Lawrence Ruggieri to satisfy a client or prospect. Heck, if he had to, he might even attend a bridal shower.

"My job isn't just working nine-to-five," says Ruggieri, director of Cushman & Wakefield, Inc., in Rye Brook. "I might be out until ten or eleven o'clock at night, whether it's attending events or networking." Needless to say, he's all in, no matter how tired he might be, or how full his day may have been. "There's always room for a little extra." Sounds like a mantra.

While Ruggieri's relentless routine might seriously suggest sleep deprivation, "it's really a matter of knowing the right people and being out there. The more people you know, the more connections you're going to have." Often, his high-octane efforts yield results. "Hopefully, someone needs some help with their commercial real estate," he says. "The more you know about a client or person, the better you'll be for it."

He thinks he's also better for the fact that he understands the meaning of the word "no," immediately backing off when a client needs a little space. "I'm typically not super-aggressive. If they tell me to call back on a certain day, I do. It goes back to knowing the person, the clubs he goes to, his hobbies, whether he has kids or likes sports. If you invite someone out to play golf, you get out there and have their ear for four hours."

Ruggieri says he's also benefited from his experience in the Air Force. "You learn how to deal with people and get things done, which isn't always easy. I wasn't in combat, but I used to work with ICBMs [Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles], so you had to know who you could turn to."

Okay, so perhaps an aptitude for working with ICBMs wouldn't necessarily come in handy at most bridal showers. Then again...

JESSE WEBER
Director, Newmark
Grubb Knight Frank



"By the time I take a client out, I know the market so well, I have in mind the perfect space for them."

Why complicate matters when simplicity is much less stressful? "I keep things casual and simple," says Jesse Weber, director of Newmark Grubb Knight Frank in Greenwich, Connecticut. "By keeping a complicated

process simple, you can make it an exciting experience [for clients]." Yet, he drills down when it comes to getting a job done right. If anything is even slightly askew, it does not elude Weber. "I don't like to let things slip through the cracks."

It's something Weber knows his clients depend on him for, given their typically unrelenting schedules that afford them little time to micromanage specifics themselves. Fortunately, Weber believes he's ideally engineered to bear the brunt of whatever comes his way.

"I'm very process- and method-oriented, so by making [a deal] simple, I try to take the questions out and go back to the client every step of the way with simple directions. It's a formula that's worked," says the "analytical" Weber, who leased 65,000 square feet of retail, office, and industrial space last year.

It's all relatively rote for Weber. "I think I've always been this way. I've been in the business for about four years and it's something I've kind of honed on my own. I've seen a lot of different approaches from a lot of different brokers and can't quite say that any one broker operates the same way," says Weber, who adds that he's simply taken those things he's found to be most efficient and applied them to his own work.

And, when it comes to doing his due diligence, Weber certainly is diligent.

"By the time I take a client out, I know the market so well, I have in mind the perfect space for them," he says. Of course, that doesn't mean a customer always sees it the same way—at least not immediately. Naturally, Weber's prepared for that. "Sometimes you have to run around the market twice before they finally realize that's the space for them. Everyone needs time to find out what works for them."

DAVID BLOCK
Senior Vice
President
CBRE, Inc.



"I don't need every client to be my best friend."

It doesn't matter what his portfolio says. And forget about whether he has a sense of humor or works like no one's business. David Block insists his most important asset is his reputation.

Try day-trading *that*.

"I've been doing this for almost twenty years and I think what I've learned over that time is that the only asset that I really have is my reputation," says Block, senior vice president at CBRE, Inc. "It's really never about the deal; it's never about the transaction. It's about approaching the

business in a consultative manner." In fact, that's often a precursor to advising clients *against* finalizing a lease or doing a deal, he notes.

"They realize that I don't just care about closing a deal; I want a long-term relationship. I want to advise them on their real estate correctly. As a result, they keep coming back," says Block, who is based in Stamford, Connecticut.

However, the luxury of repeat business doesn't mean Block routinely snags eight hours of uninterrupted sleep. "Do I think about this stuff all the time? Do I wake up in the middle of the night and think about transactions I'm working on? Unfortunately, yes, I do," he admits. "Maybe closing the deal is the only way we get paid, but if it's only about that, you're probably not going to do business with that individual and their company over and over again."

Despite his track record, though, sometimes his considerable efforts have "led to nothing whatsoever," says Block. "In those instances, it's easy for [those clients] to talk to friends or associates, which usually becomes a much easier way to gain more business."

No matter which way a deal goes, Block believes his attitude stems from the fact that he doesn't consider himself "your typical salesperson. Again, it's not just about scoring the win. I truly care about the people I work with." Along those lines, Block says he tries to work with those he likes personally, which he thinks has helped him trailblaze a successful career.

