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How To Get The The Most Out Of SIOR

By Steve Lewis
Sponsored by SIOR Foundation

Membership in SIOR carries with it a distinct measure of prestige and a recognition of the expertise of those who have earned this designation. But beyond the cache that comes with these four letters, what are some of the other real-world benefits of belonging to SIOR – and what can members do to ensure they reap those benefits?

Many SIORs say that the single greatest benefit is the ability to network with elite brokers from all different locales. They note that the way to realize this opportunity is to go where the members meet – conferences and other SIOR meetings. This is especially true for those members who have just joined.

“First of all, I would highly recommend going to the conferences,” says Grant Pruitt, SIOR since 2016, co-founder, president and managing director of Whitebox Real Estate LLC, in Dallas. “You really get to know people there and you will be assigned an ambassador, so even if you don’t know anyone, you at least know one person.”

Walter Robinson, SIOR, of Robinson Commercial Real Estate in Miami agrees. “The first World Conference registration is free within a window of time, and a new SIOR designee should take advantage of that as soon as they are able,” he says. “As a first-time participant, I was impressed by the quality and quantity of events set up specifically for new members and that a mentor, Cathy Jones, SIOR, was assigned to me who took the time to ensure that I received the maximum benefits of attendance.”

“One of the greatest aspects we have is the ability to attend conferences,” adds David Liebman, SIOR, managing broker, Merit Partners, LLC, Chicago. “Having the opportunity to attend the first one free is a huge windfall we did not get when I first joined. It’s one of SIOR’s best opportunities.”

“The networking has been very helpful to me, having done over \$400 million of recent deals with other SIORs. Many of these are a result purely of knowing each other from within the organization,” says Gabriel Silverstein, SIOR, managing director, SVN Angelic, SVN Institutional Capital Markets Chair, New York. “I also learn a lot by simply

being around the best of the best in the industry.”

So Many Opportunities

While networking with fellow SIORs is clearly one of the ways to get the most out of the membership, the opportunities expand far beyond that. Where members will ultimately derive the greatest benefits depends on individual career direction and needs.

“What I have learned over the years is that SIOR means a number of things to our diverse membership base,” says Robert Thornburgh, SIOR, executive vice president, partner, Kidder Mathews, Long Beach, Calif., and SIOR Global President-Elect. “For some, immediate value comes from attending conferences and joining national committees. For others, it starts by becoming involved at the local chapter level. Critical to this process for anyone coming into the organization is communicating early on with other, more senior SIOR members who can provide invaluable insight into opportunities that match up with corresponding interest level.”

“I highly recommend getting involved in a specialty group (Office, Industrial, Tenant Rep, Independent Brokerage Group [IBG], etc.),” adds Pruitt. “They are smaller, more intimate settings that allow you to have more engaging, impactful conversations.”

“SIOR is an organization that runs through active member involvement,” he continues. “If you want to get involved, just ask; there are plenty of things to help with.” He also advises getting involved on the local chapter level. When Pruitt joined SIOR, he was vocal about wanting to get involved, and is now the vice chair for local membership, and is transitioning to chair next year. “It gives me an opportunity to really connect and get to know people in my own market better,” he says. “It can be

more challenging to really know people in your own market as they can be competitors, but the camaraderie on the local level is excellent. This can be a way to interact with those that you wouldn’t otherwise.”

“You get out of SIOR what you put into SIOR,” says Robinson. “My education classmates and I have kept a group e-mail going to communicate news, participation in SIOR events, and business exchanges.” Participation in local chapters, he adds, is “invaluable” for local market knowledge. “Imagine you have the best and brightest brokers from each company in your market that want you to be successful -- and they do,” he shares.

“I was told early on in my membership to get on a committee,” Liebman recalls. “I did, and 20 years later I’ve finished my second year on the executive board.” Committee participation benefits members in the local marketplace as well, he asserts. “If you want a leadership role in real estate, obviously your experience in SIOR translates extremely well.” What’s more, he says, it makes you “a more well-rounded person.”

