

7 QUESTIONS



COMPANY: LEVIEN & COMPANY, INC.

NAME: KENNETH LEVIEN

1. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN THE BUSINESS?

I've been in project management for 20 years. I founded my own project management/owner's representative firm 18 years ago in 1992.

2. WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO GET INTO YOUR FIELD?

I am an architect by training, but I stopped practicing in the early 1980s to join a cousin in running a construction loan-monitoring firm. We eventually sold the firm, and in 1990 I joined a project management firm for two years. But I found that I missed running a company, so in 1992 I started my own firm.

3. WHO INSPIRES YOU?

I find inspiration in my own team and in complex projects with tough design and construction challenges. We are known for taking on difficult assignments and helping the client manage the design and construction team to solve these problems, while assuring quality and staying on budget and on schedule. When a new complex assignment comes in the door, it is always a pleasure to see everyone volunteer to take it on.

4. WHAT PUSHES YOU TO THE NEXT LEVEL?

Nearly all of the 18 professionals in our firm have multiple degrees and licenses and are always bringing new ideas, methods and tools to the table — so we are always learning from each other. That's important because our portfolio of assignments is very broad, including commercial, residential, hospitality, educational, religious, museums, performance venues, medical — you name it. You always have to be knowledgeable or else you may not ask the right questions of those you are working with.

5. WHAT IS THE MOST EXCITING PROJECT YOU HAVE WORKED ON TO DATE?

We have had some great assignments among our 300 or so projects. Some of the best include manning the reconstruction of Central Synagogue after its fire in 1998, the Harvard Club expansion, current projects at Carnegie Hall and City Center, Randall's Island Sports Fields, Museum of the Moving Image, UJA-Federation Headquarters, Columbia University and the Park Avenue Armory.

6. IF YOU HAD TO LIVE/WORK IN ANY OTHER CITY THAN NEW YORK, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

That's a tough question. The canvas of New York City is huge and only China, India, Brazil and Russia offer more opportunities. But I'd have to say London. Despite what Prince Charles thinks, there are extraordinary projects and architects there.

7. WHAT'S THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU WOULD GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING THE BUSINESS?

That's a fun one:

- Always be honest and tell the truth — have unquestionable integrity.
- If you don't know something (and no one knows everything), then ask.
- You are not the smartest person in the room on all subjects, so let the experts be experts.
- If the conversation is not confirmed in writing — it never took place.
- Before you write something or say something, think to yourself: What if it was on the front page of the newspaper?
- Be fair even, when everyone else in the room isn't.
- The client is always right — sometimes!

Kenneth Levien brings more than 30 years of experience in project management, construction monitoring, physical assessment, architecture and business management to the firm that he founded in January of 1992. Levien performs real estate advisory and executive management oversight on many of the firm's complex projects. He also performs physical assessment evaluations of properties to be purchased, financed or improved.

Levien received his Master of Architecture from Washington University in St. Louis. Prior to founding the firm, he spent two years at Jones Lang Wootton as co-director of the firm's development arm and a decade at Levien, Rich & Co. helping to transform this private firm into a market leader of over 50 professionals. Prior to that, he practiced architecture.

Levien is on the National Council of Washington University's School of Architecture, Chair of the Finance Committee of the New York Chapter of the AIA and Trustee of the New York Building Congress Foundation.