Now, it's not that turning down a potentially lucrative deal just because he doesn't feel an unmistakable connection with a potential client wouldn't be difficult for Block. "I don't need every client to be my best friend; I'm not looking for this match or chemistry. [I just don't want to work with] someone I don't want to work with. I care a lot more about quality of life and looking in the mirror and liking what I see."

Try day-trading *that*. Especially these days.

"Half the battle is to get a read on people and understand how communicative they want to be."

People pique Brian Carcattera's curiosity. "I'm generally curious about them and what makes them tick. I get a kick out of meeting new people," says Carcattera, senior vice president with CBRE, Inc. "I like to learn about them; it tends to be fascinating."

Now, that doesn't mean he'll probe every client's every quirk and nuance to the point of making them uncomfortable. "Half the battle is to get a read on people and to understand how communicative they want to be," says the Stamford, Connecticut-based Carcattera. "You have to understand that not everyone is going to tell you their life story the first five minutes after you meet

them. I think I approach the process with different people differently every single time. My goal is to learn as much about them as possible."

And you wouldn't believe some of the nuggets he picks up. "You find out everything—about their jobs, early successes or failures, strengths and weaknesses, what people are passionate about, how to judge what kind of person they are in terms of their demeanor. It's just a matter of getting them to speak freely."

Freely enough, he says, that "sometimes I'm completely thrown off guard when they tell me what they like to do in their free time."

"I've had conservative, buttoned-down, sophisticated business people that do things on their weekends like rock climbing or white water rafting, people I'd have never



BRIAN CARCATTERA
Senior Vice President
CBRE, Inc.

envisioned doing those things." Insights like those can enhance his ability to strike deals, he notes. "It's a combination of understanding that people have a different side to them" and his ability to piece together what they "like to talk about." It might be family, particular transactions, their business, or favorite sports. No matter. Ultimately, it helps knock down or at least minimize possible barriers. "Everyone's passionate about something; you want to be able to connect with them on that level," says Carcaterra, who leased about 275,000 square feet of office space last year.

The trick, he says, is "figuring out a way to get them to let their guard down." For instance, he

describes "a gentleman who was a very substantial and impactful landlord in New York." While "he's not the warmest individual, he's passionate about his school." Well, wouldn't you know it, Carcaterra had attended the same university. "It was tough to get through early on, but I developed a rapport through that and we became fast friends. I really got to understand him and learn about him from a different perspective."

At the same time, Carcaterra realizes that, "if you're too optimistic, you can be cast as a salesman, and I probably fall into that. But it's just who I am. It often leads to friendly debate."

No argument there.

**STEVEN
GREENBUSH**
Senior Vice President
CBRE, Inc.



"If you didn't come into this business with relationships... you're counted on for your work ethic, personality, and reputation."

If Steven Greenbush, senior vice president of CBRE, Inc., in Stamford, Connecticut, knew what it was about him that keeps customers coming back, he'd definitely kick that aspect of his personality into overdrive. "I'd double or triple it," he chuckles.

Trust him on that. No, seriously. Trust him, especially since, if he were forced to hazard a guess, he'd say that his honesty is the trait that propels his success. "Everything I've done in the business since I started has evolved from that. It's something I was taught very early on," says Greenbush.

Ironically, he says he also learned, very early on, that he chose a profession that "doesn't always have the best reputation [with the general public]." To compensate for that, Greenbush strives to be exceptionally transparent with his clients. "I think it comes through when you meet me. I'm sincere; I don't put on an act," he says, adding that he'll research a project until he turns it inside out. "It's important to really do right by your clients, even if it's not best for commission. It'll pay you back in spades.

"When I was first learning the market, I learned it from the bottom up," he continues. "I didn't come in and, all of a sudden, try to get the clients. I learned about buildings and their history, the history of the landlord, the market. I got to know the market cold."

Which warms his clients. "The most value you can have to someone is knowing everything that they don't know about a property, and that's something I do—whether it's Yonkers, Tarrytown, or White Plains. Wherever we go, I know that market," he insists. "If you didn't come into this business with relationships and things like that, which I didn't, you're counted on for your work ethic, personality, and reputation."

Still, even with all that working in his favor, Greenbush says he absorbs his share of rejection. "You need thick skin to be a broker. I don't do as much cold calling as I should, but I still have to deal with people hanging up the phone on me. It's not personal; it's business. You get through it."

For his part, Greenbush doesn't like rejecting others. "I'm a salesperson's dream," he quips. "I'd buy anything someone's selling."

Trust him on that. ●

Chuck Green has been a writer and reporter for more than 30 years, specializing in topics such as business, real estate, finance, sustainability, and healthcare. He's contributed to various publications including the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, WallStreetJournal.com, Bloomberg BusinessWeek, the San Francisco Chronicle, and the Washington Post.