Becoming a leader in an organization such as SIOR “is a real challenge,” adds Silverstein, because it is an organization of top-tier performers. “You have to be on your ‘A Game’ to do that effectively,” he observes. At the same time, however, he sees SIOR as a supportive and nurturing organization, “We all share the same general goals to benefit the organization and we are volunteers in those leadership roles. That allows people to get leadership experience that is both a challenge and a lower risk of failure.”

Sharpening Your Focus

With such a time-consuming profession, SIORs must think carefully about where to

devote their energies when it comes to participation in a volunteer organization. How is that decision best made?

"I'm not sure it is that difficult," says Pruitt. "Look at your list of transactions; analyze where they come from, and align your groups with these interests."

In other words, he continues, if they are mostly office, then join the Office Group. If you are a boutique, join IBG. If you specialize in Tenant Rep, join the Tenant/Corporate Representation Group. "Alternatively, align it with what you are passionate about," he continues. "If it is technology, join the Technology Committee." As far as benefitting your career, Pruitt believes that will happen simply through membership. "SIORs are serious dealmakers; being around other dealmakers will propel your career whether it is through a referral from another SIOR or through learning best practices."

"There is a science to volunteer leadership and it necessitates balance and a keen eye," Thornburgh summarizes. "Too much responsibility early on with the demands of being a full-time broker can be overwhelming. Finding that volunteer position that is exciting, while not overly burdensome, will avoid the possibility of eroding enthusiasm and lead to unique advantages through direct, long-term involvement."

Making It Personal

While SIORs recognize a broad range of benefits of active membership, nearly all of them mention personal relationships as one of the most important. "The network is very beneficial," says Robinson. "I really would call it a friendship because it is purely about working with each other on a mutual basis with no political or corporate agenda. It feels good."

Liebman also values the personal side of active participation in SIOR. "To me SIOR membership is not just about advancing your career," he says. "In the 20 years I've been a member I've probably gotten enough new business to pay for my membership many times over; beyond that, I have gathered friendships and relationships with people I spend time with – and that to me has a greater benefit."

Being boutique, Pruitt is extremely grateful for his involvement in the Independent Brokerage Group (IBG). Along with IBG, the Tenant Rep and Corporate Services Group involvement have been extremely powerful because "they have allowed me to surround myself with like-minded members that are focused on my expertise." He adds that some of the new folks coming into SIOR "absolutely knock my socks off" because they are so talented, and that further excites him for the future possibilities. "At the end of the day, though, I have friends now that I talk to all the time and that I do business with all over the country," Pruitt continues. "They are my trusted peer group, a sounding board, and a support group. They are also a ton of fun."

When asked the greatest benefits of SIOR membership, Thornburgh replied: "Without question, my ability over the years to build a circle of close, skilled, and trusted advisors across the globe. These people know me, and [they know] my business. They've been right beside me through the good times and the bad. In this process they generously serve as a sounding board on key issues." He adds that from the local committee to SIOR's global board of directors, there are numerous opportunities within SIOR that translate into a better understanding of group dynamics, productivity, corporate vision, strategic planning, technology, public relations and "everything in between." In other words, he says, "It's hard not to learn

and experience meaningful growth in an environment where a successful group of professionals come together to productively talk about issues and ideas impacting our industry -- people who complement capabilities, but have different backgrounds and aren't afraid to question existing methods."

What is the surest way to optimize the opportunities that SIOR presents? "You get what you put into it," says Pruitt. "The more you are willing to give (in time, service, mentorship, etc.) the more you will get back. You hear it all the time, but it is really that simple." ▼

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CONTRIBUTING SIORS



David Liebman,
SIOR



Gabriel Silverstein,
SIOR



Grant Pruitt,
SIOR



Robert Thornburgh,
SIOR



Walter Robinson,
SIOR