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Fearless Leaders.

SIOR'S PAST PRESIDENTS AND THE JOURNEY TO THE TOP

By Steve Bergsman
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When it comes to SIOR past presidents, their tenure tends to follow a predictable pattern. They serve on the Board a number of years, serve their one-year term as president, followed by their one-year term as "Immediate Past-President," and at the conclusion of their Board tenure, they ease back into their day job, satisfied with the tremendous impact they have had on SIOR. All have had a tremendous impact in different ways.

Then there's the case of Tom McCormick, SIOR. McCormick was president of SIOR from November 1997 to November 1998, a stint which he followed up by serving as president of the SIOR Foundation from January 1999 until December 2000. Somewhere along the line, he was awarded the Howell Watson Distinguished Service Award. He then served as past president representative on the Board for eight years and has remained heavily involved in leadership in some fashion ever since.

Where would this all lead, you might ask? In August 2018, he was hired as SIOR's chief executive officer, becoming the first SIOR member to ever hold an executive position within the organization.

If you ask McCormick, he will say that becoming SIOR Global president, and eventually CEO, was never his goal when first getting more involved in the organization. "I grew up in the military and was taught to do your best whether it was for a job or volunteering," McCormick recalls. "I got into SIOR and was put on a couple of committees, showed up for the committee meetings, and did the work I was asked to do. Eventually, they put me on the nominating committee, where at one meeting I was minding my own business, eating a muffin, when another person said, 'We should be more proactive because there are some people in this room we think ought to be president, like Tom McCormick.' I realized this organization and my peers invested in each other as much as their own businesses, and I wanted to invest more myself."

Many other past presidents ended up in the post because they had been strong advocates for certain issues over the course of their tenure. "Being a female member of SIOR in the early 1980s

presented an opportunity to provide different perspectives," says Lynn Reich, SIOR, president from 2009 to 2010. "Based on my new member encounters, I thought enhancing the new member experience (for both men and women) would be my focus. I strongly felt newcomers deserved special attention and the new member committee should revamp with Ambassadors, special recognition, and programs designed to integrate them into SIOR."

Reich was an early proponent of getting SIOR active on social media and was successful in that push, but it was almost a miracle anything like that happened at all. Her presidency occurred during the worst recession the country had experienced in decades, and one that was devastating to both the residential and commercial real estate professions. "We were doing everything we could to provide benefits to our members, be the place where they could gather to get education, continue networking, and try to survive the financial meltdown," she recalls. "We had that challenge, but I think we had a 95 percent retention rate in our membership during that horrible time when every organization was dealing with a value proposition. It was a challenge I'll never forget, and our success was due to the strong leadership within the board of directors and staff. I will always be thankful for them."

Another female president, Angela West, SIOR, president from 2014 to 2015, had similar goals for her presidency. West felt the young professionals in the wider organization needed to be more unified, so she created and led the Young Professionals group. "As so often happens, when you do a good job, you are given more opportunities in different

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aspects of an organization,” West says, “and to take your ideas and make them into a reality.”

For West, her presidency coincided with the implementation of SIOR’s strategic plan. That alone was a tremendous amount of work, but there were parts of it that fell in with her advocacy of SIOR sub-groups. “We were able to study the membership in different segments, in different business practices, and figure out how they all fit together and what groups could benefit from collaboration and connectivity,” she says. “That led to a host of other specialty communities that were created and nurtured underneath the SIOR umbrella.”

Then there is Randall Walker, SIOR, president from 2007 to 2008, who admits to being very outspoken. This outspokenness attracted adherents to some of his ideas including expanding SIOR’s international presence. “When I was president,” he says, “I made numerous trips to Europe to promote SIOR and recruit qualified members. I’m still so proud of where we are headed.”

Usually, by the time someone gets to the presidency of SIOR, they have formulated an issue or observed a discrepancy that should be addressed. A few ascend to the post with a true bee in their bonnet and have a year to address a perceived shortcoming.

“What I was hoping to do was position SIOR to be ‘future-proof,’” says Geoffrey Kasselmann, SIOR, president from 2016 to 2017. “I wanted SIOR to be able to anticipate with more effectiveness what I think are massive changes happening not only to the world of not-for-profit trade associations, but to the world of business.”

While Kasselmann certainly became a driving force for innovation and futuristic ideas, he also found additional passions to pursue, such as the launch of SIOR Service Day, an organization-wide day of philanthropic efforts, as well as the creation of the “Careers in Commercial Real Estate” campaign together with his NAR/Affiliates peers including CCIM, IREM, RLI and CRE. He also worked to hire a new CEO and collaborated with the

SIOR staff to expand global membership and brand awareness. Suffice it to say, it was a busy year.

Being president is a time-consuming, sometimes stressful, job, so when all is said and done, some may wonder why people do it. The answer, as former presidents have shared, is that there is a benefit to it all and the gain is either commercial or metaphysical.

When McCormick ascended to the presidency, he was also president of Colliers Macaulay Nicolls, Inc. At the time, they were busy rolling up smaller offices to form what is now Colliers International. “I was not active day-to-day as a broker,” McCormick says. “We bought the Charlotte, Dallas, Cleveland, Detroit, and Scottsdale offices of Colliers. Each one of the principals, or one person in a group of principals, were active SIORs. So when I called them up, they might not recognize me from CMN, but they remembered I was president of SIOR.”

For Walker, the utility of being president was the many associations made while being in the job. “The benefit was in the future,” Walker says. “I met more members, and even people outside of SIOR would seek me out. After I was president, if someone wanted to find an SIOR or an industrial specialist in southern Louisiana, it was easy for them to remember and call me.”

For West, being president aided her organizationally. “It helped me focus on time management and how to stay productive on the road,” she says. “I’m not sure it increased my business, but it absolutely developed my leadership skills.”

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"My business was national in nature before I got involved in leadership," says Reich. "In order to service my clients, I needed to have the national relationships and SIOR helped me at the inception and has continued to do so through the years. Having national recognition helps during the negotiation process – and servicing clients is what it's all about."

Being president was indeed beneficial to Kasselmann's brokerage business, but he prefers not to "glamorize" that fact as he fears it would give the wrong impression. "The one thing I didn't fully underwrite in my head is that this SIOR platform, together with the one I have at NKF, provides such a great deal of national and global visibility," he says. "As a result, my professional network expanded exponentially."

Last year ended up being one of his most productive brokerage years in the 30+ years Kasselmann has been in business. As for this year, by June it was already his best year ever.

He sums up being president of SIOR: "Worth every minute."

And what every past president, and any SIOR member lucky to serve in a leadership capacity or even at the committee level will tell you, is that you get what you put into it. The friendships and quality relationships are the best benefit of all. ♥



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