



**Kevin Kirn**

Director of Business Development  
eMerge

At the time of this interview, Kevin was working as Director of Business Development for eMerge. He also served as the Managing Director of National Accounts at CB Richard Ellis. Aside from traveling in his free time, Kevin also enjoys snowboarding, rollerblading, and golf.

professional

### **What are top 3 principles for success in your industry?**

When I was going through school, people always told me, you're good at math, you're good at science, therefore be an engineer. And what I learned in my 20s, before I really found my current career was that that stuff's great, but the most important thing is finding something you really have a passion for and trying to look back and see what your experiences were that you really enjoyed ... the environment's in which you really thrived and try and find a job or a career path that allows you to explore those personality traits that you have experience with. And just follow your passion and don't worry about people saying, "Well, this is your academic background or this is what your parents did or this is what everybody else is doing". Look in your life and see what your passions are and put those characteristics together and follow a career because it's not about the money, it's about being content and feeling like you're doing what you're supposed to be doing.

### **What character qualities do you look for when hiring?**

I would say the integrity issue is key. You can usually get a sense from people when you talk to them, is this a person I would trust? Is this a person that is following their passion in life and are they willing to learn from life as opposed to just thinking that everything is just going to be real easy and that there's not going to be any screw up or mistakes, but can they take these situations and say, "Okay, we did it that way before, it didn't work. Let's figure out a better way to do it." And somebody that's obviously a team player that can bring together people and build consensus and at the same time lead. That's a very rare gift that I've seen.

### **What makes a great leader?**

One thing that's really emerged in my mind as a key leadership quality is consistency both on the job and in your personal life. That's something that is frankly one of my biggest challenges, being the same person outside my career as I am inside my career. Integrity is obviously key. That people don't have to have your name on a piece of paper to know that you're going to do what you said you're going to do, and that people can trust you. Another quality that's lost a lot of times is the ability to really listen to people and empathize with them. There are a lot of leaders that you see in the world today that have this real strength about them, but they kind of lose touch with the people that they may be working with. That's something that has really emerged in my life as something that I feel is a gift that I have, that I sometimes shut that down when I go to work because I feel I've got to put on this different attitude and this different shell. But we're put in these situations to really encourage people. Work is probably the perfect place to do that because that's where we're going to have an opportunity to really impact people's lives that may not otherwise come in contact with another Christian. Or someone with a different world view than they've seen before. So I would say integrity, consistency and sensitivity are probably three of the real key leadership issues that have come into the forefront of my life.

### **Who are your heroes and why?**

It's a personal friend of mine and I don't want to embarrass him, so I'll just tell you about the characteristics about him that I admire. He's incredibly wise and he has one of these unique abilities of really fully integrating his faith into his life, including his business decision processes. I go to him,

literally daily, and ask him for that kind of wisdom and it's the kind of wisdom where he doesn't tell you what to do, but he helps you figure out the right thing to do by asking you the right questions. That's probably ... I don't know that there's anyone ... Fortune 100 or kind of people like that ... that I've seen that have done that. In general, it's people that have a passion for their career, but they also have their priorities straight, whether it's their family or their friends or their relationships in their lives. And again, it's not putting the overall worldly definition of success first, but that could be a by product of the fact that they're very diligent in what they do and that that success comes as a part of the results of their labor.

### **How did you get involved in the career you are in?**

My background is in engineering and engineering management in the construction side of things. I did that for a few years and realized that really wasn't where I was going to have a long-term passion in my life and so I guess when I when I was 25 or 26 I decided to do the classic career search and find out what my skill set was and where I felt my strengths and weaknesses were. I tried to build a career around that as opposed to my natural aptitudes. That led me into real estate and then in the last couple of years I've been drawn into the technology side of the business world. I'm trying to make that step I started three months ago with a technology related real estate company. It combines the excitement of technology with some of my previous experience. My role right now is in business development with my company and it's been pretty evident over the years that my skills have been in the relationship side in bringing together a lot of different, diverse people and connecting them. I really have a passion for that, both professionally and personally. And just project oriented things. Business ... knowing a little bit about a lot of different market segments and seeing the value that people have in those individual segments and then trying to bring them together to create synergies. It has been really fun for me to see that happen.

### **Do you have a mentor?**

p e r s o n a l

### **How do you define success? How has your definition evolved?**

It's more along the lines of doing what I'm suppose to be doing. Am I having an impact on people's lives as opposed to how much am I getting paid or what is my job title or what kind of relationship am I in? It's become much more about the people in my life and that's been the real attraction to New York. There's no place like this as far as the diverse types of people and the people that want to be at the top of their game, whether it's professionally or in any different number of facets. It's so fun to be up here and be a part of that. As I define success now it's doing what I'm supposed to be doing and trying to show a perspective to people, professionally, that they haven't ever seen before, as far as how relevant their faith can be in the work place and as they define their career and what their priorities are. And to be able to be recognized as successful in the contemporary world's eyes, but also to show them maybe a perspective or an attitude or a set of priorities that they've never seen before, outside of New York.

### **How do you prioritize your time/values? What are your priorities?**

Ideally I would like to say it's putting God first and always seeking what God wants me to be doing at any point in time. There's such a tension that goes on. Everybody who lives up here knows that because you're assaulted every day with these messages that this is New York's definition of success and that's why I found it to be so important to surround myself with people who share my same belief system and world view that will challenge me and encourage me and really force me to ask myself what are my priorities? Are they really pursuing what I think God wants me to be doing, as opposed to what I want to be doing and trying to control that. Am I trying to control it or is God trying to control it? So the number one priority is, hopefully, doing what God wants me to do. Secondly, it's hopefully having a positive impact on the people that are in my life. And thirdly, it's being a success ... maybe

as the world defines it. I always want to be committed to my job, but I don't want that to be the overriding or the dominant driver in my life.

s p i r i t u a l

### **How has God /faith changed your perspective on fulfillment, significance and success**

I spent my 20s pursuing the American Dream and the way it was defined and there were still a lot of questions. I had been trained to be an engineer. When you're an engineer, you just don't learn what the answers are, you learn how to get to the answers. You learn how to make decisions and come up with solutions to problems. I had been taught in my religion, the first 28 years of my life, to not ask too many questions, but just to accept what has been done in the past. I got faced with so many life situations that no one had ever told me about. I didn't feel like I was equipped to answer those questions or to address those situations. My parents always instilled in me that if you don't know the answer to something, you can figure it out. You're smart enough to do that. I started going to a real gospel-centered church and one that really taught the Bible and the wisdom that lies within that Book. And all of a sudden it was like somebody had given me the owner's manual for life. Here were all the decision framework and the reasons why I had missed this contentment. I was pursuing contentment as it was defined by people, not by our Creator. And all of a sudden the world came into color for me for the first time, as opposed to black and white and all these situations started to make sense, with the context of me being created by God for work that he had for me, not necessarily that I had for myself. Following that path was the path that was really going to lead me to contentment and not following the path that I designed for myself along the world's lines. It was a really cold splash of water on my face, too, because I had grown up thinking that I had seen everything and been exposed to all these different things and this was such a radical difference from the life view and the life perspective that I had built my whole life on. It really scared me when I first came into contact with it. But the more I pursued it, the more I realized it was about a personal relationship as opposed to a religion or set of rules ... the more it made perfect sense and it just completely changed what my goals in life were from that point on.

### **How much faith can you put in yourself versus faith in the eternal?**

The best way to describe it for me is numbness. Utter numbness and a sense of not knowing what is going to happen next?

### **Is faith critical to leadership or character?**

When I was 28 and I started to understand that faith is not about rules and regulations, it's about a personal relationship. And that my identity ... when I decided to commit my life in faith, as a Christian, to Jesus Christ, my identity became as someone who is a child of God and that that love that I have from God, through that relationship is unchangeable, that no matter how much money I make or, going through the whole list that I described, those things don't affect how much God loves me or how much He's ready to forgive me or how much grace I live under. That gives you incredible freedom because then you don't have to worry about, what if I don't get into this business school or what if I don't get into this relationship with this woman or what if I don't get married or what if I get laid off from this job or I don't get that promotion? Those things ... they matter ... but they don't affect you the way that they would if that was what your identity was based on. So, again, it's a challenge and it's a constant tension to ask myself, "Is what I'm saying really true? Is my identity as a Christian and as a child of God or is it based upon these other things?" But as I said, it's surrounding yourself with good people who constantly remind you that these other things ... it's important to be successful and be good at what you do and to be the best at what you do, but the fact that you don't get that promotion or some deal doesn't go your way is not going to effect how much God loves me and it's not going to effect my identity. He doesn't love me any less because something didn't happen. There's just so much freedom in that.

### **How did your faith in God develop? How does it continue to develop?**

As far as the question goes, if it was the fear of being a "Christian", that really didn't enter into my mind because I had been taught you follow what you know is the right thing to do and don't worry



about what other people think. But it scared me ... coming to the realization that I lived 28 years of my life and felt like I had had come in contact with a lot of different world views and a lot of different perspectives and I had never heard this perspective before, that your faith can actually be this relevant, this personal and this kind of moment by moment in your life. And the second thing that scared me was the fact that it required me to give up control of my life. That scared the crud out of me. The fact that I had been brought up to think you make your own destiny, you make your own breaks, what happens to you is a result of your efforts. The fact that when I came face to face with the fact that we do impact what happens, but that God is the one who is in control and He calls us to trust Him, as opposed to saying, "I'm going to control this situation, I'm going to create my own career and good things are going to happen." Well, you try and do that, but that may not be the outcome of your efforts. So, the fear of having to give up control of my life was huge. That was something I really had to come to grips with. But I'm glad I did. It takes a lot of the pressure off to know that it's not all about me. I think it was a really challenging situation for my family and my friends because they didn't see necessarily an outward change because I had always been seen as a nice guy and friendly and all these things, but it was the change that occurred inside my heart that I think I felt the most significantly ... is that, again, what my goals were, understanding my purpose in life. Those were the changes that really started to happen and so it gave me an incredible freedom that I had never had before because I felt, up to that point, there was a certain path that I needed to be on that was planned out for me, as far as what my career success was going to look like, what hopefully the family situation was going to look like, all these things. And giving up control of that, again, changed the purpose, the goal, just the way that I went about living my life and what was important to me and what wasn't important to me really changed.

### **If you go back in time and do something different, what would it be?**

I think the number one thing I encourage people to think about when they're choosing careers or considering career changes is not be so stressed about making a change. There are so many things out there that you can do that are going to make you happy and it's almost a process of elimination that you've got to go through a couple of changes ... for most people ... to find out something you're really going to be happy doing. And again, it's all about finding something that you're passionate about. Not necessarily where you're going to make the money or where the prestige is going to be, but find something that really takes advantage of your skill set, of what you're good at and what you love to do. That's the thing that's going to bring you contentment, not how much money you make or what your job title is or the things like that. That's probably the number one piece of advice. The other thing is that so many people put their full identity or get their full identity from what they do, professionally. And that's something that even 12 years later, having become very committed to my faith when I was 28 is still a real challenge for me, but it really gave me a lot of freedom as I've come to learn that my identity is not about what I do, how much money I make, where I live, who my friends are. That having an identity on something unchangeable, as being a child of God. That's the identity that's not going to be affected by getting laid off from your job or changing careers or moving across the country to another city or whatever. But finding something you can base your identity on that's not going to change. And that, in my mind, leads pretty much to one place. I just encourage people who are coming out of school to ask themselves that question, what is your identity? What are you basing your identity on and what happens if that definition or if that identity is effected somehow by external forces. How are you going to deal with that?